

THE SPIRITUAL BATTLE FOR SOUTH AFRICA



By **Gustav Krös** and **Donnelly McClelland**

The convulsions of civil unrest in parts of South Africa have not yet fully abated, and the extent of the destruction and upheaval will be felt by communities for a long time after calm is finally restored. Many opinions have been offered for the wanton violence and destruction. Numerous political analysts and experts have dissected the events of the past couple of weeks and provided snippets of commentary and glimmers of insight. It did not take long for news outlets to begin offering possible reasons for the conflagration, but most soon floundered over how days of threats of violence over the incarceration of former President Jacob Zuma, turned into the looting and destruction of various malls, shops, infrastructure, and haulage vehicles. Explanations soon digressed down avenues of poverty, unemployment, and mass disillusionment with yet another COVID-related ‘lockdown’. However, that did not fully satisfy many onlookers or those caught in the throes of protecting their neighbourhoods and malls. President Cyril Ramaphosa called it: “Acts of public violence of a kind rarely seen in the history of our democracy.” But, as with many situations in South Africa, no one probably has the full explanation or picture, and it is most likely a confluence of a multitude of factors. The passage of time will hopefully bring more to light, and greater clarity. However, for now, one is forced to contemplate that which is known, and attempt to process it in such a way that a measure of restoration and healing can come. South Africa remains tense, but the Lord has demonstrated on numerous occasions before that He has plans for this nation and its people, and it is important to discern what that is in the current situation, to intercede and then act on the guidance of His Holy Spirit.

OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION

By Thursday 15 July, a government spokesman confirmed that more than 20,000 troops were being deployed to assist police in quelling the week-long unrest, which saw the death toll soar to over 200 people in the rioting and looting following the jailing of former President Jacob Zuma. According to the acting minister in the presidency, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, more than 3,400 people have been arrested, while the South African Police Service (SAPS) have arrested three alleged instigators who helped organise the looting and violence. These accused are set to appear before the court in the coming days. The SAPS are working to arrest further suspects who had a hand in coordinating the attacks.

At the time of writing, a relative calm had been achieved in Gauteng province, and acts of violence in KZN were much reduced. The unrest also disrupted hospitals struggling to cope with a third wave of COVID-19, and various supply

chains were also impacted. There are food security concerns, and fuel supplies could run low in some areas. Several communities have already begun the arduous task of cleaning up and rebuilding.

THE LEGACY OF CORRUPTION AND A 'DIVIDED HOUSE'

South Africa did not simply erupt as former President Jacob Zuma gave himself in at the police station late on the evening of 7 July, rather it was the build-up of several contributing factors. An article in *The Conversation* explains: "Research findings on looting, nonetheless, suggest that such phenomena are rarely caused by one thing. Rather, it's often the outcome of various factors." A South African research paper (March 2019) that investigated xenophobic violence concluded the following: "A key driver of looting was that it was perceived by the looters to be socially acceptable. And it was often encouraged and endorsed within social and community networks. However, looting does not spontaneously emerge. It usually comes about due to instigation by influential individuals or groups who actively articulate that looting against specific targets is permissible and justifiable."

And thus, as many observers shook their heads over how the looting could be connected to Mr Zuma's incarceration, others pointed to the ongoing power struggle within the ruling ANC party, and Mr Zuma's influence, not only in his home province of KZN but also within the party. Back in 2017, as the 'state capture' scandal was exposed, Mr Ramaphosa narrowly beat Mr Zuma's preferred successor, his ex-wife, Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma, to take over the presidency of the ANC. Within two months thereafter, Mr Zuma was forced to resign as president due to his potential involvement in a series of corruption scandals, which threatened to undermine the image and legitimacy of the ANC. The ANC had told him to step down or face a vote of no confidence in parliament. In a televised statement Mr Zuma said he was quitting with immediate effect but said he disagreed with his ANC party's decision. Ever since that time, there has been a tug-of-war within the party between those who remain loyal to him, and those who support Mr Ramaphosa.

Under Mr Zuma's tenure as president, the Zondo Commission was established, to "investigate allegations of state capture, corruption, fraud, and other allegations in the public sector including organs of state." It is his refusal to give evidence and answer questions before this commission that led to his incarceration for contempt of court. The Commission is nearing the end of its investigation, with the final report due to be handed to President Ramaphosa by the end of September 2021. In the same week that Mr Zuma was incarcerated, suspended ANC secretary-general Ace Magashule (an ally of Mr Zuma) decisively lost his bid for reinstatement in the Johannesburg High Court; and the chief organiser of the so-called RET (radical economic transformation) faction of the ANC, Carl Niehaus (another staunch ally of Mr Zuma), was suspended from the ANC, and the MKMVA (Umkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association), which he led, was disbanded.

Other allies of Mr Zuma are potentially under investigation for their possible involvement in the incitement to violence.

According to an article in *The Guardian*: "It is the first time a former president has been jailed in post-apartheid South Africa, and has been seen as a landmark for the rule of law in the country, as well as a victory for [Mr] Ramaphosa. But the subsequent violence has tarnished this achievement, analysts say."

Several analysts have raised the alarm that the recent violence could very well have been a desperate attempt to force Mr Ramaphosa to face a vote of 'no confidence,' and possibly open the door for Mr Zuma and his supporters to return to power. This has not happened, but it certainly revealed some serious weaknesses, both in the country's security apparatus and the ruling party.

FROM A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

When confronted with scenarios like these, it is important to remind ourselves of the words in Ephesians 6:12: "*For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.*" What we see happening in South Africa, is

the physical manifestation of what is happening in the spiritual realm. The reality is that a spiritual battle is raging across South Africa, and it is being manifested through riots, arson, gang violence, taxi violence, farm murders, and the list goes on. When confronted with the scenes of this past week, we must guard our hearts and minds against looking at it purely from a physical perspective.

Mr Zuma's imprisonment is a physical representation of the progress that has been made in the fight against corruption within the country. Amid the many challenges South Africa faces, it is easy to lose sight of the good, and positive things that are happening around us. Over the past three-and-a-half years, we have seen the evidence of corruption and specifically 'state capture' being brought to light. This would never have happened, had it not been for a mighty movement by God's Spirit, in conjunction with the prayers of many South Africans. We need to be thankful for what has been brought to light while acknowledging that the devil would not be happy about it.

Thus, what was seen during the past week is the result of the devil acknowledging the loss of ground, and a desperate attempt to throw everything into the battle to turn the tide. Ephesians 6:10-11 says, *"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes."* A key scheme of the devil is to entice people to partake in the physical battle – with the weapons of the world – without giving any consideration to the spiritual battle. The devil knows that the battle is either won or lost in the spiritual realm, so every Christian he can entice through emotions of fear, anger, hatred, etc., to engage physically in the battle, is one less Christian available to participate in the spiritual battle. Our physical involvement in the battle needs to be an outflow of our spiritual response to the battle, and this is what we saw in general from the body of Christ in South Africa during this time of crisis.

The devil tried to entice people into a civil war along ethnic and racial lines, but instead of going to physical war, the people of South Africa took a stand against the devil and his schemes. People defended themselves, but in general, they did not escalate the violence and destruction through retaliation. What we did see, however, were people from all backgrounds and races uniting to protect their communities and in cleaning up the mess that was left behind. In an attempt to destabilise the country and retake the ground that has been lost over the past three-and-a-half years, the devil actually ended up losing more ground. These events have strengthened the body of Christ across ethnic lines because people came to see that the majority of South Africans want stability and peace and that it is actually a small minority who is driving the division within society.

It remains a deep concern, however, that the instigators were able to mobilise the number of people they did, to partake in these riots. They leveraged the very real problems of poverty and inequality in South Africa to achieve their ends, while also using the existing fissures along racial lines that exist within our society. As South Africans largely banded together to resist the forces of lawlessness, strife, and division, we must make use of this opportunity to effectively highlight and tackle these ongoing issues that were used as leverage to sway people into participating in this insurrection.

This can truly be seen as our nation's lowest point in recent history and let us hope that we can both acknowledge and address the challenges we face, so we do not have to sink to an even lower point. Many initiatives have been launched across South African society and through the Church in South Africa, to assist the people affected by these events in predominantly KwaZulu Natal (KZN) and Gauteng. As wonderful as this is, such initiatives should not simply disappear once the immediate needs have been met, but may it only be the start of something bigger that will be carried on into the future. Every Church and Christian in South Africa should make use of this opportunity to participate in the rebuilding of South African society.

Even believers outside KwaZulu Natal or Gauteng can contribute towards one of the various initiatives that have been launched for people in need in these provinces. More importantly, Christians can also start by making a difference within their immediate communities, to prevent similar situations from spreading to their community. In Luke 11:42 Jesus says the following: *"Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of*

garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practised the latter without leaving the former undone.” (Emphasis added by author). The neglect of justice could possibly be the main contributor to the events we saw unfolding in South Africa. All people on earth do not get to enjoy the same wealth during their time on earth, but how wealthy you are should not determine whether you receive justice or not. Many people believe that the troubles we have in this world, including here in South Africa, is due to inequality of wealth, but the real root of our trouble is injustice.

It does not matter how much money you have or earn; the moment you feel you are being treated unjustly you get angry. Peace can only reign in a home, the workplace, and a country if everybody in that environment feels they are being treated justly. In many instances, the Church has neglected the issue of justice in our societies by leaving it purely in the hands of the government, when in reality, Christians should be the agents of justice at ground level within our communities.

Mr Ramaphosa is currently driving an initiative within South Africa to see justice prevail, and the imprisonment of Mr Zuma and the suspension of Ace Magashule is evidence of this. The South African Church should not be discouraged by the devil’s counterattack but should use it as an encouragement to work with the government in seeing justice brought to all spheres of South African society. Simultaneously, it needs to be acknowledged that not everything the South African government is doing is right, and so the Church needs to continue to be the conscience of the government, not only in words but especially through their deeds.

May we, as South Africans and the rest of the world, come to see that this is not a turning point for South Africa, this was merely proof that South Africa reached a turning point in February 2018 when Mr Zuma was forced to resign as president of the country. The spiritual breakthrough and turning point already happened then, and what we have witnessed this past week is a continuation of the physical outflow thereof. The South African public’s response to these events is further proof that the turning point was already reached and that we are heading in the right direction.

God certainly has a plan for South Africa, and more specifically for His Body in South Africa. There is still a long way to go, and more backlash from the devil can be expected, but we can reflect on the events of the past week with much encouragement. There are still many issues in our society, such as the ongoing taxi and gang violence and farm murders, but the first step remains to acknowledge that these are all physical manifestations of the spiritual battle raging across South Africa and thus we should continue to pray into each situation. Secondly, we can physically partake in the battle by loving our neighbours and serving our communities. *“This is what the Lord Almighty said: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other’.”* (Zechariah 7:9-10).

Putting words into action

The Crisis Response Network (CRN) is supporting various churches and network partners as they assist KZN’s recovery after the devastating looting that took place.

Please click on the following link to get involved.

<https://crisisresponsenetwork.net/south-africa-kzn-response/>

SOURCES

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