

## Study Guide

### Nations in Turmoil

By Cynthia Hyle Bezek

**Note:** *This Bible study is formatted for small group open discussion. If you use this study by yourself, we suggest you journal your answers to the discussion questions. Also, please use suggested translations where indicated. Biblegateway.com is an excellent source for translations you may not have on hand.*

I've just returned from Rwanda, a breathtakingly beautiful country. Its mountains rise strong and green over valleys where flocks and herds peacefully graze. The people—especially the Christians—live more joyfully than any Americans I've ever known. It was impossible for me to imagine the bloodbath that took place there 30 years ago.

In 1994, in over a period of just 100 days, close to one million Rwandans were slaughtered in a genocide executed by their own countrymen. In what can only be described as a scheme orchestrated by Satan, neighbors and friends turned on each other. Good people who had known each other all their lives suddenly were overcome by evil and literally hacked one another to pieces with machetes. Even some pastors and church members bloodied their hands in the violence.

We easily size up conflicts, assuming we know who the good and bad guys are. But it's never that simple. Throughout history, peace-loving nations have formed political alliances with nations notorious for their human rights violations. Churchgoers in Nazi Germany stood by while Jews were hauled off to concentration camps. In ancient Israel, God sent ruthless Babylonians to discipline His own rebellious people. Judah was so rebellious, in fact, that God forbade Jeremiah from even praying for them (see Jeremiah 7:16).

*Are we so sure about who the good and bad guys are?*

Soviet dissident Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn famously said, "The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart."

But for the grace of God, every one of us is capable of great evil, whether directly or complicitly.

### Purposeful Prayers

So how to pray? Humbly. Compassionately. With faith.

We pray humbly because we know how short-sighted we are. How capable of choosing the wrong side in battles. How easily misled we can be. How ignorant we are of God's bigger purposes.

We pray with compassion because we know that every war causes unjust suffering. Children are orphaned. Women are raped. Civilian families are uprooted and separated. Given that Christ-followers are reported to be living in every single nation on earth, it's almost certain that believers are among the victims of most wars. The righteous suffer right along with the unrighteous.

But we also pray with faith because we know that God rules over chaos. Nothing happens outside of His sovereign plan. He is perfectly good and perfectly just. He redeems everything. No matter how bad things look to us, we can know that He is not fretting. He's got this. He's got *us*. As the old song goes, He's got the whole world in His hands.

### Discussion Questions

With your group (or by yourself) leisurely meditate on Psalm 46. Read it through once, slowly. Who takes credit for bringing "desolations" (NIV) and "horrific events" (NASB) on the earth? Who takes credit for making wars to cease? How does this challenge the ways we sometimes think about war?

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Read Psalm 46 through slowly another time. Pause a second or two after each phrase. What do you notice about God?

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One more time, read Psalm 46 through gently and meditatively. What do you sense the Holy Spirit saying to you? Is there any response you want to give to God?

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End your time by praying aloud this prayer from the *Book of Common Prayer* (2019):

*Eternal God, in whose perfect kingdom no sword is drawn but the sword of righteousness, no strength known but the strength of love: So mightily spread abroad your Spirit, that all peoples may be gathered under the banner of the Prince of Peace; to whom be dominion and glory, now and forever. Amen.*

### **Action Steps**

A handful of conflicts around the world make the top news headlines every day. What conflicts around the world do you know about? Name as many as you are aware of.

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There are also many conflicts going on around the world that never make the news. Take a few minutes to do some online research about lesser-reported but no less tragic conflicts. Below, note the players in the conflict. Also note how many have died or have been wounded or displaced. Besides the nations you already pray for, might God be inviting you to become an intercessor for any of these places around the globe?

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The Psalms make great fodder for prayer in times of conflict. Consider personalizing and praying a psalm a day for the nation(s) God has put on your heart. Some of the psalms below are “imprecatory”—meaning they ask God to take vengeance on the wicked. If you pray an imprecatory psalm, keep in mind that every enemy nation has innocent men, women, and children. Instead of praying against “flesh and blood,” focus these prayers on the spiritual enemies of God—Satan and his demons.

- Psalm 10
- Psalm 31
- Psalm 58
- Psalm 79
- Psalm 94
- Psalm 122
- Psalm 144

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