

FIRST OF ALL

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (1 Tim 2:1-4)

Prayer was obviously a top priority with Paul and he urged Timothy to think the same way. In particular, Paul wanted Timothy to give top priority to prayers for governmental authorities so that believers might live peaceable and quiet lives.

I know of no one who has taken this Scripture more seriously than Dick Eastman. I have an old copy of a prayer map he designed back in 1989. On the cover is a map of the world. On the inside is another world map featuring three colors. The red countries were communist and totaled 35% of the world. The yellow countries were Muslim and totaled 14%. The remaining 51% were green and considered mostly free. Believers were encouraged to pray for everyone.

Below that map were listed over 200 countries and their leaders, divided into 31 groups (one group for each day of the month). Everyone was encouraged to pray for one group each day. For example, on the 12th day of the month people were urged to pray for **Albania** & C. Ramiz Alia; the **United Arab Emirates** & Rashid Maktum; **Uruguay** & Julio Maria Sanguinetti; the **Faulkland Islands** & G.W. Jewkes; **Greenland** & Jonathan Motzfeldt; **Iceland** & Steingrimur Hermannsson; the **Faroe Islands** & Atli P. Dam. Each country had a corresponding number on the map for easy identification. At the end of each month, each prayer partner would have prayed for every country and every leader in the world.

In 1989 **Eastern Europe**, the **U.S.S.R.** and **China** were listed as “prime targets” for prayer. Since then, as you know, some remarkable answers to prayer have been seen in these three areas of the world. Eastern Europe is free, the U.S.S.R. is no more, and China is more open to the Gospel than ever. Is it possible that these good things have happened because God’s people obeyed the Scriptures and prayed for “kings and all those in authority”? I think so!

Now is not the time, however, to declare victory and stop praying. Now is the time to pray more earnestly than ever before. As you pray for the world, please consider Islamic countries and their leaders for special consideration. Just last week (Sept. 19, 2006) a Muslim general led a military coup in Thailand. General Boonyaratglin was the highest ranking Muslim ever in the Thai military. He had promised Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra that he would not be involved in a coup for three reasons. (1) Nobody wants to stage a coup. (2) Military coups are a thing of the past and the army would not get involved in political conflict. (3) A coup would hurt the country’s image.

While the Prime Minister was in New York attending a U.N. meeting, however, Gen. Boonyaratglin did precisely what he promised he would never do. He staged a military coup, relieved the Prime Minister of his power, and banned all political activities throughout the country. Lukman Lima, an exiled Muslim rebel, endorsed the coup. Even though Muslims only comprise 4% of the population they have been fighting for a separate Muslim state.

It is too early to know exactly what will happen in Thailand, but it is not too early to pray! This single incident only serves to illustrate the many problems we are facing in countless countries around the world. The ultimate solution to these problems will not be brought about by bombs and bullets. As you know, we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, powers, and spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:10 - 12). Anybody who bleeds is not the real enemy. We are involved in a spiritual struggle and the purpose of this article is to echo the words of Scripture and encourage God’s people to put a priority on prayer. If Paul wanted Timothy to do this “first of all:” perhaps we should do the same!

“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.” (1 Pet 2:13-15)