

Editorial: What do we need to see in Ukraine?

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Ukraine is not just a “bargaining chip” for global superpowers; it is perhaps the most evangelistic and evangelical of all the countries that once were part of the Soviet Union, according to Leonid Regheta, pastor of River of Life Church in Dallas.

“Ukraine is one of the most hospitable countries of the world,” Regheta explained to me.

“It’s often called the breadbasket of Europe due to all the farming that’s happening there,” he continued.

“It is the largest European country, almost identical in size as Texas, with very diverse and beautiful topography—from Carpathian Mountains in the west, to gorgeous rugged Black Sea coastline in the south, to endless black soil farms in the east, to endless quaint and pastoral villages throughout the country.

“Most importantly, it is now a country with strong evangelical presence and traditions that are impacting millions in Ukraine and far beyond.”

Pastor Regheta’s description of Ukraine feels familiar. It feels like a description of Texas, though we might not describe the Texas coast as “rugged.” Nor is Ukraine as hot, Regheta noted.

My guess is, this is not the view of Ukraine you are seeing, hearing or reading in the news. But Regheta’s view of Ukraine helps us see how what is happening there matters for us here far more than diplomatic efforts and news reports convey.

What the world's watching

What the news is reporting heightens our concern about war.

Russia has amassed an estimated 150,000 troops along Ukraine's northern, eastern and southern borders. These troops are accompanied by tanks, warplanes and other weaponry.

Just days ago, Western officials determined Russia might invade Ukraine at any time, even before the Feb. 20 conclusion of the Winter Olympics.

This week, Russia claimed to withdraw troops from the Ukrainian border, while NATO claims the opposite is happening, that Russia actually has increased the number of troops.

Concern about war certainly seems reasonable.

For many of us, our understanding of Ukraine revolves around the current flurry of diplomatic efforts to stave off a Russian invasion. If we have a longer memory, we may recall Ukraine featuring in the 2020 presidential election. Some will remember Russia's annexation of Crimea—a part of southern Ukraine—and its incursion into eastern Ukraine in 2014.

This is to say nothing of important events throughout Ukraine's centuries-old history. One reason current events in Ukraine matter for us is they are yet one more instance of hostilities the Ukrainian people—including Ukrainian Christians—have endured.

For many here, these events and their location are far removed. They may feel too abstract, too unrelated to our concerns, too much like an echo of the Cold War decades ago. Others of us may remember all too well those decades and may wish old worries weren't being rekindled.

Abstract or not, our primary concern might be what hostilities in Ukraine

may mean for the world. If Russia invades Ukraine, will it lead to a large-scale war? I am certain our brothers and sisters in Ukraine hope we are at least equally concerned for what they currently face, with or without an invasion.

What we need to see

Ukraine and its people matter to us, not because a Russian invasion would [threaten](#) U.S. economic recovery, President Biden's standing or even world peace, but because God is at work in and through the people of Ukraine—people created in God's image, many of whom are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

“Ukraine is the most evangelical and evangelistic country of the former Soviet Union,” Pastor Regheta wrote. “It sent out more missionaries and church leaders to Russia, Central Asia, Baltic countries and beyond than any other Central and Eastern European country over the last 30 years.

“However, today Ukraine is used as a bargaining chip by the world's political elites.”

Regheta and Elijah Brown, general secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, separately called Christians to pray for our brothers and sisters in Ukraine.

“We pray, hope and believe in the promises and divine plan of the Lord as expressed in Psalm 33:10—“The LORD frustrates the plans of the nations and thwarts all their schemes,”” Regheta said.

“Every church in Ukraine and many around the world are currently praying for the King above every earthly king to protect and bless this beautiful country with holy peace and sovereignty from above. Please continue uplifting these prayers, and we will see God's glory with Ukraine, too,” Regheta continued.

“As brothers and sisters within a global Baptist family, we are all called to be both peacemakers and people of prayer,” Brown wrote. “As one Baptist family rooted in Jesus Christ as Lord, we bear witness to the biblical truth that ‘if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.’

“As tensions continue along the border between Russia and Ukraine, it is vital for Baptists around the world to stand with those who are suffering and to fervently pray for peace,” he continued.

Mark Heavener, director of Texas Baptists’ Intercultural Ministries echoed Regheta and Brown: “The number one thing ... is to be in prayer for the church in Ukraine. They are ... in preparation for whatever will happen. Certainly, we need to pray for peace, but also for their ability to move forward with calling people to Jesus.”

Mobilizing in prayer

We often have a sense we need to do more than pray. Unless we’re in a position to influence high-level diplomacy by being in the room where talks are held and decisions are made, right now our role as Christians is to pray.

We might think simply praying isn’t enough. We might mistake prayer for little more than voiced sentiment or a coin tossed in a fountain. In doing so, we confuse our culture for our history.

Our history—the history of the people of God—includes Elisha asking for his servant to be able to see God’s army ([2 Kings 6:15-18](#)) and the church praying to God for Peter when he was in prison ([Acts 12](#)).

God opened Elisha’s servant’s eyes, and the servant saw a fiery army greater than the army threatening them. An angel freed Peter from prison, even as the church prayed. Ironically, those gathered to pray for Peter didn’t believe the girl’s report that he was standing at the door.

What do we need to see in Ukraine? Like Elisha's servant and the early church, we—here and there—need to see God at work.

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