



Uprisings Continue in Iran as Government Shuts Internet

The Wired Word for the Week of January 25, 2026

In the News

Recent protests against the government in Iran have left thousands of people dead. The protests started over dire economic conditions and then developed into demands for the ouster of the regime that has ruled Iran since 1979. Hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets in protest against the Islamic Republic of Iran, a theocracy in which a religious leader oversees all aspects of Iranian life.

The government, based in Tehran, has hit back hard. Amnesty International reports that "mass unlawful killings" have been "committed on an unprecedented scale." The Human Rights Activists News Agency reports that as of Sunday, January 18, more than 3,500 protesters have been killed. Videos verified by *The Washington Post* show security forces firing directly into crowds of protesters in at least six cities in Iran. Various activist groups have put the death toll far higher, but an internet blackout has made it difficult to verify numbers.

After protests started in late December, President Trump promised that if Iran were to kill peaceful protesters, the United States would "come to their rescue." But Trump refrained from ordering strikes in mid-January, after

Iranian authorities canceled plans to execute 800 protesters. The president's decision was also influenced by pressure from regional allies and concerns about unpredictable fallout, as well as the lack of military forces in the area to achieve desired goals. Some Iranians hope that Trump will still intervene. (For a lesson on interventions, see *The Wired Word* for January 18, 2026, "United States Forces Raid Venezuela, Capture President.")

As the death toll has risen, many Iranians around the world have lost contact with loved ones due to the government-imposed internet blackout. Kimiya Attar, a co-president for the Iranian Students Cultural Organization at U.C. Berkeley, said in an interview with *NBC Bay Area*, "We've realized that what's unraveling right now is especially devastating for people in Iran who are risking everything to speak, while us and our families abroad are forced to wait in the dark."

Some Iranian Americans are saying that they do not want the United States to get involved. "Nobody wants an external force to come and do anything," said Hamid Azimi, a volunteer with the Iranian American Community of Northern California, which supports a resistance group in Iran. Azimi said that the volume of public demonstrations happening now in Iran is giving his family reasons to be optimistic. "The way people have come to the streets these days, the ways they are confronting the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, gives us a lot of hope that things will change soon," he said.

Tensions between the United States and Iran remained high as Tehran's hard-line rulers threatened to hand out the "severest punishments," potentially including executions against anti-government protestors. According to *Radio Free Europe*, Iranian President Masud Pezeshkian (previously considered to be a relative moderate) warned on January 18 that an attack on the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, would bring about an "all-out war."

As the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps confronts protesters in the streets, the underground church continues to grow behind closed doors. Until the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Christianity was a tolerated minority faith in Iran, protected as long as Christians refrained from evangelizing Muslims. But after the revolution, conversion from Islam was treated as apostasy and increasingly prosecuted under the language of national security.

As a result, according to *Theology in Five*, the church went underground into "small, informal house fellowships that gather discreetly in private homes, often rotating locations to reduce the risk of detection. These gatherings emphasize trust, discipleship and mutual accountability rather than formal leadership hierarchies or institutional visibility."

The underground church in Iran has grown despite sustained persecution, becoming a community of faith that is resilient and deeply committed. Christianity spreads not through programs or events, but through personal relationships and discipleship, and it is focused on grace, forgiveness and a personal relationship with God and Christ. Instead of extinguishing Christianity, persecution has made it much more flexible and durable. In Iran, following Christ often includes both a spiritual awakening and a rejection of religious authoritarianism.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[Some Iranians Feel Betrayed by Trump for Not Helping Protesters as Vowed.](#)
[The Washington Post](#)

[Major Uprisings Continue in Iran, Internet Blackout Impacts Communication.](#)
[NBC Bay Area](#)

[U.S.-Iran Tensions High as Tehran Revives Hostile Rhetoric, Threats of New Crackdown.](#) [Radio Free Europe](#)

The Rise of the Underground Church in Iran. *Theology in Five*

Applying the News Story

Although the separation of church and state has a long history in the United States, some Americans support various forms of theocracy -- government ruled by religious figures. Use the protests in Iran as an opportunity to explore resistance to oppression, separation of church and state, maintaining faith in times of isolation, and the growth of Christianity during persecution.

The Big Questions

1. Why are the citizens of Iran rising up against their theocratic rulers? If you were a citizen in Iran, what would motivate you to join the protests, if anything?
2. What value do you see in the separation of church and state? When, if ever, should religious principles shape governmental decisions?
3. When have you been separated from loved ones in a time of crisis, by distance or impediments to communication? How did your faith console you, if at all?
4. Why is Christianity growing in Iran, in a time of persecution? When else has this happened in Christian history? What lesson do you take from this?
5. Where do you see value in the Iranian church's focus on discipleship, along with grace, forgiveness and a personal relationship with God and Christ? Where are such qualities found in your church, if anywhere? What is central to the vitality of your Christian faith?

Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

Numbers 11:16-17

So the LORD said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tent of meeting and have them take their place there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and I will take some of the spirit that is on you and put it on them, and they shall bear the burden of the people along with you so that you will not bear it all by yourself. (For context, read [Numbers 11:10-23](#).)

Because it is filled with numbers and census lists, the fourth book of the Bible is called "Numbers." Early in the first chapter, God says to Moses, "Take a census of the whole congregation of Israelites" (1:2). But the Hebrew tradition calls the book *Bamidbar*, which is translated into English as "in the wilderness." The people of Israel remain in the wilderness for the length of this book, moving from Mount Sinai toward the Promised Land.

While in the wilderness, Moses hears "the people weeping throughout their families" (11:10). Moses is distressed that he cannot give them meat to eat, and he confesses, "I am not able to carry all this people alone, for they are too heavy for me" (v. 14). He asks God to kill him if he is not given any relief.

So God asks Moses to "[G]ather for me seventy of the elders of Israel." God promises to take some of the spirit previously given to Moses and give it to the seventy elders. They "shall bear the burden of the people" alongside Moses, so that he will not bear it alone. God also promises to give the people meat in such abundance that it will become "loathsome" to them (v. 20).

Questions: What problems does Moses face as a solitary religious and political leader? What is the value of having seventy elders join him in leadership? How is such leadership shown in your congregation, if at all?

When have you found value in shared leadership, and when have problems arisen? Be specific.

John 18:36

Jesus answered, "My kingdom does not belong to this world. If my kingdom belonged to this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

(For context, read [John 18:33-38.](#))

In John 18, Jesus has been brought to Pilate, the Roman governor, because only the Roman Empire can perform an execution. The Jewish priests want Jesus to die, but they do not have the authority to kill him. The governor asks Jesus, "Are you the King of the Jews?" (v. 33). This is the only thing that Pilate cares about, because a Jewish king would be a threat to Roman authority. If Jesus says "yes," then he will be convicted of treason against the Roman emperor.

But Jesus is far too intelligent to respond with a simple yeah or nay. Like an experienced trial lawyer, Jesus says, "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" (v. 34). He wants to know if Pilate has personal knowledge of his kingship, or if he is relying on the hearsay evidence of the Jewish priests. His response serves to undermine the validity of Pilate's question.

The governor replies with an edge in his voice: "I am not a Jew, am I?" (v. 35). Pilate wants to distance himself from this whole messy affair, and stand above the squabbles of the inhabitants of the land. And yet, he is responsible for justice. "What have you done?" he asks Jesus (v. 35).

Once again, Jesus refuses to give a straight answer. "My kingdom does not belong to this world," he explains. Jesus hints that he may be a king, but he

does not describe a kingdom that would fit any Roman understanding. There are no soldiers or armies fighting for his freedom, which would certainly be the case if he were the head of an earthly kingdom.

Pilate hears the "kingdom" part of what Jesus is saying. "So you are a king?" he asks (v. 37). But Jesus dodges again. "You say that I am a king," he says. "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice" (v. 37). Jesus has not come to take the world by force. Instead, he has come to invite people into a relationship with him, by listening to his voice and belonging to the truth.

Questions: Why does Jesus not want to be the leader of an earthly kingdom? What strength do Iranian Christians get from listening to the voice of Jesus and belonging to his truth? What does the kingship of Jesus mean to you?

1 Thessalonians 2:17-20

As for us, brothers and sisters, when for a short time we were made orphans by being separated from you -- in person, not in heart -- we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. For we wanted to come to you -- certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again -- but Satan blocked our way. For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? Yes, you are our glory and joy! (For context, read [1 Thessalonians 2:13-20](#).)

The apostle Paul's first and second letters to the Thessalonians are possibly the earliest writings in the New Testament. Written to Greek followers of Christ in the port city of Thessalonica, Paul describes how they should live a life that is pleasing to God.

In the second chapter of 1 Thessalonians, Paul recounts the difficult circumstances that he and his fellow workers had to endure to spread the gospel. For Paul, experiencing persecution is a central part of one's identity in Christ. He says that he and his colleagues "constantly give thanks to God" for the reception of the word of God by the Thessalonians (v. 13), and he admires them for suffering for the faith in the same way that the followers of Jesus in Judea suffered (v. 14).

Although Paul is separated from them, he longs "with great eagerness" to see them face to face. He blames Satan for preventing his return, but ends the passage by describing the Thessalonians as "our glory and joy."

Questions: What sustained Paul during his separation from the Thessalonians? How does shared suffering unite the followers of Christ? What has given you hope and encouragement when you have been cut off from loved ones in a time of crisis?

1 Peter 2:9-10

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the excellence of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (For context, read [1 Peter 2:1-21](#).)

The apostle Peter wrote his first letter to followers of Christ in Asia Minor, which is now Turkey, in a time of persecution by Rome. "Conduct yourselves honorably among the gentiles," he encouraged them, "so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God" (v. 12). Peter lifted up the example of Christ's suffering, saying, "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps" (v. 21).

Peter saw the followers of Christ as having a distinctive identity as "a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people." They were to live as people who were free of "all malice and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander" (v. 1). Jesus was for them "a cornerstone chosen and precious" (v. 6), the "very head of the corner" (v. 7). They were thankful that they were now "God's people" and had "received mercy."

Questions: What gave hope and encouragement to the followers of Christ during persecution in Asia Minor? Which of these gifts are available to the Christians of Iran today? How would you describe your identity as a Christian? Where do you find hope and encouragement in your faith?

For Further Discussion

1. Scripture has inspired Christians to protest at various points in history; they have felt compelled by the Word of God to say, "No!" At the start of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther said, "I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise. God help me. Amen." What contemporary issue is compelling you to say, "No!" What particular Scripture might inspire you to protest?
2. A regional gospel worker named [Luke Harper writes that](#) "there's an extremely high interest in Jesus among Iranians. This interest is coupled with their deep disgust in the way their country has been governed by a Shia clerical class guilty of continued human rights abuses." There has been church growth, but Harper says that "the growth has been difficult to sustain because, sadly, there's often a lack of theological depth and healthy leadership." Why do you think interest in Jesus rises alongside disgust with

abusive religious leaders? When has this been true in your own life, if ever? Why does the church need theological depth and healthy leadership?

3. "Separation of church and state frees us from the scourge of an officially established church," [write the leaders of a group called Americans United for Separation of Church and State](#). "Established churches play out in two ways: They either become instruments of oppression and terror (think Europe in the Middle Ages or Saudi Arabia, Iran and Afghanistan today) or they devolve into ceremonial entities that are little more than house-trained props for the state." In the United States, the government can neither establish a religion *nor* prohibit its free exercise. What value do you see in the separation of church and state, if any? How does this separation protect the church from the state, as well as the state from the church?

4. There are between 500,000 and 800,000 Christians in Iran, with some estimates putting the figure above one million. "With the secrecy required of house churches it is hard to be definite," [writes Barnabas Aid](#), but the group's contacts "confirm that there is Christian witness in many parts of this vast country." Even when Christians are imprisoned, the gospel advances. Their contact reports, "There are Christians in prisons in every city. They won't stop talking about Christ. The love of Christ flows from them." Where does the love of Christ flow from you? From members of your church? What would help the gospel to advance in your community?

Responding to the News

Pray for the people of Iran, and especially for members of the underground church. Recommit yourself to the work of discipleship, with a focus on grace, forgiveness and a personal relationship with God and Christ

Prayer

God of the nations, we pray for our Iranian brothers and sisters as they face oppression from their leaders. Deliver them from evil, and lead them to freedom and peace. Send your Spirit on the members of the underground church, and keep them strong in faith. May their discipleship inspire us to trust you in all circumstances, and to follow our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.