



Understanding the Times

Freedom, Sovereignty, and the Christian Response



Understanding the Times

- Sons of Issachar Conference
- “Men who understood the times and knew what Israel should do”
- From awareness to action



Biblical Foundation

The Sons of Issachar Mandate

- 1 Chronicles 12:32 describes the sons of Issachar as people who:
 - Understood the times
 - Knew what Israel ought to do
- Discernment is not passive observation
- Biblical discernment must lead to faithful action
- Our task today:
 - Understand clearly
 - Judge wisely
 - Act courageously

Why This Conference Is Necessary



**The World Has
Changed Rapidly**



Political authority is
becoming more
centralized



Technology is
becoming part of
governance



Financial systems are
becoming more
digital and trackable



Speech and
information are
increasingly regulated

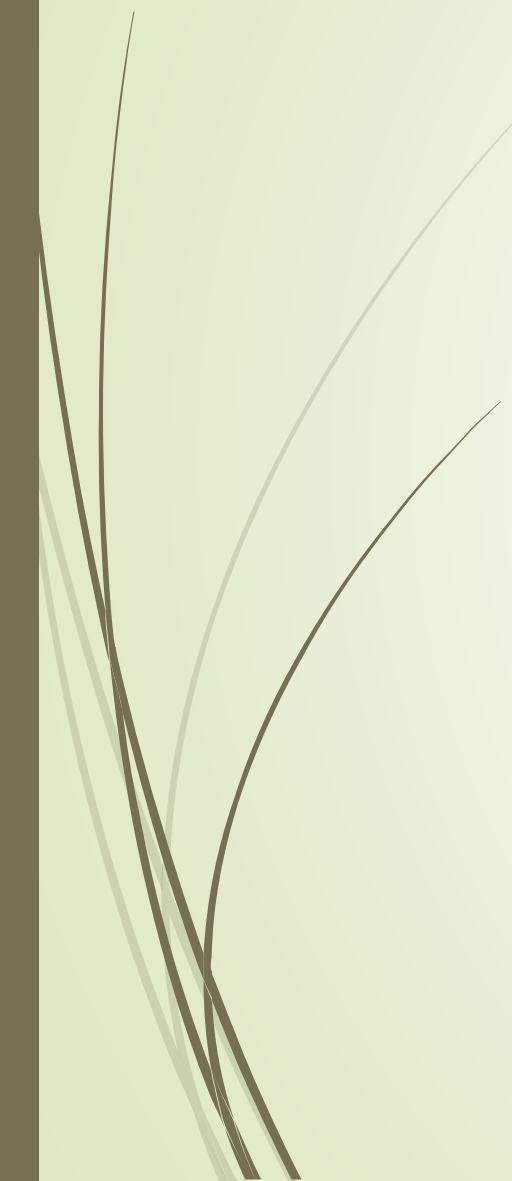


Religious conviction is
increasingly pressured
in public life



Christians need
clarity, courage, and
practical strategy

What the World Looked Like in 2023



2023: The Inflection Point

- The world was trying to “return to normal” after COVID
- Families were dealing with inflation, debt, housing pressure, and high interest rates
- Russia–Ukraine had turned energy, food, borders, and alliances into security issues
- Trust in institutions had been weakened
- Churches were rebuilding after disruption
- Artificial intelligence was moving from novelty to major disruption
- Governments were beginning to regulate online life more aggressively

2023 Was Not Normal

The Old World Had Not Disappeared, But the New World Was Being Built

- COVID restrictions were easing, but emergency-governance habits remained
- Economic stress was changing family and business decisions
- Digital platforms had become major gatekeepers of information
- Public debate had become more polarized and reactive
- Governments were increasingly focused on:
 - Online safety
 - Misinformation
 - Public health preparedness
 - Financial modernization
 - Digital identity
 - Climate transition
 - AI safety

Canada in 2023

Canada Was Also at an Inflection Point

- Housing affordability was becoming a national crisis
- Inflation and interest rates were pressuring households
- Online regulation was expanding
- The Online Streaming Act became law in 2023
- The Online News Act became law in 2023
- Canada was beginning a new era of digital, media, and speech regulation

Key Transition Statement

The Return to Normal Was Not Really a Return

- In 2023, many people wanted life to go back to normal
- But the systems being developed were not designed for the old normal
- They were designed for the next crisis
- The question became:
 - Who will control identity?
 - Who will control money?
 - Who will control speech?
 - Who will define safety?
 - Who will decide truth?
 - Who will shape the next generation?

What Changed After 2023



The Acceleration

- Since 2023, several trends have moved faster:
 - Global governance
 - Digital identity
 - AI regulation
 - Online speech control
 - Central bank digital currency research
 - Pandemic preparedness frameworks
 - Climate finance and energy transition
 - Platform power
 - Religious-liberty pressure
- The changes are connected
- Each area affects freedom and sovereignty

The Main Pattern

Good Purposes, Powerful Systems

- Many changes are presented using positive language:
 - Safety
 - Inclusion
 - Health
 - Climate responsibility
 - Child protection
 - Financial innovation
 - National security
 - Trustworthy AI
- These concerns are often real
- But each solution can create new powers of control
- The Issachar question is:
 - What power does this create?
 - Who controls it?
 - Can people opt out?
 - What happens to conscience?

Political Landscape

Power Is Moving Upward

- More decisions are shaped by global summits, treaties, compacts, and regulatory networks
- National governments remain sovereign on paper
- But practical sovereignty can be weakened by:
 - International agreements
 - Trade pressure
 - Financial conditions
 - Platform policies
 - Climate commitments
 - Security alliances
 - Global health rules
- The issue is not cooperation itself
- The issue is accountability and consent

UN Pact for the Future / Global Digital Compact

September 22, 2024

- World leaders adopted the Pact for the Future at the UN Summit of the Future on September 22, 2024
- The Pact includes the Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations
- It addresses:
 - Sustainable development
 - International peace and security
 - Science, technology, and innovation
 - Digital cooperation
 - Youth and future generations
 - Transforming global governance
- The Global Digital Compact focuses on global cooperation around digital technologies, including AI

Pact for the Future: Stated Purpose vs. Freedom Implications

Global Cooperation or Global Policy Harmonization?

Stated purpose

- Modernize international cooperation
- Address global risks
- Improve digital governance
- Promote responsible AI
- Support future generations
- Strengthen multilateral institutions

➤ **Possible positive impact**

- Encourages cooperation on problems that cross borders
- May help poorer nations access digital infrastructure
- Supports discussion of AI safety and digital inclusion
- Promotes international attention to long-term risks

➤ **Possible freedom-reducing implications**

- Can normalize global policy templates with limited direct democratic consent
- May encourage national governments to harmonize laws around speech, AI, digital ID, and information integrity
- Could increase pressure for centralized digital governance
- “Future generations” language can justify long-range policy control over present citizens
- Risk of soft-law becoming hard domestic regulation

➤ **Issachar question**

- When global institutions define the future, how do citizens preserve accountability, conscience, and national self-government?

WHO Pandemic Agreement

What the Agreement Covers

- Disease surveillance
- One Health approach
- Strengthening health systems
- Protecting health and care workers
- Coordinating research and development
- Improving local production capacity
- Technology transfer
- Whole-of-government and whole-of-society coordination
- Public communication
- International cooperation
- Sustainable financing

Stated Purpose vs. Freedom Implications

Preparedness or Permanent Emergency Architecture?

➤ **Stated purpose**

- Prevent future pandemics
- Improve global coordination
- Avoid inequity seen during COVID-19
- Strengthen health systems
- Share pathogen information and benefits more fairly

➤ **Possible positive impact**

- Better early warning systems
- More coordinated research and medical supply response
- Improved pandemic readiness for poorer countries
- Better planning before crisis hits

Stated Purpose vs. Freedom Implications

Preparedness or Permanent Emergency Architecture?

➤ Possible freedom-reducing implications

- May normalize emergency governance as a standing policy model
- Could increase pressure for travel rules, health-status systems, or public-health compliance measures during crises
- “Public communication” efforts may become misinformation-control systems
- National policy may be influenced by global frameworks before citizens fully debate them
- Practical sovereignty may narrow even where legal sovereignty remains intact

➤ Issachar question

- How do we prepare for real health threats without surrendering conscience, bodily autonomy, and democratic accountability?

International Health Regulations Amendments

IHR Amendments, Adopted June 1, 2024

- The International Health Regulations are binding rules for global public-health cooperation
- Amendments were adopted by consensus at the World Health Assembly on June 1, 2024
- There are 196 States Parties to the IHR
- The amendments came into force for most States Parties on September 19, 2025
- WHO states that the amendments do not give WHO power to force lockdowns or restrictions on national populations
- WHO temporary recommendations during a public health emergency are not legally binding, but they guide states' responses

HR Amendments: Key Concepts

What Changed

- Introduces or strengthens the concept of a “pandemic emergency”
- Strengthens global alert and coordination mechanisms
- Emphasizes international cooperation during health emergencies
- Reinforces surveillance, reporting, preparedness, and response obligations
- Helps guide states when an outbreak may cross borders
- Public Health Emergency of International Concern remains a major WHO alert mechanism
- A pandemic emergency becomes the highest level of global alert under the amended framework

IHR Stated Purpose vs. Freedom Implications

Global Alert System or Crisis-Governance Infrastructure?

➤ **Stated purpose**

- Improve international cooperation
- Help countries detect and respond to outbreaks
- Learn from COVID-19
- Provide early warning of serious public-health risks
- Coordinate action across borders

➤ **Possible positive impact**

- Faster outbreak detection
- Better coordination between countries
- Clearer global alerts
- Stronger preparation before crises escalate

IHR Stated Purpose vs. Freedom Implications

Global Alert System or Crisis-Governance Infrastructure?

➤ Possible freedom-reducing implications

- National governments may treat non-binding recommendations as politically mandatory
- Health emergencies can normalize restrictions on movement, worship, work, and gathering
- Public-health communications can become speech-management systems
- The definition and timing of emergency declarations can shape public fear and compliance
- Travel, health documentation, and surveillance systems may expand during crises

➤ Issachar question

- Who decides when emergency powers begin, when they end, and what rights remain untouchable?

Online News Act: Stated Purpose vs. Freedom Implications

Media Sovereignty or Information Gatekeeping?

■ **Stated purpose**

- Support Canadian journalism
- Protect local news
- Make large platforms share value with news producers
- Reduce the economic imbalance between newsrooms and Big Tech

■ **Possible positive impact**

- Helps news organizations receive compensation
- Attempts to protect domestic media from platform dominance
- Asserts Canadian sovereignty over foreign technology companies

■ **Possible freedom-reducing implications**

- Could make access to news dependent on government-defined eligibility
- Could strengthen large approved media organizations over smaller independent voices
- Platform retaliation can reduce public access to information
- Meta's blocking of news in Canada showed that platforms can override national policy in practice

■ **Issachar question**

- When government and platforms fight over news, who protects the citizen's access to truth?

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Online Streaming Act: Stated Purpose vs. Freedom

Cultural Protection or Algorithmic Influence?

➤ **Stated purpose**

- Promote Canadian stories and music
- Support Canadian creators
- Ensure online platforms contribute to Canadian cultural production
- Reflect Canada's diversity
- Improve accessibility

➤ **Possible positive impact**

- Supports Canadian artists and producers
- Helps smaller domestic creators compete with global platforms
- Protects cultural sovereignty in a global media environment

➤ **Possible freedom-reducing implications**

- Gives regulators influence over online discoverability
- Could shape what content platforms promote or suppress
- Could blur the line between cultural support and content steering
- May increase compliance costs for platforms and creators
- Risks privileging officially recognized cultural categories over organic audience choice

➤ **Issachar question**

- Who should shape what people discover: citizens, creators, platforms, or regulators?

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Canada Bill C-9: Combatting Hate Act

Bill C-9, Combatting Hate Act, 2026

- ➡ Bill C-9 received Royal Assent on June 18, 2026
- ➡ The reforms are scheduled to come into force on July 18, 2026
- ➡ The government says the law responds to rising antisemitism, Islamophobia, homophobia, and transphobia
- ➡ The stated goal is to protect access to places of worship, schools, community centres, and other specified places
- ➡ The Act amends the Criminal Code in relation to hate propaganda, hate crime, and access to religious or cultural places

Bill C-9: Major Legal Changes

What the Combatting Hate Act Does

- Creates an offence for wilfully promoting hatred against an identifiable group by displaying certain symbols in a public place
- Repeals the defence based on expression of opinions on religious subjects or texts in relation to offences of wilful promotion of hatred or antisemitism
- Creates a hate crime offence where an offence is motivated by hatred based on specified factors
- Creates an offence of intimidating a person to impede access to certain religious or cultural places
- Creates an offence of intentionally obstructing or interfering with lawful access to such places

Bill C-9: Stated Purpose vs. Freedom Implications

Protection From Hate or Risk to Conscience?

- **Stated purpose** Protect vulnerable communities
- Denounce hate-motivated crime
- Protect access to religious and cultural spaces
- Respond to rising community fear and intimidation
- **Possible positive impact** Stronger protection for worshippers and community members
- Clearer consequences for intimidation and obstruction
- May reduce targeted harassment against religious, ethnic, and cultural communities
- **Possible freedom-reducing implications** Repeal of the religious-text defence may concern faith communities
- Risk that controversial religious teaching could be chilled
- Public speech may become more legally risky around contested moral issues
- The definition and application of “hatred” will matter greatly
- Enforcement discretion may determine whether the law protects liberty or suppresses conscience
- **Issachar question** Can the law protect communities from genuine hatred without making biblical conviction legally vulnerable?

Bill C-9: Stated Purpose vs. Freedom Implications

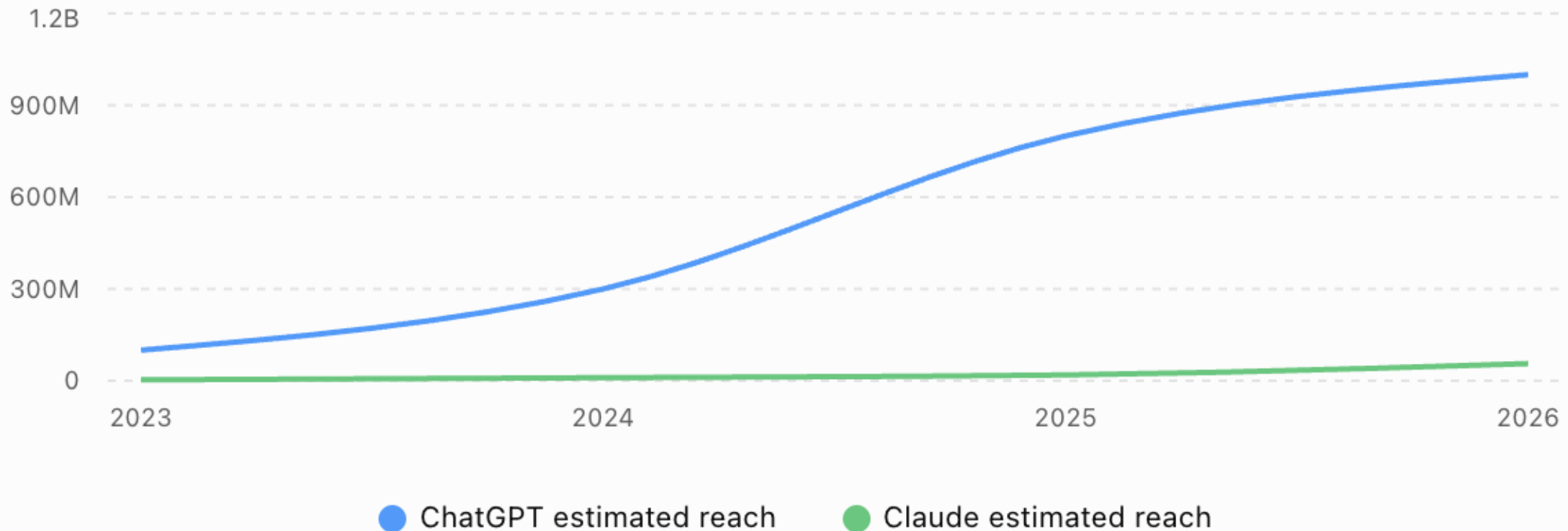
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AI Adoption Estimate

Estimated consumer AI adoption, 2023–2026

Directional estimates of monthly active user reach for ChatGPT and Claude. Use as an illustrative presentation visual, not audited official data.



Sources vary by third-party traffic and app-download trackers; ChatGPT reached very large mainstream scale by 2026, while Claude grew from a smaller base.

Global Governance Since 2023

Major Developments

- UN Pact for the Future
- Global Digital Compact
- WHO Pandemic Agreement
- Amendments to International Health Regulations
- AI safety summits
- COP climate agreements
- Cybercrime treaty frameworks
- Digital public infrastructure initiatives
- These developments show increasing global coordination
- The concern: local citizens may have less influence over policies that affect daily life

The Issachar Evaluation Grid

Use This for Every New Law, Treaty, Platform, or Technology

- What problem is being solved?
- Is the problem real?
- What authority is being created?
- Who controls that authority?
- What data is collected?
- What behaviour is rewarded or punished?
- Can citizens opt out?
- Can churches continue to teach biblical truth?
- Can families make independent decisions?
- Can nations still govern themselves?
- What happens in the next crisis?

Social Landscape

Trust Is Fragmenting

- Society is more polarized
- Public debate is more emotional and reactive
- Institutions are less trusted
- Families are under economic and cultural pressure
- Schools, media, and platforms are shaping identity and morality
- Online life amplifies conflict
- People are often isolated, anxious, and easier to manipulate
- The church must rebuild trust through truth, service, and community

Technological Landscape

Technology Is Becoming Governance Infrastructure

- AI is changing work, education, media, law, and ministry
- Digital ID systems are expanding
- Age-verification systems are becoming more common
- Algorithms influence what people see and believe
- Biometric tools are becoming more normalized
- Data-sharing between institutions is increasing
- The concern: access to life may become identity-gated, scored, or monitored

AI After 2023

From Tool to Infrastructure

- Generative AI became mainstream after 2023
- AI now affects:
 - Search
 - Education
 - Hiring
 - Policing
 - Health care
 - Banking
 - Media
 - Warfare
 - Ministry
- AI can help people work faster and solve problems
- But it can also shape narratives, automate censorship, and centralize power
- Christians must become AI-literate without becoming AI-dependent

Financial Landscape

Money Is Becoming Digital, Programmable, and Geopolitical

- Central banks are researching digital currencies
- Open banking and financial-data sharing are expanding
- Sanctions have become major geopolitical tools
- Payment platforms can restrict access
- Cash use is declining in many settings
- Digital money can improve convenience
- But it can also increase surveillance and control
- Financial freedom requires resilience and alternatives

Religious Landscape

Faith Is Increasingly Pressured in Public Life

- Christianity is often tolerated as private belief
- But biblical conviction is increasingly challenged in public settings
- Pressure points include:
 - Speech
 - Education
 - Sexuality and gender
 - Life and death ethics
 - Charitable status
 - Employment
 - Public protest
 - Conscience rights
- The church must recover courage, clarity, and compassion

Canada After 2023

Canada's Direction of Travel

- More regulation of online platforms
- More debate over online harms and hate speech
- Continued pressure around MAID and life ethics
- Digital dollar research continues
- Open banking framework continues
- Border and security legislation expanded
- Housing and affordability remain major social pressures
- Canada faces sovereignty pressure from:
 - Global platforms
 - U.S. politics and trade
 - International commitments
 - Domestic centralization

Canada: Key Areas to Watch



Freedom and Sovereignty Pressure Points

- Online speech regulation
- Digital identity and digital public services
- Central bank digital currency research
- Open banking and financial-data sharing
- MAID expansion and life ethics
- Education and parental authority
- Religious liberty and conscience rights
- Border and security powers
- Platform control over news and public discourse
- Housing, debt, and economic dependency

The Control Stack

How Systems Connect

- Identity: Who are you?
- Money: What can you buy or sell?
- Speech: What can you say?
- Information: What are you allowed to see?
- Health: What status or compliance is required?
- Mobility: Where can you go?
- Energy: What can you use?
- AI: Who interprets and moderates reality?
- When these systems connect, freedom can be reduced without obvious force

Stated Purpose vs. Likely Impact

The Issachar Test

- Stated purpose:
 - Safety
 - Efficiency
 - Inclusion
 - Security
 - Health
 - Climate responsibility
 - Trust
- Questions to ask:
 - Does this preserve conscience?
 - Does this protect family and church life?
 - Does this centralize power?
 - Does this reduce accountability?
 - Can ordinary people refuse?
 - Can the system be abused during a crisis?

Personal Freedom

What Is at Stake for Individuals

- Freedom of speech
- Freedom of conscience
- Freedom of worship
- Financial privacy
- Parental authority
- Medical decision-making
- Ability to work and do business
- Ability to travel and participate in society
- Ability to disagree without punishment
- Ability to live before God rather than before a system of approval

State Sovereignty

What Is at Stake for Nations

- Ability to make domestic laws without outside pressure
- Control over borders and immigration
- Control over money and payment systems
- Control over energy and natural resources
- Control over public health decisions
- Control over education and culture
- Control over speech and media policy
- Ability to resist global platforms, foreign states, and supranational bodies

The Christian Response

Not Fear, Not Passivity, But Faithful Readiness

- We do not respond with panic
- We do not respond with denial
- We do not respond with conspiracy-thinking
- We do not respond by withdrawing from society
- We respond with:
 - Discernment
 - Prayer
 - Truth
 - Courage
 - Preparation
 - Community
 - Practical action

Final Charge

Understand the Times. Know What to Do.

- We are not called to panic
- We are not called to hide
- We are not called to outsource discernment
- We are called to be faithful witnesses
- The world is building systems of control
- The church must build communities of truth, courage, holiness, service, and resilience