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IDEAS

THE WOMAN WHO BOUGHT A MOUNTAIN FOR GOD

The country's fastest-growing Christian movement helped fuel Trump's rise—and is gearing up for spiritual battle.

By Stephanie McCrummen
Photographs by Olivia Crumm

ON THE DAY she heard God tell her to buy a mountain, Tami Barthen already sensed that her life was on a spiritual upswing. She'd recently divorced and remarried, an improvement she attributed to following the voice of God. She'd quit traditional church and enrolled in a course on supernatural ministry, learning to attune herself to what she believed to be heavenly signs. During one worship service, a pastor

had even singled her out in a prophecy: “There’s a double door opening for you,” he’d said.

But it was not until two years later, in June of 2017, that she began to understand what that could mean, a moment that came as she and her husband were trying to buy land for a retirement cabin in northwestern Pennsylvania. They’d just learned that the small piece they wanted was part of a far larger parcel—a former camp for delinquent boys comprising 350 acres of forest rising 2,000 feet high and sloping all the way down to the Allegheny River. As Tami was complaining to herself that she didn’t want a whole mountain, a thought came into her head that seemed so alien, so grandiose, that she was certain it was the voice of God.

“Yes, but *I* do,” the voice said.

She decided this must be the beginning of her divine assignment. She would use \$950,000 of her divorce settlement to buy the mountain. She would advance the Kingdom of God in the most literal of ways, and await further instructions.

What happened next is the story of one woman’s journey into the fastest-growing segment of Christianity in the country—a movement

that helped propel Donald Trump to the White House, that fueled his attempts to overturn the 2020 election, and that is becoming a radicalizing force within the more familiar Christian right.

It is called the New Apostolic Reformation, or NAR, a sprawling ecosystem of leaders who call themselves apostles and prophets and claim to receive direct revelations from God. Its congregations can be found in cities and towns across the country—on landscaped campuses, in old supermarkets, in the shells of defunct churches. It has global prayer networks, streaming broadcasts, books, podcasts, apps, social-media influencers, and revival tours. It has academies, including a new one where a fatigues-wearing prophet says he is training “warriors” for spiritual battle against demonic forces, which he and other leaders are identifying as people and groups associated with liberal politics. Its most prominent leaders include a Korean American apostle who spoke at a “Stop the Steal” rally prior to the January 6 insurrection and a Honduran American apostle whose megachurch was key to Trump’s evangelical outreach. Besides Trump, its political allies include school-board members, county commissioners, judges, and state legislators such as Doug Mastriano, a retired Army intelligence officer whose outsider campaign for Pennsylvania governor last year was widely ridiculed, even as he won the GOP nomination and 42 percent of the general-election vote.

The movement is seeking political power as a means to achieving a more transcendent goal: to bring under biblical authority every sphere of life, including government, schools, and culture itself, establishing not just a Christian nation, as the traditional religious right has advocated, but an actual, earthly Kingdom of God.

For that purpose, the movement has followers, each expected to play their part in a rolling end-times drama, and that is what Tami Barthen, who is 62, was trying to do.

I called her recently and explained that I was in Pennsylvania trying to understand where the movement was headed, and had found her on Facebook, where she follows several prominent prophets. She said that she was willing to meet but that I should first do three things.

One was to go see a film called *Jesus Revolution*, and this I did that afternoon, the 2 o'clock showing at an AMC Classic outside Harrisburg. As the lights dimmed, scenes of early-1970s California washed over the screen. What followed was the story of a real-life pastor named Chuck Smith, who opened his church to bands of drugged-out hippies who became known as "Jesus freaks," a transformation depicted in scenes of love-dazed catharsis and sunrise ocean baptisms—young people rejecting relativism for the warm

certainty of God's one truth. The film, a full-on Hollywood production starring Kelsey Grammer and produced by an outfit called Kingdom Story Company, has earned \$52 million so far.

The second thing was to visit a church in Harrisburg called Life Center, whose senior pastor had been among the original California Jesus freaks and now held the title of apostle. I arrived at a glass-and-cement former office building for the midweek evening service. In the lobby, screens showed videos of blue ocean waves. The books on display included *Now Is the Time: Seven Converging Signs of the Emerging Great Awakening* and *It's Our Turn Now: God's Plan to Restore America Is Within Our Reach*. The apostle was out of town, so another pastor showed visitors into the sanctuary, a 1,600-seat auditorium with no images of Jesus, no stained-glass parables, no worn hymnals, no reminders of the 2,000 years of Christian history before this. Instead, six huge screens glowed with images of spinning stars. On a stage, a praise band was blasting emotional, surging songs vaguely reminiscent of Coldplay. Rows of spotlights were shining on people who stood, hands raised, and sang mantra-like choruses about surrender, then listened to a sermon about submitting to God.

The last thing was to attend a touring event called KEY Fellowship, which stands for "Kingdom Empowering You." So I headed to a small

church in State College, Pennsylvania, the 44th city on the tour so far. On a Saturday morning, 100 or so attendees were arriving, a crowd that was mostly white but also Black, Latino, and Korean-American. They all filed through a door marked by a white flag stamped with a green pine tree and the words AN APPEAL TO HEAVEN—a Revolutionary War-era banner of the sort that rioters carried into the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021. “We thank you, Father, that you have chosen us,” said the woman who’d organized the event, explaining that its purpose was to “release spiritual authority” over the region. And then the releasing began. The band. The singing. The shouting: “Lord, have your dominion.” Several men stood and blew shofars, hollowed-out ram’s horns used in traditional Jewish worship, and meant in this context to warn demons and herald the gathering of a modern-day army of God. Out came maracas and tambourines. Out came long wooden staffs that people pounded against the floor. Others waved American flags, Israeli flags, more pine-tree flags. The point, I learned, was to call the Holy Spirit through the prefabricated walls of the church and into the sanctuary, all of this leading up to the moment when a local pastor, a member of the Ojibwe-Cree Nation, came to the stage.

She was there to declare the restoration of the nation’s covenant with Native American people, which, in the movement’s intricate end-times

narrative, is a precondition for the establishment of the Kingdom. A sacred drum pounded. “Father, we pray for a holy experiment!” someone shouted. A white man cried. Then people began marching in circles around the room—flags, tambourines, maracas, staffs—as a final song played. “Possess the land,” the chorus went. “We will take it by force. Take it, take it.”

Once I had seen all of this, Tami said I could come.



The view from Tami's house (Olivia Crumm for *The Atlantic*)

THE ROAD TO THE MOUNTAIN runs through the small town of Franklin, an hour or so north of Pittsburgh, then winds uphill and through the woods before branching off to a narrower road marked PRIVATE. At the entrance is a Mastriano sign, left over from when Tami served as his Venango County coordinator.

“We don't really do politics,” she was saying, riding onto the property with her husband, Kevin. “But then we heard God say, ‘You need to do this.’”

She had raised and homeschooled three children, been the dutiful wife of a wealthy Pennsylvania entrepreneur who traded metals, but as I came to learn over the next few weeks, so many new things had been happening since she started following the voice of God.

“All this is ours,” Kevin said, passing old cabins, a run-down trailer, and other buildings from the property's former life.

“And right up here is where it all happened,” Tami said.

They parked and went over to a wooden footbridge, part of the only public path through the property. This is where they'd been walking

when Tami had first seen the spot for their retirement cabin, at which point she had looked down and seen three blue interlocking circles stenciled onto the bridge, some sort of graffiti that she took as a sign.

“I said, ‘Kevin, we’re at the point of convergence,’” she recalled.

Convergence. Spiritual warfare. Demonic strongholds. These were the kinds of terms that Tami tossed off easily, and knew could make the movement seem loopy to outsiders. But they were part of a vocabulary that added up to a whole way of seeing the world, one traceable not so much to ancient times but rather to 1971.

That was when an evangelical missionary named C. Peter Wagner returned to California after spending more than a decade in Bolivia, where he had noticed churches growing explosively and where he claimed to have seen signs and wonders, healings and prophecies. A professor at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Wagner began studying what he believed were similar forces at work in the underground house-church movement in China and certain independent Christian churches in African countries, as well as Pentecostal churches in the U.S. He eventually concluded that a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit was under way across the globe—a supernatural force that would erase denominational differences, banish

demonic spirits, and restore the offices of the first-century Christian Church as part of a great end-times battle. By the mid-1990s, Wagner and others were describing all of this as the New Apostolic Reformation, detailing the particulars in dozens of books.

The reformation meant recognizing new apostles—men and women believed to have God-given spiritual authority as leaders. It meant modern-day prophets—people believed to be chosen by God to receive revelations through dreams and visions and signs. It meant spiritual warfare, which was not intended to be taken metaphorically, but actually demanded the battling of demons that could possess people and territories and were so real that they could be diagrammed on maps. It meant portals: specific openings where demonic or angelic forces could enter—eyes or mouths, for instance, or geographic locations such as Azusa Street in Los Angeles, scene of a seminal early-20th-century revival. It meant the rise of the Manifest Sons of God, an elite force that would be endowed with supernatural powers for spiritual and perhaps actual warfare. Most significant, the new reformation required not just personal salvation but action to transform all of society. Christians were to reclaim the fallen Earth from Satan and advance the Kingdom of God, and this idea was not metaphorical either. The Kingdom would be a social pyramid, at the top of which was a government of godly leaders dispensing biblical

laws and at the bottom of which was the full manifestation of heaven on Earth, a glorious world with no poverty, no racism, no crime, no abortion, no homosexuality, two genders, one kind of marriage, and one God: theirs.

Wagner helped convene the International Coalition of Apostles in 2000. It became the model for what remains the loosely networked structure of a movement that is both decentralized and inherently authoritarian. Apostles would lead their own ministries and churches, sometimes with the counsel of other influential apostles. The movement grew rapidly, creating its own superstars whose power came from the following they cultivated, and who were constantly adding prophecies that sought to explain how current events fit into the great end-times narrative.

Broad-brush terms like *Christian nationalism* and *white evangelicals* have tended to obscure these intricacies. NAR's growth has also gone largely undetected in conventional surveys of American religiosity, with their old categories such as Southern Baptist and Presbyterian. It is most clearly reflected in the rise of nondenominational churches—the only category of churches that is growing in this country—though not fully, because many followers do not attend church. A recent survey by Paul Djupe of Denison University hints at

its scope, finding that roughly one-quarter of Americans believe in modern-day prophets and prophecies. Those who have tracked and studied the movement for years often say it is “hiding in plain sight.”

Yet Trump-allied political strategists, such as Roger Stone, understand the power of a movement that offers the GOP a largely untapped well of new voters who are not just old and white and Bible-clinging, but also young and brown, urban and suburban, and primed to hear what the prophets have to say. Recently, Stone told one interviewer that he saw a “demonic portal” swirling over Joe Biden’s White House.

“There’s a live cam where you can actually see, in real time,” Stone said. “It’s like a smudge in the sky, almost looks like a cloud that doesn’t move.”

LIKE MANY in the movement, Tami doesn’t use the phrase *New Apostolic Reformation*, but she first encountered its kind of Christianity in 2015, when a friend gave her a book called *Song of Songs: Divine Romance*. It is part of a series called *The Passion Translation*, described by its author, a pastor named Brian Simmons, as a “heart-level” version of the Bible.

At the time, Tami had just extracted herself from what she described as a long and difficult marriage. She had left the traditional

evangelical church she'd attended for years, where she said the pastor tended to side with her wealthy husband. She was estranged from some of her family. She was alone and at a vulnerable point in her life when she opened Simmons's book and began reading passages such as "I am overshadowed by his love, growing in the valley," and "Let him smother me with kisses—his Spirit-kiss divine," and "So kind are your caresses, I drink them in like the sweetest wine!"

She had never felt so loved in her life, and she wanted more. The friend who'd given her the book attended Life Center, and Tami signed up for a conference at the church called "Open the Heavens," where she learned more about prophecy, spiritual warfare, and the idea that she herself had a role to play in advancing the Kingdom of God, if she could discern what it was.

Among the speakers she heard was a rising apostle named Lance Wallnau, a former corporate marketer whose social-media following had grown to 2 million people after he prophesied that Donald Trump was anointed by God. Tami had voted for Trump in 2016, but her interest in Wallnau at this point had more to do with what he'd branded as "the Seven Mountains mandate," or 7M, the imperative for Christians to build the Kingdom by taking dominion over the seven spheres of society—government, business, education, media,

entertainment, family, and religion. Wallnau gives 7M courses and holds 7M conferences, and that is how Tami learned about convergence: the notion that there are moments in life when events come together to reveal one's Kingdom mission, as Wallnau writes, "like a vortex that sucks into itself uncanny coincidences and 'divine appointments.'"

That was exactly how Tami felt as she considered buying the mountain. Divine appointments everywhere. At Life Center, a man told her that he'd had a vision of God "pouring onto the mountain" everything she would need. Someone else shared a vision of Tami as a princess riding a horse, which she found ridiculous but also, as a woman who'd always felt under the thumb of some man, compelling. And then she herself heard the voice of God telling her what to do.

"See that?" she said now, back in the car, passing a rusted oil tank where someone had spray-painted what appeared to be a yellow Z.

"I'll explain that later," Tami said.



An oil tank on Tami's property (Olivia Crumm for *The Atlantic*)

She and Kevin drove to the former camp director's home where they now lived. Inside was a piano with a shofar and two swords on top, which Tami had bought to remind herself that she is a triumphant warrior for Christ. On a wall hung a portrait she had commissioned, which depicted her clad in medieval armor. An APPEAL TO HEAVEN flag was draped over a chair. She opened a sliding-glass door to a deck

overlooking the Allegheny River, and explained what happened after she and Kevin had closed on the mountain: how they began to envision building a “Seven Mountains training center.” How that led to someone from Life Center introducing her to an apostle from the nearby city of New Castle, who visited the mountain and wrote Tami a prophecy—that what was happening was “bigger than whatever you could dream or imagine.” How he introduced her to a group of five men who claimed to be connected to anonymous Kingdom funders, and how, not long after that, the group came to the mountain, where Tami, full of nerves, presented a plan that included a lodge, a conference center, an outdoor stage, and some yurts along the river.

“The main thing they asked is whether we were Kingdom,” Tami said.

She told them that she and Kevin were Kingdom all the way; they told her that God wanted her to double the size of the project, and then told her to “add everything you can possibly dream of,” Tami recalled.

So they did—adding plans for an outdoor pistol range, an indoor pistol range, a tactical pistol range, and a rifle range, along with a paintball course, a zip line, and other recreational facilities. They printed brochures for the Allegheny River Retreat Center, which, Tami said, was now a \$120 million project.

As they waited and waited for funding, the 2020 presidential election arrived. Tami again voted for Trump, this time in concert with prophets who said he was an instrument of God. She soon began listening to an influential South Carolina apostle named Dutch Sheets, who had for years advocated an end to Church-state separation and co-authored something called the “Watchman Decree,” a kind of pledge of allegiance that included the phrase “we, the Church, are God’s governing Body on the earth.” Sheets was among a core group of apostles and prophets spreading the narrative that the election had been stolen not just from Trump, but from God. He began promoting daily 15-minute YouTube prayers and decrees, which were like commandments to those in the Kingdom. He branded them “Give Him 15,” or GH15, and at their peak, some videos were getting hundreds of thousands of views.

Tami began reading Sheets’s decrees aloud at sunrise every morning, videotaping herself on the deck overlooking the Allegheny River and posting her videos to Facebook.

“Lord, we will not stop praying for the full exposure of voter fraud in the 2020 elections,” she read on November 12.

“We refuse to take our cue or instructions from the media, political parties, or other individuals,” she read on November 17. “We believe you placed President Trump in office, and we believe you promised two terms. We stand on this.”

She started receiving lots of friend requests and was getting recognized around town. She bought an APPEAL TO HEAVEN flag, which Sheets had popularized as a symbol of holy revolution. She kept seeing signs that made her wonder whether the mountain might have a specific purpose in what she was coming to see as a global spiritual battle.

One day the sign was a dove flying across the sky as she read the morning decree, and the dove feathers she found on her doorstep after that. Another day, two women who’d seen her videos showed up at her door with bottles of water from Israel, saying they needed to pour it in “strategic” places along her riverfront that God had revealed to them. Another day, Sheets himself announced that he was holding a prayer rally at the headwaters of the Allegheny River—two hours north of Tami—part of a swing-state prophecy tour as Trump challenged election results.

Tami went. And when Sheets and other apostles and prophets urged followers to convene at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, she felt God telling her to go there, too. So she and Kevin boarded a bus that a friend had chartered to Washington, D.C., where she read the daily decree, the Washington Monument in the background, as Kevin held the APPEAL TO HEAVEN flag.

“Let the battle for America’s future be turned today, in Jesus’s name,” she said. From what she described as her vantage point outside the Capitol, the big story of the day was not that a violent insurrection had occurred but rather that a movement of God was under way, another Jesus Revolution. “It was one of the best days of my life,” Tami said.

When she got back to the mountain, she kept recording the daily decrees from her deck, in front of a pink flower pot with an American flag.

“We refuse to allow hope deferred and discouragement to cripple the growth of your people in their true identity—the army you intended them to be,” she read after Joe Biden took office.

She flew to Tampa, Florida, for a stop on the “ReAwaken America” tour. She drove to another one a few hours away from her home, then

watched others online, events featuring a roster of prophets alongside the headliner, retired General Michael Flynn, Trump’s former national security adviser, who was now declaring the nation to be in a state of “spiritual war.” She always came home with a cellphone full of new contacts. She began introducing herself as “Tami Barthen, the one who bought a mountain for God.”



Tami and Kevin in a demonstration of prayer (Olivia Crumm for *The Atlantic*)



Left: The flag that Tami hangs on her deck, where she reads prayers from Dutch Sheets at sunrise. *Right:* Tami shows a visitor the feathers that she found on her doorstep. (Olivia Crumm for *The Atlantic*)

Occasionally she said this with a note of sarcasm, because the Kingdom funding had yet to come through, and at times she was not sure where all the signs were ultimately pointing. In those moments, she sought more prophecies.

She messaged a prophet who'd appeared on a Dutch Sheets broadcast, asking him what God might tell him about her project. "This is what I hear the Lord saying," he wrote back. "God says this came forth from His heart and He has already orchestrated the completion."

At a Kingdom-building conference in Oregon, she asked Nathan French, a prominent prophet, what God was telling him and recorded the answer on her iPhone: “I feel like that mountain is like Zion, and I feel like God is even saying you can name it Mount Zion ... I see the Shekinah coming,” he said, using the Hebrew term for God’s presence, “the shock and awe.”

Tami had rolled her eyes at this grand new prediction, but when she got home, another sign appeared.

“The Z on the oil tank,” she said now, sitting on her porch.

It was spring. She took the Zion prophecy, which she had transcribed and printed on thick paper, and slipped it into a binder, where she archived the most meaningful ones in protective plastic covers. She was trying to figure out what it was all adding up to.

“Why was Dutch Sheets at the headwaters of the Allegheny? Why is there a Z on the oil tank? Why am I meeting all these people? There are all these pieces to the puzzle, but I don’t know what it’s supposed to be yet,” Tami said.

A new piece of the puzzle was that Trump had been indicted in New York on charges of falsifying business records related to payoffs to the

adult-film actor Stormy Daniels. Tami had watched coverage on an online show called *FlashPoint*, which has a cable-news format, except that the news bulletins come from prophets.

“This is not just a battle against us; this is a battle against the purposes of God,” one had said about the indictment, and Tami understood this to be an escalation. A few days later, an apostle named Gary Sorensen called. He was an engineer who had been among the group claiming to represent the Kingdom funders. He was calling to invite Tami on a private spiritual-heritage tour of the Pennsylvania capitol, which was being led by one of the most powerful apostles in the state.

Tami took it as another sign, and she and Kevin drove to Harrisburg.

SHE WAS SLIGHTLY NERVOUS. The apostle was a woman named Abby Abildness, who heads a state prayer network that was part of the Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation, a fixture of the religious right. During the legislative session, she convened weekly prayer meetings with state legislators along with business and religious leaders. She had a ministry called Healing Tree International, which claimed representatives in 115 countries, and focused on what she described as “restoring the God-given destinies of people and nations.” She was just back from Kurdistan, where she had met with a

top general in the Peshmerga, the Kurdish military. To Tami, Abildness was like a high-ranking Kingdom diplomat.

“So,” Abildness began. “The tour I do is about William Penn’s vision for what this colony would be. And it starts—if you look up, we have the words he spoke on the rotunda.”

Tami looked up at the gilded words beneath a fresco of ascending angels.

“There may be room there for such a Holy Experiment,” Abildness read. “And my God will make it the seed of a nation.”

“Wow,” Tami said.

They were the kind of words and images found in statehouses all over the country, but which Abildness understood not as historical artifacts but as divine instructions for the here and now.

They headed down a marbled hallway to the governor’s reception room.

“So this is William Penn,” Abildness said, pointing to a panel depicting Penn as a student at Oxford, before he joined the Quaker

movement. “He’s sitting in his library and a light comes into the room, and he knows something supernatural is happening.”

They moved on to the Senate chamber.

“Here you are going to see a vision of what society could be if the fullness of what Penn planted came into being—a vision of society where all are recognizing the sovereign God,” Abildness said as they walked inside.

Tami looked around at scenes of kings bowing before Christ, and quotes from the Book of Revelation about mountains.

“You see here, angels are bringing messages of God down to those who would write the laws,” Abildness said.

They moved on to the House chamber.

“This is *The Apotheosis*,” Abildness said, referring to an epic painting that included a couple of Founding Fathers, and then she pointed to a smaller, adjacent painting, depicting Penn making a peace treaty with the Lenape people.

Tami listened as Abildness explained her interpretation: God had granted Native Americans original spiritual authority over the land; the treaty meant sharing that spiritual authority with Penn; later generations broke the covenant through their genocidal campaign against the Native Americans, and now the covenant needed to be restored in order to fulfill Penn's original vision for a Holy Experiment. Nothing less than the entire Kingdom of God was riding on Pennsylvania.

Tami listened, thinking of something she'd always wondered about, a sacred Native American site across the river, visible from her deck, known as Indian God Rock. It is a large boulder carved with figures that academic experts believe have religious meaning. As the tour ended, she kept thinking about what it all could mean.

"People I hang with think we're moving from a church age to a Kingdom age," Sorensen was saying.

"It's like, what are all these signs saying?" Tami said.



Left: Tami's King Solomon sword. *Right:* A wall in her living room features a painting of her as a spiritual warrior. (Olivia Crumm for *The Atlantic*)

Sorensen was involved in various organizations devoted to funding and developing Kingdom projects. There was Reborne Global Trust, and New Kingdom Global, and Abundance Research Institute, among others. He told Tami not to worry about her benefactors coming through. He said \$120 million was peanuts to them. He said one funder was an Australian private-wealth manager. He said others were “international benefactors,” as well as “sovereigns,” people he described as “publicly known royal and ruling families of well-known countries.”

“We are looking into establishing a Kingdom treasury,” he said, elaborating that some of the funders were setting up offshore banking accounts. “Outside the central banking system—so we can’t get cut off if we’re not voting right.”

Everything would be coming together soon, he told her.

DRIVING BACK to the mountain, Tami and Kevin listened to ElijahStreams, an online platform that launched after the 2020 election. It hosts daily shows from dozens of prominent and up-and-coming prophets, and claims more than 1 million followers.

There were so many apostles and prophets these days—the old standards like Dutch Sheets, and so many younger ones who had podcasts, apps, shows on Rumble. By now Tami followed at least a dozen of them closely, and what she had noticed was how politically involved they had become since the 2020 election and how in recent months, their visions had been getting darker.

Lance Wallnau, whom Tami thought of as fairly moderate, had spoken on Easter Sunday about hearing prophecies of “sudden deaths,” and he himself predicted that “the disciplinary hand of God” would be coming down.

Now, as she and Kevin were winding through the woods, she was listening to a young prophet from Texas named Andrew Whalen, who was being promoted on popular shows lately. He described himself as “close friends” with Dutch Sheets, and on his website, characterized the moment as a “context of war,” when “a new generation is preparing to cross over into ‘lands of inheritance’—places that Christ has given us authority to conquer.”

“I’m boiling on the inside,” he was saying, describing a dream in which he saw the angelic realm working with “earthly governments and militaries.” He continued, “I just say even today, let Operation Fury commence, God. We say let the fury of God’s wrath break forth against every evil work, against systems of demonic and satanic structure.”

Tami listened. And in the coming weeks, she kept listening as Operation Fury became a page on Whalen’s website where people could sign up to help “overthrow jezebel’s influence from our lives.” She kept listening as Trump was indicted a second time, for mishandling classified documents, and a prophet on *FlashPoint* described the moment as a “battle between good versus evil.”

She sometimes felt afraid when she imagined what was coming.

“It’s going to get bad. It’s going to get worse,” she said. “It’s spiritual warfare, and it’s going to come into the physical. What it’s going to look like? I don’t know. God said to show up at Jericho, and the walls came down. But there are other stories where David killed many people. All I can say is if you believe in God, you’ve got to trust him. If you’re God-fearing, you’ll be protected.”

The morning after her tour in Harrisburg, Tami went out on her deck and recorded the daily decree.

“We use the sword of our mouths just as you instructed,” she read. “The king’s decree and the decrees of the king are hereby law in this land.”

After that, she went to her office.

On her desk were bills she had to pay. On a table were towers of books she’d read about spiritual warfare, demon mapping, the seven mountains. In a file were all the prophecies she’d tried to follow, all the signs.

She thought about Operation Fury, and what Abby Abildness had said about Pennsylvania, and Indian God Rock, and as she began putting all the signs together, she had a thought that filled her with dread.

“I don’t want this job,” she said. “What if I mess up? Why me?”

She pulled out a 259-page book called *The Seed of a Nation*, about what William Penn envisioned as a “Holy Experiment” in the colony of Pennsylvania, opening it to the last page she had highlighted and underlined.

“See?” she said. “I only got to page 47.”

She thought that maybe the funding was not coming through because she had missed a sign. Maybe she had not been obedient enough.

Maybe she, Tami Barthen, was the one delaying the whole Kingdom, and now instead of listening to the voice of God, she was listening to her own voice saying something back: “I’m sorry.”

She thought for a moment about what would happen if she let it all go, if instead of being a Christian warrior on a mountain essential to bringing about the Kingdom of God, she went back to being Tami, who had wanted the peace of a retirement cabin by the river.



Tami in her driveway (Olivia Crumm for *The Atlantic*)

“I can’t think of a Plan B,” she said, so she reminded herself of how she had gotten here.

She had been living her life, trying to pull herself out of a dark period, when she felt the love of God save her, and then heard the voice of God tell her to buy a mountain. And who was she to refuse the wishes of God?

So she had bought a mountain, 350 acres redeemed for the Kingdom. Now she would wait for word from the prophets. She reminded herself of a favorite Bible verse.

“He says, ‘Occupy until I come,’” Tami said. “Like the Bible says, ‘Thy kingdom come.’”

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