

## Hegseth Borrows Violent Prayer From 'Pulp Fiction' to Bless Iran War at April Pentagon Worship Service



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For the [second month in a row](#), Pete Hegseth, who likes to call himself “secretary of war,” read a violent prayer — that echoes a scene in the Quentin Tarantino film *Pulp Fiction* — during a worship service at the Pentagon on Wednesday (April 15) to bless the U.S. war against Iran and call for “great vengeance and furious anger.” Hegseth also argued that what they hear in the worship service should impact the policy and military decisions they make — including decisions related to the war.

“Fifteen minutes ago, I was talking about blockades with Admiral Cooper, and now we’re going to study the Lord’s word. And may what we talk about, how we worship today inform the remainder of our day and the remainder of our week and who we are and how we conduct ourselves, no matter what we’re doing,” he said. “That’s why I just wanted to share briefly this morning what my devotion was from this morning, from this very morning.”

Standing at the podium with his Bible [stamped](#) with a Jerusalem Cross and “Deus Vult,” Hegseth then read from Luke 7, when John the baptizer sent a couple of his disciples to ask Jesus if he really is the Messiah. Jesus responded by reminding them of the miracles they saw and how “the poor have good news preached to them.” Jesus added, “And blessed is the one who is not offended by me.”

“I’ve zeroed in on that last verse: ‘And blessed is the one who is not offended by me,’” Hegseth said. “I’m not a theologian, but I know there were a lot of expectations that people were putting on Jesus at that time: What he was going to come to do, what he would save people from. Most of it through our own lens, as we do all the time. It was a cultural lens. It was a political lens. It was a philosophical lens. And they wanted more urgently Jesus to do certain things.”

“And he lays out some of the ways in which he demonstrates who he is, and blessed is the one who is not offended by who I am and what the truth actually represents,” Hegseth added. “Everyone was looking for something else in Jesus’s time. We often look somewhere else and look at trials through the wrong lens, and Jesus understands what kind of recipe we need for his purpose.”

Hegseth added that reminded him of the prayer handed to him a couple of days ago that was “delivered from the lead mission planner of Sandy 1,” the head of the [recent rescue mission](#) that recently located and extracted Air Force crew members shot down in Iran. Hegseth then led those at the service in saying the prayer.

“The path of the downed aviator is beset on all sides by the iniquities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men,” Hegseth prayed. “Blessed is he who, in the name of camaraderie and duty, shepherd the lost through the valley of darkness, for he is truly his brother’s keeper and the finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to capture and destroy my brother. And you will know my call sign is Sandy 1 when I lay my vengeance upon thee, and amen.”



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Before repeating that prayer, Hegseth mentioned he was told the prayer is titled “CSAR 2517,” which stands for “Combat Search And Rescue” and alludes to the fact that it borrows some wording from Ezekiel 25:17 (though there are other verses also used, [like with his violent prayer](#) at last month’s service). The last two sentences of the prayer do mirror language from Ezekiel, except the speaker is changed from being God to the commander of the U.S. mission.

“I will execute great vengeance on them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I lay my vengeance upon them,” the prophet records God as saying as a warning to the Philistines for seeking to destroy Judah. Ezekiel offered that word at a time when the Hebrew people had been conquered by the world’s largest and most powerful military and then subjected by the Babylonian Empire.

While Hegseth mentioned Ezekiel 25:17 as an inspiration for the prayer, he did not point out the more direct link to a movie. In *Pulp Fiction*, Samuel L. Jackson’s character claims to quote that Bible verse but takes poetic license with the text. What he says in the movie during a speech is close to what Hegseth read as a prayer, with a few words changed to make it align more with a search and rescue mission.

“There’s this passage I’ve got memorized, sort of fits this occasion: Ezekiel 25:17,” Jackson’s character [says](#) as he prepares to unload his gun at an unarmed man. “The path of the righteous man is beset on all sides by the iniquities of the selfish and the tyranny of evil men. Blessed is he who, in the name of charity and good will, shepherds the weak through the valley of the darkness, for he is truly his brother’s keeper and the

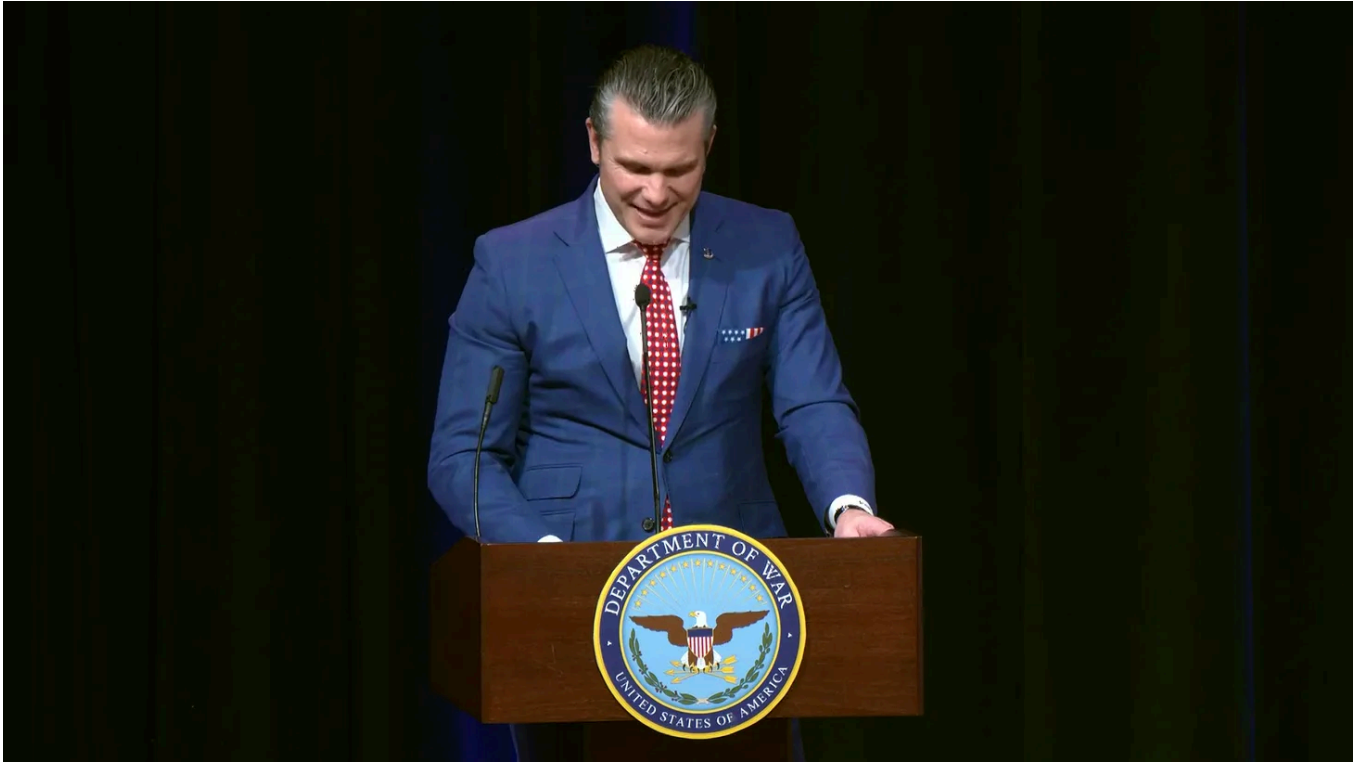
finder of lost children. And I will strike down upon thee with great vengeance and furious anger those who attempt to poison and destroy my brothers. And you will know my name is the Lord when I lay my vengeance upon thee!”



Other parts of Wednesday service also invoked Christian Scripture and music to sanctify the work of the U.S. military. The guest preacher was Zack Randles, founding pastor of Waterfront Church, a [Southern Baptist congregation](#) in Washington, D.C. Including Randles, half of the [12 monthly worship services](#) have featured a sermon by a Southern Baptist. Preaching from Acts 28 when Paul is shipwrecked, Randles urged the military members to continue serving God and seeking to help others even when in pain.

The military official who opened and closed the service started by greeting those present “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” and closed it by praying that “Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” His opening prayer included a request to God that the nation’s leaders would hear “the message from your word today” so that “they might see ever more clearly your glory in the face of Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Additionally, Randles led those present in saying the Lord’s Prayer before an Air Force official led the singing of “Amazing Grace” and the “Doxology.”



Screengrab as Pete Hegseth prays during a worship service at the Pentagon on April 15, 2026.

## Theological and Legal Pushback

Hegseth's violent prayer at last month's service has particularly sparked criticism. He did not mention the public debates during Wednesday's service. But just four days after last month's service, Pope Leo XIV appeared to counter Hegseth's Crusader theology.

"Brothers and sisters, this is our God: Jesus, King of Peace, who rejects war, whom no one can use to justify war. He does not listen to the prayers of those who wage war, but rejects them, saying: 'Even though you make many prayers, I will not listen: your hands are full of blood,'" Leo [said](#) on Palm Sunday, with the last line a quote from Isaiah 1:15.

Archbishop Reinhard Marx of Munich, Germany, made his criticism even more explicit in his Easter sermon as he [criticized](#) Hegseth for "shameless blasphemy." Marx, who also condemned the head of the Russian Orthodox Church for "holy war" rhetoric, added that the world needs "Easter people" who do not follow those who "prioritize violence and power over justice and peace."

Shortly before the worship service started on Wednesday, nine U.S. Democratic representatives [filed six impeachment articles](#) against Hegseth allegedly war crimes, abuse of power, and other charges. The lead sponsor of the impeachment resolution is Rep. Yassamin Anasari of Arizona, the first Iranian-American Democrat elected to Congress. The cosponsors are Reps. Steve Cohen of Tennessee, Jasmine Crockett of Texas, Nikema Williams of Georgia, Dina Titus of Nevada, David Min of California, Shri Thanedar of Michigan, Brittany Pettersen of Colorado, and Sarah McBride of

Delaware. While it won't advance as long as Republicans hold the House, it signals an increasing focus on Hegseth as the most targeted Cabinet member after the firing of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem and Attorney General Pam Bondi.



Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth looks toward Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Dan Caine during a press briefing at the Pentagon on April 8, 2026. (Manuel Balce Ceneta/Associated Press)

The impeachment articles don't mention his worship services. But last month, Americans United for Separation of Church and State (where I serve as vice chair of the national [board of trustees](#)) [filed lawsuits](#) against the Department of Defense and the Department of Labor for holding government worship services. As AU President and CEO Rachel Laser said about the services: "The federal government's role is to serve the public, not to proselytize."

John E. Jones III, a former federal judge (appointed by George W. Bush) who is now president of Dickinson College, this week told *The Conversation* that Hegseth's services appear to violate the no establishment clause of the First Amendment. But Jones warned that the current U.S. Supreme Court might not be willing to stop it.

"It sure looks like they are in violation. These activities are hosted on government property. They're potentially coercive and appear to promote one particular religious viewpoint above others," Jones [explained](#). "The founders knew that if there was a move towards a favored or national religion in the eyes of the government, that could replicate what took place in Great Britain, where religion and politics mixed with

occasionally terrible results. Failure to adhere to the dictates of the church could render you a second-class citizen, or worse. My hope is that judges will be very, very careful about a systemic creep that totally eviscerates the purpose and intent of the establishment clause.”

*As a public witness,*

*Brian Kaylor*



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