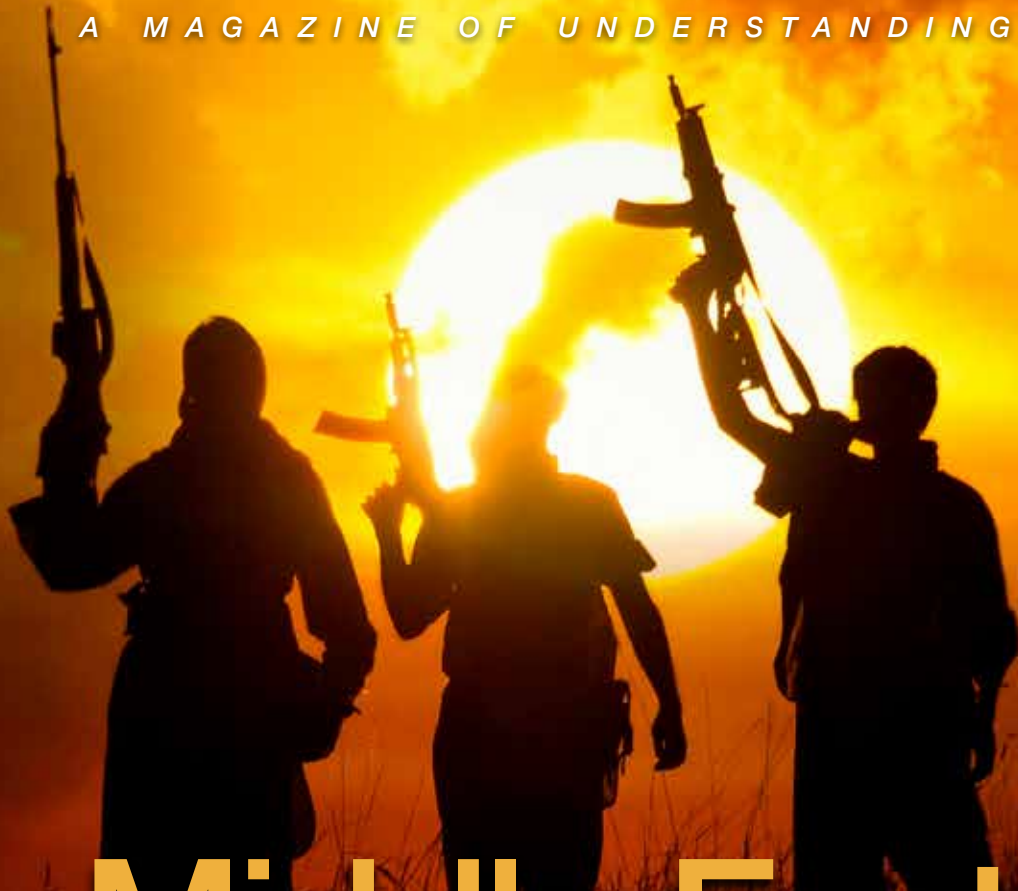


# *The* Good News

January-February 2015

A MAGAZINE OF UNDERSTANDING



## Middle East CHAOS

What's Happening and Why

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BEYOND  
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## Chaos Will Give Way to Peace

**M**ost of my souvenirs from several trips to the Middle East bring back pleasant memories. One, not so much.

It's a copy of *The Jordan Times* newspaper. The headlines, articles and photos tell the horrifying story of near-simultaneous suicide bomber attacks on three American-chain hotels in Amman in which 64 people were killed and more than a hundred maimed.

I was only a mile away when it happened. *Beyond Today* TV host Darris McNeely and I had just finished a four-week trip through Jordan and Israel, and we'd turned in early at our hotel to get a good night's sleep before catching our long flight home to America.

We'd been asleep only a short while when we were startled awake by a loud pounding on the door. As we stumbled to open it, a hotel employee burst in shouting: "Emergency! Emergency! You must evacuate now!" We hurriedly threw on clothes and, with several hundred other guests, made our way through the lobby, out into the street and to a nearby vacant lot. We shivered in the cold November night air as hotel employees passed out much-welcomed blankets.

In the distance we could hear sirens and see flashing lights but

**It's remarkable how past and present—and, yes, sometimes even future—collide in the Middle East.**

had no idea what was going on. We assumed it was a fire, but smelling no smoke we concluded it must've been a bomb threat.

After what seemed like an eternity, the hotel manager quietly told a few persistent questioners of the murderous attack that had happened nearby. When the police and military had finished sweeping the hotel for explosives and any other possible bombers, we were allowed back in for a quick call to our wives to assure them we were okay and a few uneasy hours of sleep before leaving for our flight home.

It's remarkable how past and present—and, yes, sometimes even future—collide in the Middle East. Only a few days earlier Darris and I had stood overlooking the battlefield in Galilee where the forces of the Muslim general Saladin defeated the Crusaders in A.D. 1187, ending almost a century of Crusader rule in the Holy Land. From this spot we could also see the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee and pick out the locations of Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida, the principle towns of Jesus Christ's ministry.

A day or two before, we had stood atop the ancient mound of Megiddo—biblical *har-Megiddo* or *Armageddon*—and gazed across the broad Jezreel Valley to the ridge on which Nazareth lay in the distance. Yes, the Prince of Peace grew up as a boy in a village overlooking the most fought-over piece of land known to man—the battlefield that lends its name to the final climactic clash of man vs. God that will determine who will rule the earth at Christ's return.

Meanwhile, human clashes come all too often in this bloodstained land where ancient resentments resurface with alarming regularity, leaving temporary victors but far greater numbers of permanent victims—for no one ever truly wins at war in this age of man's misrule.

Before our border crossing to Jordan and that terrible night in Amman, Jordan, I'd stood at the Western Wall in Jerusalem and followed God's admonition through King David in Psalm 122:6 to "pray for the peace of Jerusalem"—a peace that will come only with the return and reign of the true Messiah, Jesus Christ.

In an age of daily headlines of Middle East chaos, that day can't come soon enough. That's why He tells us to pray regularly, "Your Kingdom come!" I hope you'll join us in praying that always.

—Scott Ashley, Managing editor



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# Middle East CHAOS

What's Happening and Why



Once again the Middle East is being transformed before our eyes, with a near-constant stream of headlines describing chaos and upheaval. What does it mean? Where is it leading? You need to know the answers!

*by Scott Ashley*

What news items have dominated international headlines the last several years? Consider this quick recap:

- Four years ago the Arab Spring uprising began to reshape the Middle East. Several Arab governments were overthrown in what was widely hailed at the time as a popular and progressive democracy movement. However, subsequent events showed this view to be naïve and far from reality, with violence, bloodshed and harsher forms of oppression spreading through the region.

- The Syrian civil war, an outgrowth of the Arab Spring, has claimed some 200,000 lives as various groups have competed—so far unsuccessfully—to overthrow Syrian strongman Bashar al-Assad. The war has also created millions of refugees, many of whom have fled into neighboring Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Iraq.

- In the background over the last few years we've seen Iran determinedly pursuing nuclear arms, while endless rounds of negotiations with Western nations accomplished little other than allowing Iran to buy time to pursue its goals of developing nuclear weapons and the means to deliver

about a third of what was formerly Syria and Iraq. And as this new state has arisen, Iraq and Syria have fragmented to the point of no longer existing as we have known them.

- Part of the declaration of the Islamic State was the simultaneous proclamation of the reestablishment of an Islamic caliphate—an Islamic religious-political empire uniting Muslims under the rule of a single leader and governed by Islamic sharia law.

- The newly proclaimed Islamic State/caliphate has also shocked the world with its brutality—proudly beheading Western hostages and distributing videos of the murders, executing prisoners in the thousands, capturing women and selling them as sex slaves, and instilling fear in millions of people in the region.

- This last summer saw yet another war between Hamas and Israel, with Hamas and other terror groups in Gaza indiscriminately launching rockets and mortars at Israeli cities and towns until Israel retaliated with a devastating ground invasion to destroy and degrade terror capabilities. And as I write this, we may be seeing the beginning of a new *intifada*, or uprising, among Arabs living in Israel, with several Israelis murdered in car and knife assaults, including an

more importantly, *why* it's taking place. And you can be sure that the Middle East isn't the only area affected by these trends. They're increasingly affecting the rest of the world.

What do all of these things have in common? If you're an astute follower of the news, you probably recognize that all of these events have a key factor in common—and that's *Islam*. They're all driven by beliefs spelled out in Islam's holy book, the Quran, and the Hadith, the traditions of the prophet Muhammad.

### Prophecy of characteristics and conflict

However, the story doesn't begin with today's headlines. It begins far earlier, about 4,000 years ago in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. It begins with a man named Abraham and a foolish decision to have a son by his wife Sarah's Egyptian servant girl Hagar after Sarah wasn't able to conceive—a decision that has had consequences lasting all the way down to our day.

Sarah became jealous of the now-pregnant Hagar and dealt harshly with her to the point that Hagar fled into the desert. Picking up the story where Hagar is about to die of thirst, a divine messenger appears and assures her that she and her unborn son will not die, and then this messenger of God tells her something about the son she will bear: "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count."

So the descendants of Hagar's son by Abraham, and other children she would bear later, were to become a large nation. The messenger then revealed more information to Hagar about her son: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of

a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility towards all his brothers" (Genesis 16:10-12, New International Version).

Although it's not politically correct to say so, this is an apt description of the descendants of Ishmael—the Arab peoples, who proudly proclaim their descent from Ishmael to this day. History shows us that

## We cannot understand so much of what's happening in the world if we don't understand what's taking place in the Middle East and why.



them. Recent news reports indicate that Iran now appears to

have mastered most of the design challenges involved in creating a nuclear warhead that can be fitted on its Shahab-3 missiles.

- In recent months we've witnessed history being made as a new national entity arose on the world scene—the Islamic State (also referred to as ISIS and ISIL), spanning

appalling attack in which four rabbis were shot, knifed and hacked to death during morning prayers at a Jerusalem synagogue.

Why are we seeing such chaos and violence in the Middle East? What's behind it, and where is it going?

These are crucial questions, because we cannot understand so much of what's happening in the world if we don't understand what's taking place in the Middle East—and





they have seldom been able to get along, as attested by the near-endless cycles of violence and war in the Middle East. The rare times they have been mostly unified were when they were forced to live at peace under dictatorships and/or were allies in arms against someone else.

A longer form of an old Arab proverb states: “Me against my brother. Me and my brother against our cousin. Me, my brother, and my cousin against the neighbors. All of us against the stranger.” The last clause is sometimes given as “Me, my brother and my cousin against the world.”

As foretold in that prophecy in the book of Genesis almost 4,000 years ago, the history of the descendants of Ishmael is a chronicle of conflict and fighting. It was Arabs, mostly from Saudi Arabia, who flew passenger jets into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, and changed our world forever. It was fighters from Arab nations who took over Afghanistan and made it a terrorist haven.

It is no coincidence that al-Qaeda founder Osama bin Laden was from Saudi Arabia, that his successor, Ayman al-Zawahiri, is Egyptian and that many of the warriors still holding out and fighting in Afghanistan are Arabs. Nor is it a coincidence that Arab fighters form the backbone of the newly declared Islamic State.

It’s also not surprising that the most stable Arab governments have been those ruled by dictators or kings with near-dictatorial powers to suppress unrest or discord. Their peoples have not been united or at peace for very long except when forced into it by strongmen like Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Muammar Gaddafi in Libya. And we have seen how those nations degenerated into chaos when those leaders were taken out of the way.

## Prophecy of conquest and empire

Genesis 16 isn’t the only prophecy of the Arab peoples in the Bible. In the next chapter we find another revealing prophecy of Abraham’s descendants through Ishmael. Here God, speaking to Abraham, says: “As for Ishmael . . . I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly . . . and I will make him a great nation” (Genesis 17:20).

Was this promise that the Arab peoples would become a great nation ever fulfilled? It was indeed—*beginning more than 13 centuries ago*. From the Arabian Peninsula sprang the religion of Islam in the 600s A.D. The Arabs spread this new religion

by force of arms outward in all directions across the Middle East, spanning North Africa and well into Europe, conquering most of Spain and Portugal and advancing as far as Paris before being turned back.

After its initial early expansion, the spreading wave of Islam lost momentum and stalled for several centuries. The end of this period was marked by the Crusades, a reaction to these Muslim conquests. Islam and Catholic Europe had already clashed when Muslims captured the Holy Land, including Jerusalem, in A.D. 635-638. The conflict grew deeper when Muslims invaded Spain and Portugal, then threatened to take

**The Arabs spread this new religion by force of arms in all directions across the Middle East, North Africa and well into Europe, conquering most of Spain and Portugal and advancing as far as Paris before being turned back.**

France before being defeated near Paris in 732. With papal backing and encouragement, Europe’s kings and nobles mounted a counteroffensive to retake the Holy Land for Christianity.

Finally successful in 1099, Crusaders held Jerusalem for almost a century until driven out by the armies of Saladin in 1187. Later Crusaders briefly retook the city from 1229 to 1239 and 1243 to 1244 before being driven out for the final time—after which Muslims would rule Jerusalem until World War I, when British forces captured it from the Ottoman Empire in 1917.

In the 12th century Islam launched a second great wave of expansion, building on earlier gains. This second wave more than doubled the territory under its domination.

From North Africa, Islam spread south into sub-Saharan Africa and along the eastern coast of the continent. From the Middle East it spread far to the east across southern Asia, encompassing much of India and the islands of Southeast Asia, and north across the whole of Asia Minor, the areas around the Black and Caspian Seas, and into southeastern Europe as far as Vienna before Muslim forces were again prevented from sweeping over Europe.

While Europe was in the Dark Ages—due in no small part to being cut off by hostile Muslim forces along its borders—the Arab-led Islamic empire became one of the world’s most highly developed civilizations. The Arabs made notable advances in geography, mathematics, medicine, chemistry,

architecture and astronomy—all in fulfillment of God’s promise many centuries earlier that they would be a great civilization.

## Resentment directed toward the West—and America in particular

An underlying reason for today’s conflict between the Arab world and the West is that the Arab peoples well remember that they once had a great empire, but it decayed and collapsed long ago. Their worldview is powerfully shaped by their holy book, the Quran, which tells them that Muslims are destined to rule over all other nations: “It is He [Allah] who has sent for His apostle

[Muhammad] with guidance and the true faith [Islam], *so that he may exalt it above all religions*” (Surah 61:9, Dawood translation, 1999, emphasis added throughout).

This dichotomy between the promises of the Quran and the reality of the Muslim world creates a great deal of humiliation and resentment—the Western world today enjoying such material success while Arab civilization has declined in comparison by virtually every key measure.

Thus, in the minds of many Muslims, Western powers like the United States must be brought down so that Islam will be vindicated and Muslims may attain their rightful place as rulers of the world. This is why, after the terror attacks on the United States on Sept. 11, 2001, city streets across the Arab world were filled with joyous revelers celebrating the fact that America had been struck such a devastating blow.

This is why some Islamic leaders speak of America as “the Great Satan” and Britain and Israel as “little Satans.” In their view these nations are tools of the devil preventing Islam from attaining its rightful destiny as the world-ruling power.

But how did we get to this point that much of the world, and nearly all of the Middle East, is in chaos due to Islam?

## Key facts about unrest caused by terrorism

The *Global Terrorism Index 2014*, published by the Institute for Economics and Peace, an Australian think tank, points out these key facts about global terrorism:

- “In 2013 terrorist activity increased substantially with the total number of deaths rising from 11,133 in 2012 to 17,958 in 2013, a 61 per cent increase . . . The number of countries that experienced more than 50 deaths rose from 15 to 24. This highlights that not only is the intensity of terrorism increasing, its breadth is increasing as well.

- “Over 80 per cent of the lives lost to terrorist activity in 2013 occurred in only five countries—Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nigeria and Syria. However, another 55 countries recorded one or more deaths from terrorist activity.

- “Since 2000 there has been over a five-

- The number of deaths from terrorism *is increasing dramatically—up 61 percent* from 2012 to 2013, the last year for which statistics are available.

- The number of deaths from terrorism *has increased 500 percent* from 2000 to 2013.

- The number of countries affected by terrorism is also increasing dramatically, with the number of countries experiencing more than 50 deaths from terrorism growing from 15 to 24 from 2012 to 2013, and 60 countries recording at least one death from terrorism.

- The vast majority of the world’s deaths by terrorism—two out of three—are attrib-

other sects, infidels who must be converted or face the sword so that “pure” Islam (as they define it) can be revived and spread.

This also goes for Muslim-ruled governments throughout the region, where fundamentalist groups are determined to topple rulers—whom they view as apostate or Westernized—so they can convert the nations to their vision of Islam. Such groups have openly boasted of their intent to bring down Bashar al-Assad in Syria (where a bloody civil war is raging) and the ruling royal families of such kingdoms as Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Kuwait.

Meanwhile, in Nigeria, the Boko Haram terror group, notorious for its bloody massacres at churches and kidnapping hundreds of schoolgirls, is following the original method used to spread Islam—by converting as many as possible to Islam and killing those who resist, all while trying to topple the government so they can take over and convert the entire nation to Islam.

What does it all mean?

The answer is both simple and profound: *Islam is awakening from its long slumber and beginning its third wave of expansion.* And as with the first two waves that started in the 600s and 1200s, this resurgence is creating violence, instability and fear both within the Muslim world and all along its borders.

As we saw earlier, the Quran tells Muslims that they are destined to rule a world converted to Islam. They are also told that many will resist, so Muslims are to wage *jihad* so that the world will be united under Islam: “*Fight against them until idolatry is no more and [Allah’s] religion reigns supreme*” (Surah 2:193). This is spelled out in greater detail in “The Jihadist Worldview: What’s Behind the Mideast Brutality?” beginning on page 9.

### Caliphate and conquest

Many Muslims have long dreamed of an Islamic empire, a caliphate, united under the leadership of a single Muslim ruler or caliph, as it was in the days of Islam’s founder Muhammad and his immediate successors. They see this as promised and commanded in the Quran because they are Allah’s chosen people: “You are the noblest community ever raised up [as an example] for mankind. You enjoin justice and forbid evil. You believe in [Allah]” (Surah 3:110).

And for this they are promised rulership in a land where Allah alone is worshipped and all peoples submit to him (*Islam* means “submission,” and *Muslim* “one who submits”):



fold increase in the number of deaths from terrorism, rising from 3,361 in 2000 to 17,958 in 2013.

- “The threat of terrorist activity is a major if not the major national security risk for many countries. The recent rise of ultra-violent groups such as ISIL [or ISIS] in Syria and Iraq is underpinned by greater territorial ambitions . . . thereby increasing the risk of further destabilisation in the Middle East region.

- “The majority of claimed deaths from terrorist attacks, 66 per cent in 2013, are claimed by only four terrorist organisations: ISIL, Boko Haram, the Taliban and al-Qa’ida and its affiliates. Variations of religious ideologies based on extreme interpretations of Wahhabi Islam are the key commonality for all four groups . . .”

### Painful truths and conclusions

Notice several truths from these facts:

utable to *just four terror groups, all of them Islamic.*

- The “territorial ambitions”—i.e., desire for conquest—of these Islamic groups threaten to further destabilize the Middle East.

- More than 80 percent of deaths due to terrorism took place in only five countries. Four of the countries listed are overwhelmingly Muslim, meaning *Muslims there are slaughtering other Muslims*. The exception is Nigeria, about 50 percent Muslim, where most of the deaths from terrorism are from Muslims slaughtering those of other religions, primarily Christians (who make up 40 percent of the Nigerian population).

### Third wave of Islamic conquest

What are we to conclude from these facts? Although not explained in these raw numbers, why are Muslims killing so many other Muslims? In their own words, they consider more moderate Muslims, or Muslims of



“[Allah] has promised those of you who believe and do good works to *make them masters in the land* as He made those who went before them, to strengthen the Faith He chose for them [Islam], and to change their fears to safety. *Let them worship Me and serve none beside Me*” (Surah 24:55).

When the head of the terror group ISIS or ISIL (the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham, i.e., Greater Syria or the Levant), Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, declared the establishment of the Islamic State on territory captured from Syria and Iraq, he declared himself caliph, ruler of a new Islamic caliphate. In a written statement announcing this dramatic step, he quoted the two Quranic verses above plus many other similar ones.

He recited early Islamic history and its great conquests, including the toppling of the empires that stood in Islam’s way, and called on Muslims worldwide to join him: “The time has come for the [worldwide community of Muslim believers] to wake up from its sleep, remove the garments of dishonor, and shake off the dust of humiliation and disgrace . . . *The sun of jihad has risen. The glad tidings of good are shining. Triumph looms on the horizon. The signs of victory have appeared* . . .

“So fear Allah, O slaves of Allah. Listen to your caliph and obey him. Support your state, which grows everyday—by Allah’s grace—with honor and loftiness, while its enemy increases in retreat and defeat. *So rush O Muslims and gather around your caliph, so that you may return as you once were for ages, kings of the earth and knights of war.* Come so that you may be honored and esteemed, *living as masters with dignity.*

“Know that *we fight over a religion that Allah promised to support.* We fight for [a worldwide Muslim community] to which Allah has given honor, esteem, and leadership, promising it with empowerment and strength on the earth. *Come O Muslims to your honor, to your victory . . . rush to your religion and creed, then by Allah, you will own the earth, and the east and west will submit to you. This is the promise of Allah to you.*”

Al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State are merely the latest to proclaim their desire for the reestablishment of the caliphate, which last existed in the Ottoman Empire and was dissolved shortly after World War I. Islamist groups ever since, including such terror groups as the Muslim Brotherhood, the Taliban, al-Qaeda, Islamic Jihad and Hamas “all profess the revival of the caliphate, the

regime that was installed by Muhammed’s righteous successors, the caliphs, and has become the iconic model to be emulated by all future generations of Muslims” (Raphael Israeli, *From Arab Spring to Islamic Winter*, 2013, p. xiii).

To be blunt, the Islamic State is so brutal and bloodthirsty that it seems doubtful that it will offer broad appeal across the Muslim world—even though other groups such as the Taliban, Boko Haram and terror groups in Libya, Egypt, Algeria, Yemen and the Philippines have announced their support for it. It is also attracting fighters from all over the Muslim world and has drawn hundreds of jihadists from Western countries including Britain, France, Belgium, Italy, Germany, the United States and Canada.

## “You will conquer Rome and own the world”

In his speech announcing the revival of the caliphate, Al-Baghdadi admonished believers worldwide to rally to the cause. “Rush O Muslims to your state,” he urged. “. . . This is my advice to you. If you hold to it *you will conquer Rome* and own the world, if Allah wills.”

Promises to capture Rome crop up regularly in Islamist speeches and sermons. Why Rome? The answer is twofold. First, Rome is the seat of Roman Catholicism, seen as the mortal enemy of Islam. And second, Rome is symbolic of Europe as a whole, because it was Roman Catholicism coupled with Europe’s armies that launched the Crusades that fought back against Islam.

To this day Muslim jihadists regularly refer to Western military forces as “Crusaders”—because in their minds the Crusades never ended. To them that conflict merely went into a temporary lull, and now the fight to the death has resumed.

## Bible prophecy foretells further conflict

Can we know where these trends are leading the world? There is only one sure source that tells us what the future holds, and that is the Word of God, the Bible. It does not give us all of the details, but it does give broad outlines of major trends leading up to the return of Jesus Christ to rule the world when He establishes the long-awaited Kingdom of God here on the earth.

Daniel 11 contains the Bible’s longest continuous prophecy, giving us an overview of trends affecting the Middle East from Daniel’s time in the 500s B.C. up to and including Jesus Christ’s return. This remarkable prophecy describes what will happen “at the time of the end” (verse 40),

when an end-time “king of the South”—likely the leader of an alliance of Muslim nations or a restored caliphate, an Islamic empire—will initiate a new round of warfare with a power to the North, apparently centered in Europe.

This begins a chain of events leading to warfare of unprecedented scale and destruction, bringing the human race to the verge of extinction if not for Jesus Christ’s return to save mankind from that end.

Could the Islamic State be the final power of the South? It seems highly doubtful, because this regime’s callous brutality and cruelty make it unlikely that it will gain widespread support among other Muslim nations of the region.

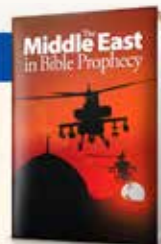
However, the Middle East always has the capacity to surprise—just as four years ago few could’ve foreseen that a few scattered protests in the early days of the Arab Spring would lead to chaos sweeping across and destabilizing virtually the entire Middle East.

Most significant of all, however, is that these events sweeping the Middle East and other areas of the world show that Islam’s dream of domination has reawakened, kindling the cries of *jihad* and conquest—with deadly implications for all those who stand in its way. Clearly millions of Muslims long for a caliphate, and the desire for Islamic conquest and the defeat of Rome shows that dangerous times lie ahead.

Never has it been more important for you to dig deeply into God’s Word to understand the times in which we live. Never has it been more important for you to forge a close relationship with your Creator that will see you through the perilous times facing our world! **GN**

## Learn More

It’s impossible to understand much of what’s going on in our world without some understanding of the age-old conflicts of the Middle East and their long-ago roots. To help you understand these things, and where they are taking the world before Jesus Christ returns to usher in a glorious time of unprecedented peace, we’ve prepared an in-depth study aid, *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. You can’t afford to be without this valuable information. A free copy is waiting for you. Download or request your free copy today!



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# The Jihadist Worldview

## What's Behind the Mideast Brutality?

The brutality of the Islamic State and various terrorist organizations is shocking and horrifying—beheadings, suicide attacks, slaughter of prisoners and women forced into sexual slavery. What's really behind such barbarism? The truth may surprise you! **by Scott Ashley**

**T**he headlines out of the Middle East in recent months have been horrifying—American and British hostages beheaded, captured prisoners executed in the thousands, women forced or sold into a lifetime of sexual slavery, children brutally murdered and communities starved to death or murdered in cold blood for refusing to change their religion.

Much of the world is shocked by such brutality, and rightfully so. It seems incomprehensible to the Western mind.

What's driving such cruelty, a barbarism not seen in our lifetimes? If we are to understand, we need to cast off the blinders of political correctness and unflinchingly face the facts.

In reality, the answer is simple. Those who are behind these horrors share a common denominator. They are unapologetic in saying they are doing what they are told to do by their religion—Islam.

And while it is true that many Muslims are peaceful, and are equally horrified by these events, all we have to do is look at the words of the perpetrators of such atrocities to understand their motivations. They clearly and proudly state that they are doing what their religion tells them to do.

### A religion of peace?

Ever since the horrific hijacked-airliner terror attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon (with another jet apparently supposed to crash

into the White House or U.S. Capitol building), Western leaders have gone out of their way to describe Islam as a religion of peace.

For example, just six days after those attacks that killed almost 3,000 Americans, then-President George W. Bush, speaking at the Islamic Center of Washington D.C., said: “These acts of violence against innocents violate the fundamental tenets of the Islamic faith . . . The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. *That's not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace*” (emphasis added throughout).

In a speech to the United Nations on Sept. 24, 2014, U.S. President Barack Obama stated: “The United States is not and never will be at war with Islam. *Islam teaches peace*. Muslims the world over aspire to live with dignity and a sense of justice. And when it comes to America and Islam, there is no us and them—there is only us, because millions of Muslim Americans are part of the fabric of our country. So we reject any suggestion of a clash of civilizations.”



In a speech on Sept. 3, 2014—ironically, the day after the Islamic State (IS) released a video showing the beheading of American journalist Steven Sotloff—U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry applauded Islam as a “peaceful religion based on the dignity of all human beings.” He then explained that “the real face of Islam is . . . one where Muslim communities are advocating for universal human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the most basic freedom to practice one’s faith openly and freely.”

On Sept. 24, following the brutal decapitation of British hostage David Haines, British Prime Minister David Cameron insisted that his murderers “have nothing to do with the great religion of Islam, a religion of peace, a religion that inspires daily acts of kindness and generosity.”

## Who is a more reliable authority on Islam?

While these and other Western leaders repeatedly claim that Islam is a peaceful religion, we should also remind ourselves that those actively involved in committing these atrocities have spent their entire lifetimes immersed in Islamic belief and culture.

We should also note that Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the declared caliph of the Islamic State, holds a doctorate in Islamic studies from the Islamic University of Baghdad—distinguishing him as highly knowledgeable of Islamic law, history and culture. Unlike these Western leaders, he is thoroughly familiar with the beliefs of Islam and teachings of its holy book, the Quran.

As caliph—supreme ruler of the new Islamic nation carved out of Syria and Iraq—his determinations of what is allowable or forbidden is the law of the land. And as recent headlines have shown, Al-Baghdadi and his followers, like Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda before them, see no conflict between their tactics of murder and mayhem and their practice of Islam. In fact, they boast that what they do is the practice of Islam.

What, then, is the truth? Is Islam a religion of peace, as these politicians say, or is it something different? To understand the answer, we need to examine Islam’s holy book, the Quran.

## Islam—the supreme and only true religion

What are some of the teachings of the Quran that are leading to violence and bloodshed around the world?

The clear teaching of the Quran is that

Islam is the supreme and only true religion, and that eventually the entire world will come under Islamic rule.

For example, Surah 61:9 states: “*It is He [Allah] who has sent for His apostle [Muhammad] with guidance and the true faith [Islam], so that he may exalt it above all religions, much as the idolaters may dislike it*” (all quotes from the Dawood translation, 1999). In the Quran, “idolaters”

thus they are “the domain of war.”

Another aspect of this that bears bringing out is that most of the Muslim world is united against Israel because it is considered an abomination for land that was once *dar al-Islam*, part of the land of Islam, to revert to *dar al-harb*, to fall back under control of the infidel (Christians or Jews).

This is a key reason why Muslims are so determined to bring the physical territory of



## While groups from all religions have engaged in violence and terrorism, recently Muslims have been involved in far more of these activities than people of other religions.

refers to all who practice non-Islamic religion—including Christians and Jews.

In line with this belief in the supremacy of Islam, Surah 2:193 gives this clear command: “*Fight against them until idolatry is no more and [Allah’s] religion reigns supreme.*” Again, “idolatry” in the Quran refers to any religion other than Islam, which would include Christianity and Judaism and any other belief system. To those who follow this verse—and there are millions who do—if you don’t worship Allah by the dictates of Muhammad, you are considered an idolater and therefore a legitimate target of this command.

In the worldview of Islamic scholars and leaders, the world is divided into two spheres—the sphere or lands of *dar al-Islam*, meaning “the domain of Islam” (where Islam is dominant) and *dar al-harb*, meaning “the domain of war.” A fundamental aspect of this worldview is that *all* non-Muslim lands must eventually be absorbed or conquered by Islam, preferably by peaceful conversion, but by force if necessary—

Israel back under Muslim domination. Keep in mind that the Palestine Liberation Organization was founded in 1964, *three years* before Israel captured the West Bank and Jerusalem in the 1967 Six-Day War—so Muslim determination to “liberate” Israeli lands long predates Israel’s control of these areas and extends to all of Israel, period.

This is why Muslim leaders openly boast of their desire to liberate the land “*from the sea to the sea*”—from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, meaning no more Israel. This is why the founding documents of terror organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah openly call for the elimination of Israel.

Western governments, failing to understand this Muslim belief, regularly pressure Israel to negotiate with Hamas and the Palestinian Authority for a peaceful solution. But in fact there is no peaceful solution when the negotiating partners believe with all their heart and soul that Israel’s land belongs to them and that it must be ethnically cleansed of Jews—as stated repeatedly



by Hamas and Palestinian Authority leaders.

### **Jihad—holy war against non-believers**

If Islam is to become the supreme and only true religion in the world as taught by the Quran, how is that goal to be accomplished? The answer is *jihad* or holy war. The Quran commands violence and conquest to spread Islam. It contains literally dozens of such commands, but we'll quote just a few:

Surah 9:5 states: "When the sacred months are over *slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them.*"

Surah 9:73 reads: "Prophet, *make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal*

*rigorously with them.* Hell shall be their home: an evil fate."

Surah 9:123 commands: "*Believers, make war on the infidels who dwell around you. Deal firmly with them. Know that [Allah] is with the righteous.*"

Harvard University professor of government Samuel Huntington, commenting on the disproportionate involvement of Muslims in warfare and terrorism around the globe, coined the phrase "the bloody borders of Islam" in his 1997 book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. At that pre-9/11 time he had no idea how prophetic the phrase would be.

In the 2005 book *Religion, Culture and*

*International Conflict: A Conversation*

(Michael Cromartie, editor), Professor Huntington wrote: "While groups from all religions have engaged in various forms of violence and terrorism, the figures make it clear that in the past decade Muslims have been involved in far more of these activities than people of other religions . . .

If you look around the Muslim world you see that in the 1990s Muslims were fighting non-Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Chechnya, Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Kashmir, Indonesia, the Philippines, the Middle East, Sudan, Nigeria, and other places. Muslims have been fighting one another also" (p. 5).

## Confusion Over What the Quran Teaches—Peace or War?

Those who state that Islam is a peaceful religion usually point to several verses in the Quran to support their view. Those most commonly cited are:

- "There shall be no compulsion in religion" (Surah 2:256, all quotes from the Dawood translation, 1999). This is often quoted to say Islam doesn't compel conversions to Islam or prevent people from leaving Islam for another religion.

- "Whoever killed a human being, except as punishment for murder or other villainy in the land, shall be regarded as having killed all mankind; and that whoever saved a human life shall be regarded as having saved all mankind" (Surah 5:32). This is often cited to show that Islam condemns violence and holds human life in high regard.

- "Say, 'Unbelievers [non-Muslims], I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship. I shall never worship what you worship, nor will you ever worship what I worship. You have your own religion, and I have mine'" (Surah 109:1-6). This is often quoted to say that Islam takes an accepting view toward others being able to practice their own religions.

- "If they incline to peace, make peace with them, and put your trust in [Allah]. It is surely He who hears all and knows all" (Surah 8:61). This is often cited to say that Islam teaches living at peace with others.

Some even say that the word *Islam* means "peace," though this isn't true. *Islam* means "submission"—submission to Allah, Islam's deity. The meaning of *Muslim*, a person who practices the religion of Islam, is "one who submits"—who submits to Allah and his religion.

While the verses quoted here seem fairly clear, what the Quran actually teaches isn't so straightforward. Dozens of verses, a few of which are quoted in the main article "The Jihadist Worldview," clearly advocate warfare, violence and brutality. So why the clear contradictions?

Much of the confusion stems from the circumstances under which the Quran was written. Muhammad, the founder of Islam, was illiterate, so he didn't write a word of the Quran. The 114 chapters of the Quran, called *surahs*, record the supposed revelations of Muhammad as written down or memorized by his followers after Muhammad came out of trance-like states during which Allah



supposedly disclosed his divine thoughts.

In the years following Muhammad's death in A.D. 632, his closest companions compiled these writings into the Quran, which Muslims consider to be the divine and authoritative words of Allah.

However, unlike the Bible, the Quran isn't organized historically, chronologically or thematically. It's organized based on the length of the chapters, from longest to shortest, regardless of content or timing. Thus, when verses conflict, no one can really tell for sure which verses were written earlier and which were written later (and thus presumably the "final word" on a given subject).

Such inherent contradictions led to

the Muslim doctrine of abrogation, meaning earlier verses were abrogated—nullified or overridden—by later verses. This doctrine is based on two verses that Muslims believe Allah inspired to be included in the Quran:

- "If We abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, We will replace it by a better one or one similar. Did you not know that [Allah] has power over all things?" (Surah 2:106).

- "When We change one verse for another ([Allah] knows best what He reveals), they say: 'You [Muhammad] are an imposter.' Indeed most of them have no knowledge" (Surah 16:101).

Islamic scholars and teachers are well aware of this teaching, though they seldom discuss it openly because of its inescapable implications—that Allah, far from being an all-wise and all-knowing deity, can and did change his mind in what was supposedly divinely revealed to Muhammad.

What are the practical conclusions that result from the doctrine of abrogation?

Most scholars who have studied the Quran believe that the Quran's verses advocating peaceful coexistence and tolerance were written in the early years of Muhammad's movement when he and his small number of followers didn't wish to antagonize potential enemies who greatly outnumbered them. But as Muhammad gained more and more power and a greater following, the chapters of the Quran written later increasingly advocated warfare, violence, intimidation and enslavement of those who opposed him.

Thus, Allah's later revelations command fighting and subjugation of "infidels"—non-Muslims—so that Islam would gain its rightful place as the dominant (or only) religion in lands it controlled.

Which is exactly what we see playing out in headlines all around the world.



He went on to note that in the year 2000, 23 of the world's 32 armed conflicts involved Muslims. Similar numbers hold true today. A glance at a world map shows that nearly all of the world's wars are taking place around the edges of the Muslim world where Islam is pressing outward against non-Muslims. Whereas the Bible teaches us to love our neighbors (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39), the Quran teaches Muslims to "*make war on the infidels who dwell around you*"—to fight your neighbor.

It's also worth noting that many Muslims believe that the only *sure* way to enter paradise (in their view of the afterlife) is to become a martyr fighting for Islam. They draw this belief from Surah 22:58: "As for those that have fled their homes in the cause of [Allah] and afterwards died or were slain, [Allah] will surely make a generous provision for them [in paradise]. [Allah] is the most munificent provider. He will surely admit them with a welcome that will please them. All-knowing is [Allah], and gracious."

In Islamic thinking, as soon as a martyr sheds his first drop of blood, he is guaranteed a place in paradise. And when he arrives, he has waiting for him 72 young, dark-eyed, beautiful virgins to be his perpetual companions in paradise. This is one reason so many young Muslim men are willing to die as suicide bombers—because they are guaranteed entry into paradise as soon as they blow themselves up, since they are dying in the cause of *jihad*.

The Quran also says that Allah will punish those who do not wage *jihad* as he commands. Surah 9:39 warns: "*If you do not go to war, [Allah] will punish you sternly, and will replace you by other men.*" In other words, if you're a Muslim and don't wage *jihad*, you will be punished and Allah will choose someone else to fight in your place.

## Using terror in waging *jihad*

The Quran also commands using terror and cruelty in waging *jihad*. Surah 8:59-60 states: "Let not the unbelievers think that they will ever get away. They have not the power so to do. Muster against them all the men and cavalry at your command, *so that you may strike terror into the enemy of Allah and your enemy*, and others besides them who are unknown to you but known to Allah."

This is why the Sunni fighters of the Islamic State are so viciously cruel. Knowing this verse, they use terror to strike fear into their enemies to demoralize them and cause them to give up their will to fight. Those whom they capture—Shiites whom

they consider apostates or non-Muslims—they brutally execute in accordance with what they read in their holy book.

The Quran even mentions specific methods to sow terror, which the Islamic State fighters use. Surah 8:12 states: "[Allah] revealed his will to the angels, saying: 'I shall be with you. Give courage to the believers. *I shall cast terror into the hearts of the infidels. Strike off their heads, strike off the very tips of their fingers!*'"

So what the Quran tells them to do, they do. When their holy book tells them to strike off heads, they do exactly that.

The civilized world has been horrified to see Islamic State fighters, like al-Qaeda fighters and Iraqi terror groups before them, brutally decapitate captive soldiers, as well as Western journalists and aid workers. Perhaps you have seen clips from some of the beheading videos shown on news reports or posted on the Internet. You may have wondered, as I did, what the Arabic-language shouting and chanting signified.

I already knew the meaning of the shouts of "Allahu Akbar"—"Allah is great" or, more properly, "Allah is greater" (than any who would oppose them). With a little research I learned the significance of the

photos showing Islamists carrying out and celebrating such practices.

## Slavery and the Quran

What does the Quran teach about slavery? Although little is said about it in Western media, slavery remains alive and well in parts of the Muslim world. While the slave trade in the Americas during the 1600s, 1700s and 1800s has been rightfully condemned, the focus has largely been on the white slave owners and slave traders, with little said of the Arab Muslims who first



## A particularly appalling aspect of recent Muslim conquests is women and girls being taken captive to be used as sexual slaves. This, too, is allowed in the Quran.

chanting often accompanying the shouts. The murderers are chanting verses like the one above telling them to behead infidels. They are simply quoting their scriptures in the Quran.

Yet Western leaders assure us, as President Obama did in a Nov. 16 White House statement after the beheading of American hostage Peter Kassig, that such acts "represent no faith, least of all the Muslim faith . . ."

Another Surah that illustrates Allah's cruelty is Surah 5:34-35: "Those that make war against [Allah] and His apostle [Mohammad] and spread disorder in the land shall be slain or *crucified* or *have their hands and feet cut off on alternate sides*, or be banished from the land. They shall be held up to shame in this world and sternly punished in the hereafter."

Here Allah commands torture, crippling and maiming of prisoners. Crucifixion is a horrible form of torture and execution, and they practice it with relish. A brief search of the Internet will produce hundreds of

enslaved Africans and sold them to whites.

This, too, was approved in the Quran. Surah 47:4 says: "When you meet the unbelievers in the battlefield *strike off their heads* and, when you have laid them low, *bind your captives firmly.*" Those who follow the Quran literally have long understood this to mean that when Muslims defeat their enemies, they are allowed to either kill them or enslave them.

According to early Muslim writings, Muhammad—who is viewed as the ideal man whom Muslims are to emulate—sold, traded and confiscated slaves, making himself a slave trader.

A particularly appalling aspect of recent Muslim conquests is women and girls being taken captive to be used as sexual slaves. This happened with the capture of Yazidi towns in northern Iraq by the Islamic State and the kidnapping of hundreds of school-girls by the Islamic Boko Haram movement in Nigeria. This, too, is specifically allowed in the Quran. Notice these verses:



# Survey Shows Sobering Muslim Attitudes

Out of a world population of about 7 billion, approximately one in four to five people—1.5 to 1.6 billion—is Muslim (though some place the number of Muslims as high as 2 billion).

I have traveled in several Middle Eastern nations and personally experienced the hospitality and friendliness of many Muslims, so I know firsthand that many of them want and believe in peace. Yet in those same countries Westerners like myself have been targeted for terror attacks. One night suicide bombers struck three Western hotels a mile from where I was staying, killing and maiming dozens of people.

But how many Muslims subscribe to the worldview described on these pages? This is a crucial question, because if only 1 out of 10 of the world's Muslims take the commands of the Quran literally, that still means a minimum of 150 million Muslims are willing to kill or support other killers in advancing the cause of Islam. And as recent news reports from Syria and Iraq show, young Muslims from nations like England, France, Germany, Canada, Australia and the United States are flocking to the Islamic State to fight in the cause of *jihad*.

Because Islamic countries are geographically widespread and culturally diverse, it's difficult to generalize about Muslim beliefs and practices as they relate to the Quran's commands quoted on these pages. However, an extensive 2014 Pew Research Center poll of Muslims in the Middle East, Africa and South Asia shows great cause for

concern. Some key findings of the poll were:

- 10 percent of Nigerians hold favorable opinions of Boko Haram, the Islamic terror movement that has kidnapped schoolgirls, blown up churches and massacred Christians in recent years.
- 11 to 25 percent of Muslims in Jordan, Egypt, the Palestinian territories, Nigeria and South Asia hold favorable views of the terror group al-Qaeda.
- 8 to 41 percent of Muslims in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Nigeria and South Asia hold favorable opinions of the terror group Hezbollah, including 26 percent of those in Gaza and 35 percent in the West Bank.
- 32 to 39 percent of Muslims in Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Gaza and the West Bank hold favorable views of the terror group Hamas. 8 to 29 percent of those in South Asia and Nigeria see Hamas favorably.
- Asked whether suicide bombings or other forms of violence against civilians can be justified in the defense of Islam, those who approved numbered 62 percent in Gaza, 36 percent in the West Bank, 29 percent in Lebanon, 24 percent in Egypt, 19 percent in Nigeria, 18 percent in Turkey and 15 percent in Jordan.

Troublingly, a separate 2011 Pew Research Center survey of U.S. Muslims found that 8 percent thought suicide bombings and violence against civilians are justified to defend Islam, and 5 percent held favorable views of al-Qaeda. Further, 21 percent said there was support for Islamic extremism among American Muslims.

In Britain, a 2006 poll of British Muslims for *The Sunday Telegraph* found that 20 percent sympathized with the motives of the four Muslims suicide bombers who blew themselves up on London subway trains and buses on July 7 of that year, killing and wounding more than 700 people, and 40 percent supported instituting sharia law in predominately Muslim parts of Britain.

Surah 23:1-6 says: "Blessed are the believers, who are humble in their prayers, who avoid profane talk, and give alms to the destitute, who restrain their carnal desires (except with their wives and *slave-girls, for these are lawful to them . . .*)"

Surah 33:50 states: "We [that is, Allah speaking of himself in the plural] well know the duties We have imposed on the faithful concerning their wives and *slave-girls. (We grant you this privilege [satisfying their sexual desires with slave girls]) so that none may blame you.*"

A Nov. 5, 2014, report by the *International Business Times* was headlined "Shocking: ISIS Official 'Slave' Price List Shows Yazidi, Christian Girls Aged '1 to 9' Being Sold for \$172." The article went on to describe a price list for sexual slaves on an Islamist website: "In the name of

Allah, most gracious and merciful. We have received news that the demand in women and cattle markets has sharply decreased and that will [affect] Islamic State revenues as well as the funding of the Mujaheddin [jihadist fighter] in the battlefield. We have made some changes. Below are the prices of Yazidi and Christian women."

At the same time a video posted online appeared to show Islamic State fighters at what one of them called "slave market day" while quoting Surah 23:1-6 (cited above). The men discuss prices for girls and women from \$100-300 depending on the age and eye color—with green or blue eyes bringing a higher price.

An October online edition of *Dabiq* magazine (published by an Islamic State jihadist group) boasted after the capture of the Iraqi town of Sinjar that "the enslaved Yazidi

families are now sold by the Islamic State soldiers." It then explained that "the Yazidi women and children were then divided according to the Shariah [Islamic law] amongst the fighters of the Islamic State who participated in the Sinjar operations." Thus, as war booty, they were divided up and sold as pieces of property.

## Turning a blind eye to the grim reality

The sad truth about the Middle East today is that we are seeing a revival of the original Islam Muhammad brought to the world in the seventh century.

Muhammad's new religion caught fire, fueled by power and plunder. The Islamic State is repeating Muhammad's early conquests—burning churches, looting monasteries, enslaving and forcibly converting the powerless, and callously executing those who stand up to them. It is vigorously enforcing sharia law—cutting off the hands of thieves, stoning adulterers and blasphemers, whipping criminals and banning anything that stands in the way of Islam.

In defiance of the major Western powers, it has brutally butchered American and British citizens, decapitating them and posting videos of the murders on the Internet for the world to see. The message is unmistakable: Allah is on their side, and they have nothing to fear from the major world powers.

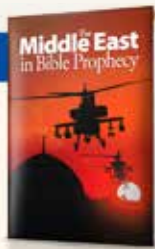
Until Western leaders wake up from their willful blindness and face the grim reality of the jihadist worldview that is motivating the Islamic State as well as Hamas, Hezbollah and countless other groups and movements, that part of the world will remain a powder keg waiting to explode and take down much of modern civilization with it. And shockingly, Bible prophecy indicates that is the likely outcome to which events in that region are heading. GN

## Learn More

We cannot understand the events reshaping our world without understanding the Middle East, and we can't understand the Middle East without understanding the role of Islam and what is foretold in Bible prophecy. You need to read our eye-opening study guide *The Middle East in Bible Prophecy*. Download or request your free copy today!

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# Warnings to the West

Rising “lone wolf” Islamist attacks against the West should compel us to learn the importance of seeking true security. *by Tom Robinson*

It's quite shocking for those in Western nations to see news of increasing beheadings in the Middle East by Islamist groups like the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS or IS). It's even more shocking when this monstrosity is perpetrated against captured Western journalists and aid workers by Muslims from Britain fighting for the Islamic State. But it's more shocking still when it happens inside Britain and the United States.

Beheadings and other increasing terrorism are swiftly coming to Western shores. In October 2014 in the Canadian capital, a Muslim convert fatally shot a soldier on duty at the national war memorial and then proceeded into the parliament building in a shooting attack. (Had he turned down a hall inside, he could potentially have shot parliament members and the prime minister.) This came two days after a car-ramming attack on military personnel in Quebec, murdering a soldier, by another Muslim convert.

Thankfully, some attempted attacks are being thwarted—including one in Britain against the queen (“Terrorists Foiled in Plot to Kill Queen Elizabeth,” *New York Post*, Nov. 7, 2014).

The commissioner of London's Metropolitan Police said that police have prevented an increasing number of attacks recently. But how long can the danger be averted? It's important that we recognize the increasing peril the Western world finds itself in—and that we know where to turn for real security.

## Lone-wolf attacks—not easily stopped

Some attacks have, of course, still happened. In September, an 82-year-old woman was beheaded in her London garden by a recent Muslim convert. In May 2013, a British soldier in London was murdered by two Muslim men who nearly decapitated him in public on the street. In both instances the police instantly ruled out terrorism—even though that's obviously what it was.

The same reflexive denial of terrorism happens with such incidents in the United States. A recent Muslim convert beheaded a woman

in Moore, Oklahoma, in September. Authorities were quick to label it workplace violence—just as they did the shootings at Fort Hood in Texas in 2009 in which 13 soldiers were killed and another 29 wounded. Yet the shooter, Nidal Hasan, has repeatedly referred to himself as a soldier of Allah, including in a recent jihadist letter to Pope Francis (Catherine Herridge, “Fort Hood Shooter Sends Letter to Pope Francis Espousing ‘Jihad,’” Fox News, Oct. 10, 2014).

Breitbart News recently listed a number of other attacks by such “lone wolves” since

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2006 in which individual Muslim men killed eight people and injured many others in attacks that included beheadings, shootings, knifings and driving a car into a crowd of people (Ben Shapiro, “7 Other Lone Wolf Islamic Attacks Inside the U.S.,” Sept. 28, 2014).

Some have a hard time seeing lone assailants as terrorists, assuming terrorism must be planned and carried out by a group of people. Yet the Canadian parliament attack was labeled terrorism despite the single shooter. Of course, in at least several of these cases the assailants were responding to the call of Islamic leaders abroad for such attacks against the West. So terror organizers are still involved in terms of incitement.

Indeed, terrorists acting alone are now considered a greater danger than groups conducting bigger plots that might be more easily uncovered. A recent *Newsweek* headline declares: “The West's Greatest Threat Is the ‘Lone Wolf’ Terrorist, Say Security Experts” (Joshi Herrmann, Sept. 3, 2014).

The accompanying article states: “According to experts, the authorities are most worried about small-scale, primitive, and brutally violent attacks from jihadists affiliated in one way or another with Islamic State (IS), also known as Isis, operating

more independently than their predecessors, who were organized into terror cells. The result is an unpredictable agent of terror, an incarnation of the much-feared lone wolf . . .

“Claude Moniquet, a former agent for French foreign intelligence . . . says the mass participation of up to 2,500 Europeans in the Syrian war means that, ‘the situation now is seen as extremely dangerous in France by the security services.’

“‘I think that clearly the idea of a large-scale attack still exists,’ says Moniquet. ‘But the lone-wolf attack, the isolated jihadist, is much more worrying because they could attack very easily.’

“He says such attacks are the preference of the IS leadership: ‘I think if they had the choice between a global attack in two years

in Washington, with all the risks of being detected, and five or six small-level attacks in Europe, they will definitely choose [the latter]’ . . .

“The security services face a race to adapt, says Moniquet. ‘We were trained in the security services and the intelligence services to oppose large-scale organisations, like the KGB, like the Cosa Nostra [or Mafia], like al-Qaida,’ he says . . . ‘We are not so trained to find and confront isolated people.’”

## A growing danger from within and without

The situation is made worse by many individuals from not just France but also Britain and the United States traveling to the Middle East to fight with the jihadists—and then returning home with skills picked up from the battlefield and training camps.

As the BBC News article above reported, London's police commissioner “highlighted a police estimate that 500 people have left the UK to Iraq or Syria to fight. ‘They’re going to have been militarised. They will have a complex web of people that they know and of course they will have learned tactics that they may want to use here,’ he said. Labour MP Khalid Mahmood earlier



told the *Sunday Telegraph* he believed the number was closer to 2,000.”

This problem is part of the consequences of multiculturalism, wherein rather than blending into a national whole the various ethnicities and religious groups are fragmented into separate communities. Instead of pacifying Islamic radicals, this just gives place to homegrown terror and violence. Consider this title of a news article about Sweden: “Swedish Police Release Extensive Report Detailing Control of 55 ‘No-Go Zones’ by Muslim Criminal Gangs” (The Muslim Issue Worldwide, Nov. 8, 2014).

The Western world must take the threat of Islamic infiltration and increasing terrorism seriously. Some think there is no threat—that the West is far out of reach from Middle East terrorists. But increasingly influential groups like ISIS, with access to lots of money and weapons and manpower, are a threat.

U.S. officials recently issued a strong warning of “fresh intelligence that ISIS wants to recruit or inspire sympathizers inside America to hurt military members where they live” (“ISIS Threat at Home: FBI Warns US Military About Social Media Vulnerabilities,” ABC News, Dec. 1, 2014). And in Britain it’s being reported that al-Qaeda is planning to bring down a number of passenger jets with bombs. We must take the rise in threats and attacks against the West as a warning!

### Finding real security

What should those in the West do in the face of all this? Most importantly, of course, people need to turn to God. It was very disturbing how easy it was for a terrorist to walk into the Canadian parliament building and start shooting.

It was likewise disturbing when a man was able to hop the fence at the White House and enter through an unlocked door. A subsequent attempt was stopped by guard dog—not, as Americans might have imagined, by lasers and other hi-tech security devices.

But the truth is that it does not ultimately matter what security measures are in place. The Bible tells us, “Unless the LORD guards the city, the watchman stays awake in vain” (Psalm 127:1).

We would be blind not to realize that God has been protecting the United States, Britain and other Western nations from those who seek our destruction. But with increasing immorality in these nations, God is lifting that protection. For real security, it is vital that we return to God in repentance and pray for His protection and guidance. **GN**

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# Is Israel the Obstacle



## to Middle East Peace?

Many believe peace would be achievable in the Middle East if not for the nagging problem of Israel. They blame the ongoing regional conflict on the Jewish state's recalcitrance in negotiations and even its very existence. But would there really be peace if Israel were out of the way? How is peace to truly come? *by Tom Robinson*

**T**he bells would ring out, songs of joy would break forth, the pipes of peace would be merrily played in the Middle East—if only the Jewish state of Israel did not exist as a source of contention and conflict with its Arab Muslim neighbors. Islamic State beheadings and other jihadist terrorist movements would soon die away. Or so many would have us believe.

We see widespread belief that if Israel would just make huge concessions, then all would be well. And then there are those who think it would be even better if Israel didn't exist at all. This isn't limited to those who decry Israel as a Zionist racist evil regime—of which there are plenty. Rather it's also part of the utopian calculus that seeks the “greater good”—the simplistic

notion that the higher aim of regional and world peace would be met by removing the supposed source of friction.

But is Israel even the actual source of the problem? Is it to blame for the conflict in the Middle East? Would there be peace if Israel made massive concessions—or if it ceased to exist altogether?

### Blaming Israel for ISIS

In recent months U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry made trips to the Middle East to, in part, discuss the rise and expansion of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. While there, he called for a resumption of Israeli–Palestinian Authority peace negotiations. After his return, he spoke at a State Department ceremony to mark the Muslim festival of Eid al-Adha, which celebrates the end of

the Hajj pilgrimage (yes, really!).

He stated: “There wasn't a leader I met with in the region who didn't raise with me spontaneously the need to try to get peace between Israel and the Palestinians, because it was a cause of recruitment and of street anger and agitation . . . People need to understand the connection of that . . . It has something to do with humiliation and denial and absence of dignity, and Eid celebrates the opposite of that” (quoted by Barak Ravid, “Israeli Ministers Slam Kerry for Tying Rise of Islamic State to Israeli–Palestinian Conflict,” *Haaretz*, Oct. 17).

Translation? Israel's supposed unwillingness to make concessions fuels jihad—as does Israel's so-called oppression of Arabs and disproportionate military response to terrorism.

It's not surprising that Arab Muslim leaders would make such a case, but it is deeply troubling that the American secretary would fall in line with such rhetoric—especially while promoting an Islamic holiday in the same breath! He was essentially claiming, as one Israeli news source put it, that “Israel's failures to forge a peace deal with the intransigent Palestinian Authority



(PA)—not the US's failures in the Middle East—are to blame for the rise of Islamic State (ISIS)" (Tova Dvorin, "Bennet Blasts Kerry's Comments Blaming Israel for Rise of ISIS," *Arutz Sheva Israel National News*, Oct. 17, 2014).

Israel's Economy Minister Naftali Bennett shot back at Kerry's insinuation in these poignant terms regarding brutality carried out by an ISIS member from the United Kingdom: "Even when a British Muslim beheads a British Christian, there will always be those who blame the Jews" (*ibid.*).

Communications Minister Gilad Erdan added: "Kerry is breaking records for a lack of understanding of what is going on in our region and the essence of the conflicts therein . . . Does anybody really believe that Islamic State's war criminals will stop their atrocities and abandon the vision of an Islamic state because negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians were renewed?" (quoted by Ravid). That's a good question.

### Land for peace?

There are increasing calls for Israel to cede control of territory for the creation of a Palestinian state. Nearly a decade ago, however, *American Thinker* co-founder and chief political correspondent Richard Behr noted that people "seem to forget that Israel offered to give up 97% of the land in the territories in the year 2000, and provide Palestinians land within Israel in exchange for the remaining 3%. It was an offer designed to end the conflict. Instead, the Palestinians chose war" ("Israel as a Stabilizing Force in the Middle East," July 25, 2005).

He further commented that it would be telling to see what would happen following Israel's 2005 pullout from Gaza. He predicted that terror would increase. Was he ever right!

As radio host and columnist Bob Siegel recently pointed out: "Rockets have been firing into Israel since 2005, as a gesture of thanks when Israel abandoned the Gaza strip turning it entirely over to the Palestinians. Those who feel that all hostilities will cease if Israel simply gives back 'all occupied territory' should keep the example of Gaza in mind. Hamas does not recognize Israel's right to exist. Neither does the Palestinian charter. The return of land makes no difference whatsoever. Very few people today seem to understand this" ("The Historical Truths Behind the Israel-Palestinian Conflict," *Communities Digital News*, Aug. 28, 2014).

Siegel went on to say: "When two nations

make a peace treaty, there is supposed to be give and take on both sides. Israel's deal (brokered by the U.S) always goes like this. 'You give the Palestinians back some land and here is what they will do: They'll promise to stop killing you.' That's the deal. Then, shortly after the deal, the promise is broken and missiles are fired into Israel from Gaza (where the Palestinians were finally offered their own autonomous rule) or a suicide bomber kills women and children on a bus.

"Nothing Israel does, no gesture, no concession, no discussion, will make a hill of beans of difference. They can sign a peace treaty. They can jump on board for a two state solution. It doesn't matter. Hezbollah wants Israel dead. Al-Qaeda wants Israel dead. Hamas wants Israel dead. Muslim Brotherhood wants Israel dead. But it isn't limited to the terrorist groups. Palestine itself wants Israel dead. The surrounding Arab nations want Israel dead. The Persian nation of Iran wants Israel dead."

It's often said of the Arab-Israeli conflict that if the Arabs and other Muslims laid down their arms there would be peace, whereas if the Israelis laid down their arms there would be no Israel.

Ultimately, this is where Israeli inaction or massive compromise would lead—and frankly, that is what those pushing for Israel to go this route seem to be aiming for (see "Two-State Plan Is a Means to Israel's Destruction" on page 19).

### A more obvious basis of conflict—Muslim fundamentalism

As for the contention of John Kerry and others that terrorism in the wider region and further abroad is fueled by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there is some truth to the idea in that those who wish to see Israel eliminated constantly cite this as a grievance. But is that really the heart of the matter? Richard Baehr points out some cold, hard truths in his *American Thinker* piece:

"Certainly bin Laden never used the conflict as a primary justification for any of his actions leading up to and including the 9/11 attacks. His chief political objective has always been to rid Muslim soil of US and other Western forces, particularly in Saudi Arabia, where his ultimate objective has been to replace the royal family. Muslims in Chechnya, Kashmir, Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Bali who have been relentlessly murdering non-Muslims for the last decade [as of 2005] have all had local or regional political issues on their agenda as well."

Baehr countered other suggested sources like impoverished citizenry and repressive regimes by pointing out that other peoples in like conditions have not systematically resorted to international terror campaigns as those of Muslim lands have.

He then stated: "One issue that is rarely mentioned by the apologists and explainers is the most critical factor in explaining the growth of Muslim anger against the West: indoctrination. Muslims are indoctrinated into fundamentalist Islam, making it a growing force in many countries, through a steady stream of messages in the media, schools, prisons and mosques. This relentless propaganda campaign is funded primarily by Saudi Arabia . . . And where fundamentalism grows, anger and hatred of the West grows with it."

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict does play into this, but it's for the same reason. "Think about this a different way," Baehr suggests. "Are the world's Jews so unsettled by the lack of resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that they too are resorting to a terror campaign against the West or Arab states to demand its resolution?"

"Israelis who send their children off to school, who board a bus, who eat at a restaurant, are aware that life could suddenly end for them or their family members at any moment. Israelis might have a right to be angry about the dangers and the state of siege they have endured for more than half a century. But [the need for] assuaging Israeli anger does not enter into the picture . . . Israelis, after all, are civil, and Western. They don't deliberately kill innocents."

He explains that the idea that Muslim anger would be assuaged by a two-state solution is naïve: "The resolution of the conflict that radical Islamists seek is not a two state solution in any case, but the elimination of Israel, which they see as a foreign Western outpost on what should be Islamic controlled land.

"There is no potential compromise between the views of Hizbollah, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Iranian mullahs, bin Laden and al Qaeda and the continued existence of a majority Jewish state of Israel. No border arrangement, and no two state solution could satisfy these zealots. These groups or leaders repeatedly emphasize that withdrawal of Israel from the West Bank and Gaza is insufficient, merely a first step to elimination of Israel and the Zionist entity" (*ibid.*).

### Islam's history of conquest and reconquest

A key fact to be aware of in this conflict



is that Islam was spread by the sword from its earliest decades. Indeed, the history of the religion is one of conquest and reconquest. The objective in authentic Islam, as spelled out in its holy book the Quran and the traditions of Muhammad, is to subjugate the world to Allah.

And once a land was conquered by Muslims, it was considered forever to be Islamic territory. Thus, to Islamic fundamentalists, the fact that the whole land of Israel was conquered in the 600s by Muslims means that it must forever remain under Muslim control. No political treaty can negotiate away this fundamental religious tenet.

As Baehr noted: “The darker side of this malignant stream that Israel has no right to exist, is really a broader argument, made by radical Muslims in this case, that non-Muslims can have no meaningful role in any Muslim-dominated land, and may live there only at the will of the Muslims who are there. The concept of a majority Jewish state, or even a Christian majority state within the Muslim world, is anathema in this mindset. And any country, once Muslim dominated, is part of the Caliphate to be restored. So Spain is in the target sights too.”

What this means is that even if there were no Israel or if Muslims now fully reacquired it, there still would be no peace in the Middle East. Even if Israelis made the ultimate sacrifice of giving complete control over to Muslims or, unthinkable, converting to Islam en masse, the march of militant Islam would continue still. As Baehr put it, “Sacrificing Israel will provide one good meal for them, only encouraging their appetite for more” (ibid.).

The march and accompanying conflict would continue even in completely *Muslim* lands that are not completely sharia-compliant, as is the case in Iraq and Syria, which have now seen the rise of the Islamic State as a new caliphate or Islamic empire.

So even with Israel gone, Muslim fundamentalists would still be fighting non-Muslims on their borders as well as non-Muslims and Muslims of different sects within their borders. They would still be fighting back against the West, whose people they view as the Christian Crusaders who invaded the Muslim-controlled Middle East in the Middle Ages. And not only must that still be avenged, but they see the Westerners as invading even now—not just through their proxy Israel but through their global influence.

## War until all the world is under Islam

It's vital to understand that Islamic

fundamentalists feel compelled to wage jihad against not just the Jews, but Christians and those of other religions as well. Regarding non-Muslims, the Quran tells them, “Fight against them until idolatry is no more and [Allah's] religion reigns supreme” (Surah 2:193). “Idolatry” in this context refers to any religion other than Islam.

Author Lela Gilbert has written about a Muslim catchphrase: “*First the Saturday People, then the Sunday People*. Such graffiti can sometimes be found in Muslim neighborhoods in the Middle East. The ‘Saturday People’ are, of course, Jews [who rest and worship on Saturday, the seventh-day Sabbath], today nearly gone from Muslim lands. Now the ‘Sunday People’—Christians [as most professing Christians observe that day]—are in the crosshairs, and they, too, are fleeing at an alarming rate. Both religions are unwelcome in many Muslim-majority lands for reasons of Islamist ideology—the declaration of jihad, or holy war, against infidels” (“Saturday People, Sunday People,” *The Weekly Standard*, Nov. 17, 2010).

In response to ISIS killing and enslaving Christians in Iraq, syndicated columnist Charles Krauthammer said July 22, 2014, on Fox News’ *Special Report With Bret Baier*: “This is the pure essence of the intolerance and the barbarism of this kind of Islamic radicalism . . . You see it with Hamas. It wants to wipe out the Jews. You see it in Egypt with the Copts. You see it in Boko Haram with the attack on the churches in Nigeria. It’s all over. This is not about what the West has done, this is not about imperialism. This is not a payoff. This is the expression of jihadism, and we see it tonight in the most horrible form.”

And the aim goes beyond Muslim borders. In fact, the Islamic State has declared its intention to conquer Rome, the very heart of the mainstream Christian world.

Moreover, it ultimately doesn’t matter if the West ever acted against the Muslim world or not. The real issue is that Islamists, in obedience to the commands of the Quran, consider it their duty to spread Islam to other countries regardless—until the whole world is Muslim.

In this ideology, “peace” is found only within those areas controlled by pure Islam, called *dar al-Islam*, the domain of Islam (that is, of submission). And lands outside of Islam’s control are regarded as *dar al-harb*, the domain of war—that is, the lands on which Muslims are to make war until they submit. Only when the whole world is

brought under Islam will it all be the domain of peace with no more cause for war.

Again, this isn’t something new. In 1786, American Founding Fathers John Adams and Thomas Jefferson met with diplomats from Tunisia about the Barbary Pirates there (and in nearby Morocco and Algiers) attacking American ships and wrote the following to then-Secretary of Foreign Affairs John Jay: “We took the liberty to make some inquiries concerning the Grounds of their pretensions to make war upon Nations who had done them no Injury, & observed that we considered all mankind as our friends who had done us no wrong, nor had given us any provocation—

“The [Tunisian] Ambassador answered us that it was founded on the Laws of their prophet, that it was written in their Koran, that all nations who should not have acknowledged their Authority were sinners, that it was their right & duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, & to make slaves of all they could take as Prisoners, and that every Musselman [Muslim] who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise” (American Peace Commissioners to John Jay, March 28, 1786, Library of Congress, [hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib001849](http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mtj.mtjbib001849), Images 430-432).

## The real obstacle to peace to be removed

Thus it should be quite clear that Israel is not the obstacle to peace in the Middle East. And Israeli concessions or even getting rid of the Jewish state would not bring peace to the Middle East or the wider world.

Israel is not even the big enemy in the eyes of Muslim fundamentalists. It is but a “little Satan”—an outpost in the region for “the Great Satan,” the United States of America as the preeminent Western Christian power in the world. Israel effectively serves at present as a buffer of sorts—a nearby focus for Islamist hostility. But if Israel were gone, Islamic terrorists would be pushing against and attacking Europe and the United States all the more. And these terrorists would take control of Israel’s nuclear arsenal, if you can imagine such a nightmare scenario.

Moreover, dictatorial regimes in the Middle East that have used Israel as a means to shift the focus of their populations away from dissatisfaction with their own leadership would step up efforts to blame the regions’ problems on Western powers—as they do to some extent already.

Now with the rise of the caliphate, Islamists are further encouraged and embold-



# Two-State Plan Is a Means to Israel's Destruction

In October 2014, Sweden's government officially recognized a state of Palestine, and Britain's parliament called for recognizing it in a non-binding motion—the former British foreign secretary Jack Straw stating that the only thing the Israeli government understands is *pressure*, as if Israel is the unreasonable party in negotiations. France's parliament issued the same call in December.

Caroline Glick, senior contributing editor of *The Jerusalem Post*, wrote a piece in response that appeared in *The New York Times*. She pointed out that Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Lofven's statement that a two-state solution requires mutual recognition and a will to peaceful coexistence “inadvertently gave the game away” since the Palestinians will do neither:

“Lofven, Straw and their colleagues throughout Europe aren't stupid. They know what they're

doing. They know that Gaza, which Israel vacated nine years ago, is a terror state run by the jihadists of Hamas.



“They know that if Israel succumbs to their political and economic warfare and cedes its capital city and historic heartland to its enemies, it will be

unable to defend its remaining territory. And they know that like Gaza, those areas will quickly be taken over by Hamas, which will use them to launch a war of annihilation against Israel in conjunction with its jihadist brethren in surrounding states.

“In other words, they know that in recognizing ‘Palestine’ they are not helping the cause of peace. They are advancing Israel's ruin. If they were even remotely interested in freedom and peace, the Europeans would be doing the opposite. They would be working to strengthen and expand Israel, the only stable zone of freedom and peace in the region. They would abandon the phony two-state solution, which as Straw and Lofven revealed, is merely doublespeak for seeking Israel's destruction and its replacement with a terror state.

“With strategic blindness and moral depravity now serving as the twin guideposts for European policy toward Israel, Israel and its supporters must tell the truth about the push to recognize ‘Palestine.’ It isn't about peace or justice. It's about hating Israel and assisting those who most actively seek its obliteration” (“There Should Be No Palestinian State,” Oct. 17, 2014).

ened to commit terrorism in the West. And the situation is sure to worsen. (See “Warnings to the West,” beginning on page 14).

So what, then, is the real obstacle to peace? Islamic fundamentalism is certainly a critical factor. But its roots go deeper than being simply a made-up religious system. There is also a serious family divide between Jews and Arabs going all the way back to the time of Abraham (see “Middle East Chaos: What's Happening and Why” beginning on page 4).

Yet even this is not the ultimate heart of the problem. As we consider all of the frenzied hatred stirred up against Israel, the Jewish people and other nations of Israelite descent—not just among Muslims but among people the world over—we should gain a sense that this is not merely a matter of socioeconomic and political factors. The utter irrationality and unrestrained barbarism of it all provides another clue. There is something deeper at work—something utterly dark and evil.

The Bible informs us that this world is under the deception and sway of the truly Great Satan (1 John 5:19; Revelation 12:9)—not a nation, but an immensely powerful spirit being. Satan the devil and his demons have confused the minds of people everywhere to corrupt them. They especially seek to undermine God's purpose involving the descendants of Israel.

The constant spewing of hate originates with these hate-filled beings. Satan as “the

prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience” (Ephesians 2:2), broadcasts wrong moods and attitudes into human minds. Indeed, Satan and his demons are more directly the architects of false religion—including Islamic fundamentalism, which even its adherents believe and claim was revealed to Muhammad by a spirit being.

Yet God says that He will use the demonically stirred-up animosity and confusion to fulfill His purposes in the last days: “Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it” (Zechariah 12:2-3).

Indeed, God further says of what He Himself will bring about, “I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem” (Zechariah 14:2, emphasis added).

We should further note that these prophecies mention the Jews being in the Holy Land up until these end-time events that will usher in Jesus Christ's return—so the anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic dream of the Jewish state being completely eradicated will not come true. However, the prophecies do reveal that the Jewish nation will suffer greatly, as will the other Israelite nations (see our free study aid *The United*

*States and Britain in Bible Prophecy* to learn more).

So how will peace come at last? Not through the eradication of the Jews, but through the removal of Satan and his demons at the coming of the Jewish Messiah—the true Christian Messiah, Jesus Christ, who will establish His reign over all nations. It will be an imposed *true* peace for the benefit and blessing of the whole world. People's minds will be healed to think soundly and rationally—and with love and kindness toward all.

Of that time we are told, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘In those days ten men from every language of the nations shall grasp the sleeve of a Jewish man, saying, “Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you”’” (Zechariah 8:23). What a vastly different world that will be! **GN**

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# Current Events & Trends

by Milan Bizic, Rudy Rangel and Tom Robinson

## Iran nuclear talks extended

**T**he deadline for an agreement on capping Iran's nuclear program in exchange for Western powers easing economic sanctions was pushed to the end of June 2015 when negotiations failed to achieve a deal this past November.

As *The Wall Street Journal* reported: "After 14 months of negotiations, the two sides were unable to bridge gaps on two key issues: the future size of Iran's nuclear-fuel production capacity and the pace at which sanctions will be lifted . . . The U.S. and its allies suspect Iran's nuclear work is aimed toward producing a weapon, something Tehran has repeatedly denied" (Jay Solomon and Laurence Norman, "Iran, World Powers Fail to Reach Nuclear Agreement by Deadline: Talks Extended for Seven Months," Nov. 24, 2014).

It was pointed out at Power Line Blog that "this development is being reported as 'no deal,' but there actually is a deal of sorts here. According to the British foreign secretary, Iran will receive about \$700 million per month in frozen assets. In exchange, it makes no concessions. Instead, the status quo is maintained with regard to Iran's nuclear program" (Paul Mirengoff, "Iran's Win-Win," Nov. 24).

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry lobbied for the extension, arguing, "The nuclear program in Iran as we negotiate is frozen" (quoted by Solomon and Norman). But this seems like wishful thinking.

Another summary in *The Wall Street Journal* noted: "The sharpest worry about giving Tehran more time is that it will continue research on its centrifuges so that it can produce much more powerful technology in the future. That would significantly cut the time Iran would need to produce enough material to fuel an atomic bomb" (Laurence Norman, "5 Things to Know About

What Comes Next in Iran Nuclear Talks," Nov. 24).

Following the announcement of the extension, Iranian President Hasan Rouhani said in an address to his nation "that the extension was a victory, adding negotiations will lead to a deal, 'sooner or later'" (quoted by Solomon and Norman).

Moreover, as *The New York Times* reported, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, issued these remarks: "In the nuclear issue, America and colonial European countries got together and did their best to bring the Islamic Republic to its knees, but they could not do so—and they will not be able to do so" (quoted by Thomas Erdbrink, "Breaking Silence, Ayatollah Says Iran Is Standing Up to West in Nuclear Talks," Nov. 25). This is the same leader who shortly before this went on a Twitter tirade against Israel, posting, "This barbaric, wolflike & infanticidal regime of #Israel which spares no crime has no cure but to be annihilated" (quoted at *The Blaze*, Nov. 9, 2014).

The Iranian Resistance criticized the entire process: "Continuing with negotiations which have been going on for 12 years, instead of decisiveness and intensifying sanctions, amounts to taking a path which will inevitably lead to the acquisition of a nuclear bomb. This is the repeat of the same policies and mistakes which have brought the mullahs so close to obtaining a nuclear bomb" (National Council of Resistance of Iran, Nov. 24).

Meanwhile, a number of Republican members of



Ali Khamenei

the U.S. Congress, who assume control of the legislature as of January 2015, have expressed the need for tighter sanctions. "Now more than ever, it's critical that Congress enacts sanctions that give Iran's mullahs no choice but to dismantle their illicit nuclear program," Senator Mark Kirk said in a statement. "Congress will not give Iran more time to build a nuclear bomb" (quoted in "US Congress Skeptical of Iran Nuclear Talks Extension, Agence France-Presse, Nov. 24, 2014). Likewise House Speaker John Boehner said, "Instead of giving Iran more flexibility, we should be holding this regime accountable for the threat it poses to the region."

In reality it does not seem that this threat will be arrested by talks or sanctions. The Iranian leadership's desire to acquire nuclear weapons is driven by a fanatical aim to start global war in order to bring about the end of the world with the appearance on the world scene of the Shiite 12th imam as the Islamic savior, the Mahdi. How does one negotiate with that? (Sources: Agence France-Presse, *The Blaze*, National Council of Resistance of Iran, *The New York Times*, Power Line Blog, *The Wall Street Journal*.)

## Why bad news in The Good News?

**S**peaking of conditions before His return, Jesus Christ said our planet will experience "a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will never be again" (Matthew 24:21, Revised English Bible).

The United Church of God, whose members and supporters provide the financial backing for *The Good News* and other publications, proclaims the good news of the imminent return of Jesus of Nazareth. Yet we often report on the negative consequences of human behavior leading to the very conditions Jesus described.

Following Jesus' example, part of our purpose is to highlight the lessons mankind is writing in its self-centered way of living and to warn of where this way is leading. But more than that, our intention is to illustrate the need for an alternative way of life—the godly way of life Jesus revealed and personified. Beyond the bad news, we present this way of living that would eliminate all of man's problems. We also explain from Scripture that under the coming rule of Christ, God's way will become universal—and humanity will at last know true and lasting peace.

The world of today is indeed filled with bad news. Yet the future holds incredible promise—Christ's return to establish the Kingdom of God (Daniel 7:13-14; Revelation 11:15), ushering in a wonderful world of peace, prosperity and plenty during which all people will at last learn to live God's way of life. This truly is good news!

## The global economy and Russian sanctions

**S**ince the Russian takeover of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula, economic sanctions have been imposed on Russia as a punitive reprimand by the Western powers of the world. Immediately, in a

**The economic system at times seems very stable, and at other times seems to be teetering on the edge. The truth is that the world economy is all very interconnected and shaky.**

seemingly juvenile reaction, Russia responded with counter-sanctions.

Russian President Vladimir Putin's plan was to keep Russia's export goods from leaving its borders, hunker down and take the sanctions on the chin. What couldn't be planned was the price of oil. Russia exports a lot of oil, and the country was coasting along, sanctions and all, when the price of oil was high. Recently, however, as you may have noticed at the pump, oil prices dropped—to around \$75 a

barrel. This is when Russia began to feel the blow.

*The Economist* states: "The immediate worry is the oil price. Mr Putin is confident it will recover. But supply seems set to increase, with OPEC [the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, including states in the Middle East, Africa and South America] keen to defend its market share. American government agencies predict oil prices could average \$83 a barrel in 2015, well below the \$90 level Russia needs to avoid recession" ("Russia: A Wounded Economy," Nov. 22, 2014).

The economic system of the world at times seems very stable, and at other times seems to be teetering on the edge. The truth is that the world economy is all very interconnected and shaky. Little movements here or there can impact national economies for years. The Russian example is still playing out, but we can see how sanctions can affect a country.

God's coming government and global economy will be stable, just and true. Look to the pages of your Bible and see what God has in store for His coming Kingdom. (Source: *The Economist*.)



## State laws losing in the gay marriage battle

The American gay marriage agenda moves forward, one state and one judge at a time. The newest states to see the legalization of gay marriage are Arkansas, Mississippi, Montana, Kansas and South Carolina, where federal judges struck

**Take some time and read through Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 to understand the chilling reality of what our choices will bring to pass.**

down preexisting laws banning gay unions in those states.

The decisions are at least temporary blows to efforts of those who support the traditional, biblical definition of marriage as being between one man and one woman. It's a serious moral issue the entire country is facing.

The Associated Press reports that representatives from states fighting the judicial legalization

of gay marriage promise that they are not done working against federal court rulings:

"Montana, Kansas and South Carolina have continued their legal fight against gay marriage despite rulings in favor of the practice from federal appeals courts that oversee them. In South Carolina, Republican Attorney General Alan Wilson said he would fight to uphold the state's constitutional ban even though the U.S. Supreme Court . . . denied his emergency request to block gay marriages being performed there" (Matthew Brown and Lisa Baumann, "Gay Couples Exchange Vows in Montana After Ruling," Nov. 20, 2014).

While many people, even a majority in some states, support the defense of the biblical definition of marriage, Gallup polls reveal that 55 percent of the U.S. population supports the legalization of gay marriage (Justin McCarthy, "Same-Sex Marriage Support Reaches New High at 55%," May 21, 2014). A nation that chooses to disobey God will reap the consequences of its decisions. Take some time and read through Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 to understand the chilling reality of what our choices will bring to pass. (Sources: Associated Press, Gallup.)

## Surprise school shooting drill terrifies students

In November 2014, police in a Florida town performed an active shooter drill in a local middle school. "And by 'active shooter drill,'" *The Washington Post* reports, "we mean that a Winter Haven middle school went into lockdown as two armed police officers burst into classrooms, guns drawn, leaving the unsuspecting children terrified—and their parents



furious" (Abby Ohlheiser, "I Thought He Was Going to Shoot Me.' Unsuspecting Middle School Students Terrified by Active Shooter Drill").

It's scary for students today. School shootings have plagued America for a number of years now. And the intentions of the policemen in Florida were practical. They wanted to give students the tools they would need in a highly intense, highly stressful situation. Running into a middle school with a loaded gun really opens students to the reality of the world we live in—though the value of that against students everywhere being panicked and perhaps traumatized in such exercises is debatable (not to mention the problems with keeping parents uninformed). In any case, it's not just fire and tornado drills that students have to endure. School shooting drills are now a reality.

The shootings at Columbine High School in Colorado in 1999 changed the perspective for many about the world we live in. It was seen in the media instantly across the nation and the world. Soon more and more schools started installing metal detectors and cameras across the nation to protect students from future attacks.

Just at the time of this writing, news came that another gunman injured three people at Florida State University before he was killed by police. Violence is all around us no matter where in the world we live. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul says that in the last days men will be "brutal." We see that brutality not only glorified on television, video games and the movies, but also in the news. Brutality is now just a part of the world we live in—including for children innocently seeking an education. (Source: *The Washington Post*.)

## German debate shows anti-Semitism can worsen quickly

The heightened religious tensions in Jerusalem caused by ongoing Jewish-Muslim conflicts are spilling over to Europe.

Germany in particular is struggling with the reemergence of hostility and rhetoric against the Jewish people. In the wake of the Holocaust during World War II being enabled through endemic anti-Semitism, Germany has effectively stigmatized any form of institutionalized or even personal anti-Semitic dialogue. But Germany's sterling reputation as a safe haven for European Jews is threatened by a growing



Graffiti on Jewish shop in pre-World War II Germany

Israel's actions against Palestinian Arabs in Gaza to Nazi Germany's genocide of Jews were blocked from attending an official leftist party meeting. This situation didn't occur in a vacuum, as reported in *The Wall Street Journal*:

"The debate comes on the heels of protests this summer touched off by the Gaza conflict, which Jewish organizations say led to the worst outbreak of public anti-Semitism seen in Germany in years. Chants such as 'Child murderer Israel' and 'Jew, Jew, cowardly pig,' could be heard at anti-Israel rallies" (Anton Troianovski, "Anti-Semitism Debate Roils German Left," Nov. 19, 2014).

The same report says the event and subsequent media coverage "has in recent days brought back to the surface a long-simmering debate of how much criticism of Israel is appropriate in German politics" (ibid.).

The resurgence of anti-Semitic thought in Germany shows how widespread and mainstream anger at Europe's Jewish population has become in past months. As secular and biblical history reveals again and again, cultural stigmatization of Jewish populations often leads to violence. Keep a close eye on Europe in the coming weeks, months and years. (Source: *The Wall Street Journal*.)

debate centering on the emergence of anti-Semitic thought.

The debate began when journalists who compared

## How can you make sense of the news?

So much is happening in the world, and so quickly. Where are today's dramatic and dangerous trends taking us? What does Bible prophecy reveal about our future? You're probably very concerned with the direction the world is heading. *So are we.* That's one reason we produce the *Beyond Today* daily TV commentaries—to help you understand the news in the light of Bible prophecy. These eye-opening presentations offer you a perspective so badly needed in our confused world—the perspective of God's Word. Visit us at [ucg.org/beyond-today/daily](http://ucg.org/beyond-today/daily)!





# God's Plan for the Middle East

The news out of the Middle East today leaves us with little hope and very little good news. Does anyone have solutions to these huge problems? *by Beyond Today host Darris McNeely*

**W**hen I saw a recent news headline of a tragic terror attack in Jerusalem I was shocked and saddened. A 3-year-old girl, an American citizen by birth, was killed when an Arab terrorist drove his car into a crowd of people at a Jerusalem metro train station.

The crime was senseless. Even more senseless was the praise given by Hamas officials for this terrorist, who was later shot by Israeli soldiers. Hamas is the radical Islamist group dedicated to eliminating the Jewish state. The senseless cycle of violence continues.

The little girl had just come from the Western Wall in Jerusalem with her parents who took her there for her first look at the revered site—the remnant of the wall supporting the immense platform on which Israel's temples once stood. Her grandfather was quoted as saying, "They held her up to face the Temple Mount, and they told her this is the holy place, this is the Temple Mount . . ."

This story brings home the continuing tragedy of everyday life for many across the Middle East. Religious and ethnic division continues to sow the seeds of a bitter harvest that disrupts lives on all sides of the conflict.

Will a solution to the strife in this region be found—and from where? Thankfully there is an answer to this question. It's revealed in the Bible, and the solution is the Kingdom of God being established here on the earth.

## Not yet how it's meant to be

Notice what the Bible says Jerusalem will one day look like: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets'" (Zechariah 8:4-5).

This is a prophecy that promises a time when young and old will be safe while walking and playing in the streets of Jerusalem. We are not there yet. But imagine the time and contrast it with what things are like now.

You can go to Jerusalem today and see it as a busy, vibrant city rich with history and culturally diverse, with multiple nationalities living side by side. Jerusalem is an international city once called the center of the world.

You can safely walk its streets as I have done. Yet you sense an ongoing tension



**Unlike today, the Bible foretells a time when Jerusalem will be peaceful, with old men and women living safely and the streets full of boys and girls playing.**

over the fact that something could happen at any moment. Armed Israeli soldiers are everywhere, and you're also aware that many citizens carry concealed weapons. Jerusalem is the only city I've been to where buying a hamburger at a fast food restaurant required passing through a metal detector.

Jerusalem is also a city of contrasts. It's a place that holds the key to understanding much of the larger problems in the Middle

East. One of those problems is the fate of the Arab populations displaced from the wars between Israel and its neighbors.

## Ongoing fallout from prior conflict

The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 by the United Nations led to many Arabs in the land siding with surrounding Arab states that attempted to destroy the new Jewish nation. When Israel won the resulting war, those people fled with their families to Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, and for many years they lived in temporary settlements hoping to one day return to the home they knew as Palestine. The same thing happened later when other wars to destroy Israel failed.

The unresolved refugee issue is often cited as a major reason behind the terror attacks

and ongoing simmering resentment and hatred. In spite of the creation of a Palestinian Authority and billions of dollars in aid to the region, no one has found a permanent solution to this critical humanitarian issue.

No one has been able to implement a just solution to this decades-old problem at the heart of much of the ill will and conflict. The result is gridlock and an ongoing problem impacting the

everyday life of men, women and children who walk the streets of its cities, towns and villages.

Let me illustrate with a personal observation. A few years ago I led a tour of Americans to Jerusalem. We used a Jordanian tour company that supplied us with an Arab guide. While in Jerusalem the Arab guide from Jordan left our group for a few hours one afternoon. When I later asked him where





he had been, he told me he had gone to visit his aged mother in the Old City of Jerusalem. He had been uprooted to Jordan in an earlier conflict, and his mother remained in Jerusalem. He could not go back, and she could not come to him. Theirs was a divided family separated by politics and war.

This problem has been going on for decades. From where will a solution come? Will any nation's diplomats be able to create a treaty that is just and addresses past wrongs? Will they be able to ensure security for everyone?

### God desires to rescue everyone

Here is what God's Word says will bring the solution: "Thus says the LORD: 'I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth . . . Behold, I will save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; I will bring them back,

and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. They shall be My people and I will be their God, in truth and righteousness'" (Zechariah 8:3, 7-8).

God's plan to resolve the problems of the Middle East begins and ends in Jerusalem. Today, the focus of the Middle East conflict has spread to Iraq, Iran, Syria and Egypt. God's focus is on a much bigger picture. His interest—His love and compassion—is for *everyone* in the streets of the Middle East, whether they be Jew or Christian or Muslim, Sunni or Shia, religious or secular.

### Depth of desperation across the region

The road to the solutions Bible prophecy spells out will be a difficult one. The world must pass through a time of ever-increasing trouble and peril. Many other prophecies foretell events that will bring this age of human conflict in the Middle East to a close.

There was another street scene in the

Middle East that illustrates the depth of the problem of human government and rule in the region. You may remember it from the news.

It began on Dec. 17, 2010, in a small, poor Tunisian village. A street vendor named Mohamed Bouazizi sparked an uprising that set in motion revolutions across the Middle East—what was called the "Arab Spring."

Bouazizi refused to pay the \$7 bribe demanded by the corrupt local government. That's a day's wage for such a merchant. A petty government clerk stole his scales and fruit wagon. Desperate, the young man sought a hearing from the town offices.

No one paid any attention to his pleas for justice. Finally, he stood in the street, poured paint thinner on his clothes and set himself on fire. The flames seared third-degree burns onto his flesh. He was taken to the hospital where he survived for a few weeks before dying. But the story was not over.

His family, friends and supporters took to

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<b>Alabama</b>	
Birmingham	ch. 44, 45, Sun 9 a.m.
<b>Alaska</b>	
Anchorage	ch. 18, Tue 9 p.m.
<b>Arizona</b>	
Phoenix	ch. 51, Fri 7:30 a.m.

<b>California</b>	
Los Angeles	ch. 30, Fri 8:30 a.m.
Sacramento-Modesto	ch. 29, Fri 8:30 a.m.
San Diego	ch. 18, 19, 23, Mon 5 p.m.
San Francisco	ch. 29, Sun 6:30 p.m.
San Francisco-Oakland	ch. 41, 65, Sun 9 a.m.

<b>Colorado</b>	
Denver	ch. 43, 59, Sun 8 a.m.

<b>Connecticut</b>	
Hartford-New Haven	ch. 26, Fri 8:30 a.m.

<b>Florida</b>	
Jacksonville	ch. 21, Fri 8:30 a.m.
Miami	ch. 35, Fri 8:30 a.m.
Orlando	ch. 56, Fri 8:30 a.m.
Tampa-St.Pete-Sarasota	ch. 42, Fri 8:30 a.m.
West Palm Beach-Ft. Pierce	ch. 67, Fri 8:30 a.m.

<b>Georgia</b>	
Atlanta	ch. 14, Fri 8:30 a.m.

<b>Illinois</b>	
Chicago	ch. 38, Fri 7:30 a.m.

<b>Iowa</b>	
Cedar Rapids	ch. 47, Fri 7:30 a.m.

<b>Hawaii</b>	
Honolulu	ch. 41, 66, Sun 9 a.m.

<b>Indiana</b>	
Indianapolis-Bloomington	ch. 27, 51, 63, Sun 9 a.m.

<b>Iowa</b>	
Des Moines-Ames	ch. 39, Sun, 8 a.m.

<b>Kentucky</b>	
Lexington	ch. 67, Sun 9 a.m.

<b>Louisiana</b>	
New Orleans	ch. 49, 50, Sun 8 a.m.

<b>Massachusetts</b>	
Boston	ch. 32, Fri 8:30 a.m.
Boston-Concord	ch. 33, Fri 8:30 a.m.
Boston-Vineyard Haven	ch. 40, Fri 8:30 a.m.

<b>Michigan</b>	
Detroit	ch. 31, Fri 8:30 a.m.
Grand Rapids-Kalamazoo-Battle Creek	ch. 43, 44, Sun 9 a.m.

<b>Minnesota</b>	
Brooklyn Park	ch. 19, Sun 6 a.m. & 2 p.m.; Sat 10 p.m.
Minneapolis-St. Paul	ch. 40, Fri 7:30 a.m.
New Ulm	ch. 3, 14, Mon 11:30 a.m.; Tue 12:30 p.m.; Thu 9 a.m.; Fri 8 p.m.

<b>Rochester</b>	
	ch. 10, Sat & Sun 10 a.m. & 7:30 p.m.

<b>Missouri</b>	
Kansas City	ch. 51, Fri 7:30 a.m.
St. Louis	ch. 46, 47, Sun 9 a.m.

<b>New York</b>	
Albany-Schenectady-Troy	ch. 50, 55, Sun 9 a.m.
Buffalo	ch. 51, Sun 9 a.m.
New York	ch. 31, Fri 8:30 a.m.
Syracuse	ch. 15, 56, Sun 9 a.m.

<b>North Carolina</b>	
Durham	ch. 18, Wed 7:30 a.m.
Greensboro-Highpoint-Winston/Salem	ch. 14, 16, Sun 9 a.m.
Greenville-New Bern-Washington	ch. 34, 35, 38, 51, Sun 9 a.m.
Raleigh-Durham	ch. 47, Fri 8:30 a.m.

<b>Ohio</b>	
Cleveland	ch. 23, Fri 8:30 a.m.
Toledo	ch. 69, Sun 5 p.m.

#### Oklahoma

<b>Oklahoma City</b>	ch. 62, Fri 7:30 a.m.
Tulsa	ch. 44, 28, Sun 8 a.m.

<b>Oregon</b>	
Eugene	ch. 29, Tue 2 p.m.
Medford	ch. 15, 95, Sun 5 p.m.
Milwaukie	ch. 19, Tue 5:30 a.m. & 2:30 p.m.
Oregon City	ch. 23, Fri 7:30 a.m. & 2:30 p.m.
Portland	ch. 21, Sun 7:30 p.m. & 22, Fri 8:30 a.m.

<b>Pennsylvania</b>	
Philadelphia	ch. 61, Fri 8:30 a.m.
Pittsburgh	ch. 16, 38, Sun 9 a.m.
Wilkes Barre/Scranton	ch. 32, 64, Sun 9 a.m.

<b>Rhode Island</b>	
Providence-New Bedford	ch. 17, Fri 8:30 a.m.

<b>South Carolina</b>	
Columbia	ch. 47, Sun 9 a.m.

<b>Tennessee</b>	
Knoxville	ch. 54, Sun 9 a.m.
Memphis	ch. 50, 51, Sun 8 a.m.
Nashville	ch. 28, Sun 8 a.m.

<b>Texas</b>	
Dallas	ch. 68, Fri 7:30 a.m.
Houston	ch. 49, Fri 7:30 a.m.
San Antonio	ch. 26, Sun 8 a.m.

<b>Utah</b>	
Salt Lake City	ch. 16, 29, Sun 8 a.m.

<b>Virginia</b>	
Norfolk-Portsmouth-Newport News	ch. 49, Sun 9 a.m.
Roanoke-Lynchburg	ch. 36, 38, Sun 9 a.m.

<b>Washington</b>	
Seattle-Tacoma	ch. 33, Fri 8:30 a.m.
Spokane	ch. 34, Sun 9 a.m.

<b>Washington D.C.</b>	ch. 60, Fri 8:30 a.m.
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<b>West Virginia</b>	
Charleston-Huntington	ch. 29, 39, Sun 9 a.m.

<b>Wisconsin</b>	
Kenosha	ch. 14, Sun & Mon 7:30 p.m., ch. 55, Sun 8 a.m.
Milwaukee	ch. 96, Mon 2 p.m.; Tue 7 p.m.; Wed 2 p.m., ch. 55, Sun 8 a.m.

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### NEW ZEALAND

**Prime Television** (simulcast on Sky satellite platform) Sun 7 a.m.

### SOUTH AFRICA

**Cape Town DSTV** Sun 8:30 a.m. ch. 263 and open ch. 32, 67

the street in protest against the corruption. Social media picked it up, and the unrest spread to the capital of Tunis. Thousands of people were drawn into the unfolding drama that grew bigger each day. The streets swelled with thousands within 24 hours. What became known as the Jasmine Revolution began.

Protesters demanded economic, social and political reform. The autocratic leader of Tunisia, President Zine Ben Ali, tried at first to ignore the unrest. When it grew he sent in the army to restore order, which led to beatings and death. Every effort the president made failed. Hundreds of thousands of people demanded he step down. When the army finally turned against him, Ben Ali had only one option—to flee the country. On Jan. 14, 2011, he and his wife fled to Saudi Arabia.

From this small Arab land the flame of revolution spread across the Middle East—soon coopted by Islamic fundamentalists. Next to fall was the government of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt. Unrest in other Arab states followed, and today the fires still burn in Syria.

The depth of desperation across the Arab world has been exposed by such events. No religion, government or ideology in the modern history of the region has adequately addressed the economic needs, political rage, societal failure and despair of the people.

Islam as a religion has hindered the modernization of the people under its influence. It has spawned terror that impacts people both in and far beyond the region. In time, events that start here will trigger larger movements that will drag the world's nations into massive conflict in the area.

### A hope-filled vision of getting along

Let's go back to God's plan for the Middle East. The Bible gives us not only the ultimate picture of a transformed region through Christ's return, but also the keys that could improve the everyday lives of people today—if only the leaders would accept God's way.

One of those keys has to be a mutual respect for each other. Arab must respect Jew, and Jew must respect Arab. Frankly, you must cut through the centuries of religious confusion that envelops the region and look at the people—every tribe and race and ethnic group—and *see them as God does*.

All human beings are made in the image of God. He looks on them not according to man-made divisions of culture and religion, but as all being of one blood—and therefore one family. The God of Abraham is the God of all nations, and He is not a respecter of persons. Hate and prejudice must be removed from the heart. God will do this when He sets His hand

to bring reconciliation among the people.

God's prophet Isaiah gave us a prophecy telling of this coming time of mutual respect upon Jesus' return, when ancient enemies will all cooperate and get along: "The LORD will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day . . . In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria. In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria—a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, 'Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance'" (Isaiah 19:18-25).

God looks on Egypt, Assyria and Israel as His people. All of these nations should look on each other with the same respect and love that God does. God plans to lead these nations into an agreement that will bring peace to the streets. Little children will not be in fear of being run down by a driver who uses his car as a weapon. Young street vendors will be allowed to do business without threats from corrupt government.

### Israel a blessing even now

Let's examine again part of the passage cited above. It says Israel will be "a blessing in the midst of the land" (verse 24). We should think about that and look at the situation on the ground today. There is another key to understanding God's plan for the Middle East here.

When Israel goes to extreme measures of war to protect its borders and people from rocket attacks from enemies on its northern and southern borders, it is accused in the court of world opinion of aggression and genocide. And yet God says that in the age to come Israel will be "a blessing in the land."

Could it just be that the state of Israel today is already "a blessing in the land" in various respects? It is the only country in the Middle East that comes close to offering the freedoms Western, developed nations cherish. It is a country founded by refugees from political oppression and attempted genocide. Its culture is closer to the Judeo-Christian culture of the West. Many of Israel's values, policies and culture have fostered an environment of freedom, economic prosperity and peace for its Jewish and Arab citizens.

This is controversial to say. So be it. Would you rather live in Israel or a sharia state like Saudi Arabia?

Israel is a marker placed in the Middle East by the God of Abraham as a sign and promise of His enduring faithfulness to all nations and peoples who bless and honor the example and memory of that patriarch.

God said to Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you" (Genesis 12:3). That promise stands today in this example. It is a key to understanding God's plan for the Middle East. If any Arab states would take this seriously they would reap a blessing today.

### God's peace will come to Jerusalem

The Jewish state's existence sets up a prophetic event foretold by Jesus Christ, who spoke of an "abomination of desolation" to be set up "in the holy place" in Jerusalem (Matthew 24:15). Whatever final form this event takes, it can only be accomplished with a Jewish presence that involves religious sacrifices in Jerusalem that will be stopped shortly before Christ's return. This was not possible before 1948 when modern Israel was established.

While this prophecy foretells an end-time conflict centered on Jerusalem, we must not overlook the important fact here for mankind that God is guiding history according to His divine purpose and plan.

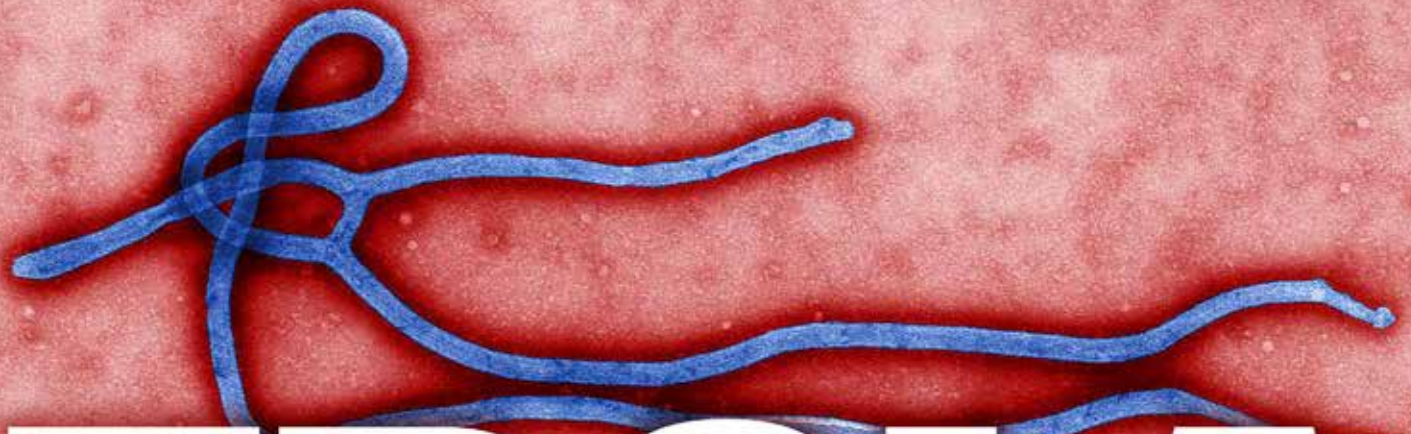
So what does this mean for *you*? Maybe you're thinking that the Middle East is far away, and it doesn't affect your life at all. But *it does*, and *it will*. The instability in the Middle East affects everyone. It affects major decisions that governments make. It determines whom they align themselves with. The spread of extremist ideology is quickly crossing borders from the Middle East to other areas. God's plan for peace in the Middle East (and the whole world) is spectacular, but difficult times will persist and grow worse before peace comes.

This is why understanding the truth about the future of the Middle East is so vital. You can have peace of mind *now*. You don't need to fear whatever may come. You don't need to fear what may be happening in your neighborhood, your country or even in far-away places right now.

To have that peace of mind you need to understand the mercy and kindness and love of God. To do so, you must understand who He is through Bible study. You must develop a deep relationship with Him and your Savior, Jesus Christ, through repenting of doing things your own way and turning to Him through prayer, fasting and obeying His commands.

God has a purpose in history, and this present chaotic moment is *not* the final chapter. Conflict in the Middle East *will* end after Christ returns and forcefully requires all nations to live in harmony with His laws. Peace *will* come to the people of the region. But it will come from God's intervention, not from efforts of human government! **GN**





# EBOLA

## A Foretaste of Prophesied Epidemics to Come?

In the advanced countries of the Western world, we assume deadly epidemics to be a scourge of the distant past. But the recent Ebola outbreak is forcing us to rethink that assumption. *by Mike Kelly*

**T**hroughout history, disease epidemics have ravaged mankind. The Black Death of bubonic plague killed more than 20 million in Europe in the 14th century. A 17th-century outbreak of the dreaded disease in England killed more than 70,000 of London's 600,000 inhabitants.

Modern vaccines and advancements in global hygiene were thought to bring these disease epidemics under control. Yet the last century witnessed the influenza epidemic of 1918, in which the H1N1 virus killed an estimated 70 to 100 million people worldwide. Estimates of death from the much more recent AIDS epidemic of the 1980s exceed 30 million, according to the World Health Organization.

Clearly the scourge of disease epidemics has not been eradicated. In fact, bubonic plague just killed 47 people in Madagascar

in November (*Daily Mail*, Nov. 26, 2014). And now there's a devastating new menace on the world scene, Ebola.

This virus-born disease is not really new; the sporadic minor outbreaks of the past 40 years have been quickly brought under control. But a new strain that has ravaged West Africa since the summer of 2014 has brought back the specter of death tolls in the tens of thousands and threatens to spread from Africa to the rest of the world.

Spread by a virus native to the African fruit bat, patients contract the disease within 2 to 21 days after exposure. Victims suffer high fevers, muscle pain and severe headaches, usually accompanied by vomiting and diarrhea that lead to hemorrhaging and death.

In pondering these developments we ought to ask: What is the outlook for the world in the years ahead on the disease front? Does

the Bible have anything to say about it?

### Increasing pandemics prophesied

Students of Bible prophecy are familiar with the "four horsemen of the Apocalypse" found in Revelation 6. Putting these together with Jesus Christ's outline of future events in His lengthy prophecy on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24:3-8, Mark 13:3-8 and Luke 21:7-11), we can see that the four horsemen symbolize a series of terrible conditions that would beset the world.

Mankind has been ravaged by the white horse of religious deception (Revelation 6:1), the red horse of warfare (verse 4) and the black horse of famine (verse 5).

When we continue reading, we also see a fourth horseman: "When He opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, 'Come and see.' So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him" (verses 7-8).

Who or what is signified by this fourth horseman? The next conditions Jesus described were terrible plagues of pestilences (disease epidemics) and natural disasters.



Notice that the pale horse carried a rider, referred to as Death, accompanied by Hades, the Greek word for the grave. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* has this to say about the color of that horse: "'Pale' (*chloros*) denotes a yellowish green, the light green of a plant, or the paleness of a sick person in contrast to a healthy appearance. This cadaverous color blends well with the name of the rider—'Death'" (Vol. 12, 1981).

So the world has seen increasing epidemics, and it will yet see more. The recent Ebola outbreak, then, is a preview of worse things to come. Yet it is the disease now on the rise, and we need to pay attention to it.

## Most recent U.S. Ebola patient

In the United States, the head of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta, Dr. Thomas Frieden, warned Americans that Ebola would likely jump the Atlantic to America. "The spread of Ebola to the U.S. is inevitable," he testified before Congress in August (Fox News, Aug. 9, 2014).

Frieden was correct in his prediction. Since that time, all but one of the 10 who have contracted the disease, mostly from traveling to or working in affected areas of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia, have recovered due to intensive treatment in U.S. hospitals.

But in mid-November Ebola claimed its second U.S. victim. Dr. Martin Salia, a surgeon who contracted the disease while working in Sierra Leone to treat other Ebola patients, died within 36 hours of being admitted to a Nebraska hospital. Dr. Phil Smith, who leads the Nebraska Medical Center's bio-containment unit, had said the 44-year old Salia was "extremely ill," adding that his condition was much worse than other patients treated successfully in the United States.

Despite fewer than a dozen U.S. cases, Ebola dominated American headlines in late 2014. Calls for the total elimination of flights from affected nations in West Africa were met with objections from those who saw the travel restrictions as a rejection of America's traditions of open borders. The political firestorm was somewhat quelled with a compromise that restricted travel from those areas to five U.S. airports where patients are screened on arrival.

## "Could affect world economy"

As of early December the deadly virus had killed more than 6,000 people in West Africa, mostly in Liberia, Guinea and

Sierra Leone. At present rates, thousands more are affected every month. The mortality rate has held steady at a consistent 50 to 70 percent, and researchers are desperately racing to find an effective vaccine.

The CDC publicized sobering statistics in October about the possible spread of the disease. "The worst-case scenario tops a million cases within a relatively short period of time, and not only would affect West Africa, but would inevitably spread to other countries," Frieden said. Although the CDC later scaled back its projections, infections anywhere near that level could have widespread impacts.

While the CDC does not foresee a "significant health risk" in the United States, Frieden admitted that in an interconnected economy, "it could absolutely change the way we work here." He continued: "It could change the economy of the world. It could change how we assess anyone who's traveled anywhere that might have had Ebola."

The highly contagious disease spreads from close human contact and transfer of bodily fluids. Observers have noted that often-crowded living and transportation conditions and the porous borders between many African nations further contribute to the spread of Ebola.

An ABC News story from October about the spread of the disease in Mali is revealing. "Ebola could cause many deaths here in Mali," said Aminata Samake, who works at a bank in Bamako, the capital. "We have a tradition of living closely together that could contribute to a huge contamination. Take the example of public transport—you find people crammed into a bus, one on top of the other. Large families share the same plates, even the same glasses for tea."

Responding to the threat, the CDC has issued a Level 3 travel warning for U.S. citizens to avoid nonessential travel to Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Also in place is a Level 2 alert against U.S. citizens traveling into Mali or the Republic of the Congo, where dozens of Ebola cases have been reported.

The political divide in the United States goes beyond the air travel issues mentioned above. The outbreak has fueled conservative calls for tighter border restrictions, while liberals still press for freer movement into and out of the country from all areas of the world and a greater reliance on Washington's leadership in managing the epidemic.

Some have also expressed outrage at President Obama's decision to send Ameri-

can troops to areas affected by the disease with little training in preventing infection.

## Biblical principle of quarantine

Medical experts agree on the effectiveness of quarantine as a way to stop the Ebola advance. You may not know it, but the Bible teaches the exact same thing!

Ancient peoples did not know that most diseases are spread by microorganisms transmitted from one person to the next. They also did not know about laws of sanitation, such as making sure bodily wastes are kept away from human contact. Historians celebrate impressive achievements of the ancient Egyptians, yet those supposedly advanced people actually used animal dung as a primary ointment ingredient for all types of illnesses.

Nowhere in the first five books of the Bible—commonly called the books of Moses—did God reveal to ancient Israel that disease organisms transmit disease. But God did instruct Israel that the sick should be kept isolated from the rest of the population. Read for yourself God's specific instructions in Leviticus 13 and 15 concerning people with various types of rashes and bodily discharges. They were to separate themselves from the camp of Israel for the duration of the illness.

Just as ancient Israel used the practice of quarantine to stop disease from spreading through the crowded camp of Israel, quarantine has proven to be the best method to stop the spread of Ebola.

## Laws concerning disease and bodily discharges

Again, consider the time during which Moses wrote these instructions. Ancient Egyptian medical knowledge was primitive compared to that of the 1800s. It is obvious from the Papyrus Ebers manuscript and other ancient sources that there was no sense of sanitation in Egypt whatsoever—as illustrated by the dung ointments mentioned above.

The ancient laws of the Israelites, on the other hand, show nothing but concern for sanitation. These would have protected against microscopic pathogens. Yet how could Moses have known of the existence of such germs? The Egyptians certainly did not—nor did any other ancient culture.

In fact, "until this century, all previous societies, except for the Israelites who followed God's medical laws regarding quarantine, kept infected patients in their homes—even after death, exposing fam-



# Ebola—New Terrorist Tool?

It hasn't been lost on many observers that the Ebola threat has emerged at about the same time as the new terrorist threat of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Like their al-Qaeda cousins, the Islamic State jihadists have shown themselves willing to use any weapon in their terrorist arsenal. Many wonder if Ebola and other diseases such as smallpox could be used as bioweapons.

We're not talking about the rantings of conspiracy theorists here. As reported by several respected media sources, national security planners are already considering what could result if terror groups learn to use Ebola or other infectious diseases for their own purposes.

Deadly as it is, medical experts know that Ebola is only contagious when a patient begins showing symptoms—not during the 2- to 21-day incubation period. Could the Islamic State or other terror organizations, which have shown they have some mastery of modern technology, somehow develop a mutation of the virus, a sort of "super strain" that could become infectious during incubation?

Perhaps, but that would be the hard way to do it. Much easier, says Capt. Al Shimkus, a retired naval captain and now professor of national security affairs at the U.S. Naval War College, would be for human suicide carriers to spread the current version of the disease.

"In the context of terrorist activity, it doesn't take much sophistication to do that next step to use a human being as a carrier," Shimkus told *Forbes* magazine (as reported on the *Forbes* website, Oct. 5, 2014)

In his scenario, the Islamic State or any other terror group could send soldiers into

heavily infected areas where they would steal infected bodily fluids to use later, or they could deliberately expose themselves to the virus before heading to some target city or country. There, they would mingle with the population, infecting as many victims as possible.

The idea is not new. During the Middle Ages, armies catapulted the bodies of victims of plague over the walls of enemy cities to spread the disease.

There would be problems with this approach, say other observers. The advanced health-care systems of the United States and Europe, terror groups' main targets, would

**During the Middle Ages, armies catapulted the bodies of victims of plague over the walls of enemy cities to spread the disease.**

be effective in combating the disease unless populations were infected on a massive scale, which presently seems unlikely.

In a *Slate* opinion piece published in mid-November, University of Pennsylvania bioethicist Nicholas Evans doubted that Ebola could be a viable bioweapon candidate because by the time the carrier started showing symptoms—the only time the disease could be transmitted—the terrorist contagion agent would himself be so sick he would have only a few days to do his deadly work.

Ebola in its present form is only spread by bodily fluids, which "are not efficient or stealthy weapons," says Evans. Still, in the hands of a determined terrorist group with members only too willing to die for the cause, the idea of contagious diseases as weapons cannot be overlooked—especially since Ebola will not be the last deadly contagion we see.

ily members and others to deadly disease. During the devastating Black Death of the 14th century, patients who were sick or dead were kept in the same rooms as the rest of the family.

"People often wondered why the disease was affecting so many people at one time. They attributed these epidemics to 'bad air' or 'evil spirits.' However, careful attention to the medical commands of God as revealed in Leviticus would have saved untold millions of lives.

"Arturo Castiglione wrote about the overwhelming importance of this biblical medical law, 'The laws against leprosy in Leviticus 13 may be regarded as the first model of a sanitary legislation' (Arturo

Castiglione, *A History of Medicine* . . . , 1941, p. 71).

"Fortunately, the church fathers of Vienna finally took the biblical injunctions to heart and commanded that those infected with the plague . . . be placed outside the city in special medical quarantine compounds. Care givers fed them until they either died or survived the passage of the disease. Those who died in homes or streets were instantly removed and buried outside the city limits.

"These biblical sanitary measures quickly brought the dreaded epidemic under control for the first time. Other cities and countries rapidly followed the medical practices of Vienna until the Black Death was

finally halted" (Grant Jeffrey, *The Signature of God*, 1996, pp. 149-150).

Of course, while taking all reasonable precautions, we should also be aware of the protections God offers to those who look to Him for protection. As Psalm 91 states: "I will say of the LORD, 'He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust' . . . You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday" (verses 2, 5-6, New International Version).

## What to watch for

The beginning of 2015 sees a world somewhat relieved that earlier fears of a massive Ebola outbreak have not materialized, but still nervous as it views the spread of the disease to other nations.

However, we have to ask ourselves: Could this signal that the fourth horseman is ready to begin his deadly ride? And if this horseman is not riding through the advanced Western countries, is it riding through other nations? The events of Revelation 6 can become starkly real—and indeed they already are to tens or hundreds of thousands of people in affected areas.

This is not a time for complacency or letting down our guard. All that would be required for an epidemic to begin to ravage the United States, Europe, Canada, Australia or some other Western nations is for perhaps a dozen new cases to break out while our attention is diverted elsewhere. If each of those infected people had contact with 10 other people, who had contact with 10 others, who had contact with 10 others . . .

Yes, it could happen just like that.

The media easily diverts our attention to whatever is "hot news" at the moment, keeping us attuned to their advertising messages. Yet Jesus' warnings in His Olivet prophecy and in the book of Revelation are for our time today, when a chaotic, troubled world will experience the pinnacle of misery before at last being replaced by the just reign of God through Christ over all nations.

"Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man" (Luke 21:36, NIV).

God gives His prophetic warnings for a purpose. He wants His people to see the danger coming and do what it takes to avoid it. Will you be one who heeds the warning? **GN**

# What Cancer Cannot Do

Cancer is a deadly scourge that affects the lives of millions. What can you do if it afflicts you or those you love? *by Janet Treadway*

**A**s I gazed into her hospital room, I noticed all the flowers. In the bed lay a very frail woman, hooked up to morphine to kill the pain. How could this be the same person who only a few weeks before was hopping into her car and going to work every day? Why, she hadn't even taken a vacation in 11 years! She cared for her sister, her huge house and, at the age of 75, worked 40 hours a week.

Our family prided itself in the fact that my mother-in-law Dorothy was so strong and independent for her age. We thought she would outlive us. She never complained and would not ask anyone to do anything for her. Now here she lay, totally dependent on people to even take her to the bathroom.

I still remember when she called my husband to take her to the hospital. She was in horrible pain. Nevertheless, while en route, she had some loose ends to take care of. She needed to drop some things off at work before caring for herself!

A few days after taking her to the hospital, I sat with my husband in a small room listening to the doctor list all the places where cancer had invaded her body. It might've been faster for the doctor to have told us where the cancer *wasn't*.

The doctor saw no chance of her surviving the prognosis. The best thing they could do for her was to try to make her comfort-

able by reducing the horrible pain. The doctor ordered radiation and chemotherapy.

Following the diagnosis, Dorothy's cancer became a sickness not only for her but our family as well. I spent my mornings taking her to radiation treatments, keeping track of different doctor visits and giving her medication. I also had to fight with the insurance companies. While sitting in the waiting room during her treatments, I would read magazines and booklets on cancer in hopes of finding suggestions on overall diet and particular food she could eat without throwing up.

I had entered into a new world of people who were also sick and fighting cancer. I watched as friends and relatives brought in their loved ones for treatment. It was sad to see the strain on some of the caregivers' faces.

For me it was emotionally draining as I tried to stay positive for my mother-in-law, while crying alone or to a friend. At times, I felt I was in a nightmare with no end in sight and with no end in sight for her and no relief from all her suffering.

## Cancer's widespread impact

Dorothy lost her courageous battle with cancer eight years ago. This past year, 2014, saw an estimated 1.7 million new cancer cases diagnosed and around 577,000 cancer deaths in the United States. Excluding abor-

tion, cancer remains the second most common cause of death in America, accounting for nearly 1 in 4 deaths.

My heart sinks when I read on church prayer lists of people being hit with cancer or other life-threatening diseases. The statistics become very real to them when they become one of the numbers. Then there are the family members who also receive the diagnoses, which hit them hard too as they try to cope with caring for a loved one.

While going through this with my mother-in-law, I thought of others who are also dealing with caring for an aging or sick parent while trying to care for their own families and maintain a regular job. The task can be unbearably hard without help. The number one source of help is, of course, God. But help can and should also be found in other people.

God expects all of us to rally around and help those who are sick, to extend aid to the families of a sick loved one, to give them support and relief. How can we be involved in helping families who are dealing with such trials? Moreover, how can we cope if we have cancer ourselves?

## How you can help

Here are some things that I learned when I was caring for my mother-in-law. I hope these tips can help you in dealing with such a trial, whether you are caring for someone who is sick or you have been told you have cancer yourself.

- *Stay close to God.* You will need every ounce of strength that you can muster to deal with helping someone who is sick or

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with your own sickness. You need encouragement. Go to God and pour out your frustrations, anger, fear and sense of helplessness to Him.

Your body can be severely afflicted, and you may have a great struggle, but if you trust in God's love then your spirit will remain strong. The apostle Peter tells us, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7, New International Version). Your greatest enemy is not the disease but despair.

• *Find a support group.* You can find

going to be temporary. The apostle Paul, who himself suffered great trials, said: "I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:12-13).

• *Help lighten the load.* Ask how you can help. Some common ways to lighten the load would be to offer to sit with the family member who is sick to give the caregiver a break or to bring cooked food to the

*It cannot cripple love,  
It cannot shatter hope,  
It cannot corrode faith,  
It cannot eat away peace,  
It cannot destroy confidence,  
It cannot kill friendship,  
It cannot shut out memories,  
It cannot silence courage,  
It cannot reduce eternal life,  
It cannot quench the Spirit,  
It cannot lessen the power of the resurrection.*

A few years have passed since the trial of struggling with my mother-in-law's illness began. I learned many lessons over its course. I learned to take one day at a time and live it as if it's our last. I learned that God will walk through the day with us—holding our hand, catching our tears and giving us great comfort.

Deuteronomy 31:6 states of the things that would stand in our way: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you." I also learned, while going through this with my mother-in-law, that I gained great strength through the help and concern from my family and loving friends.

Cancer can kill the body, but it cannot kill the hope or the reality of eternal life. Keep your focus on God and the hope He holds out to all of us, that when this body is no more we can be given a new life—a life for all eternity!

My mother-in-law succumbed to cancer. She now waits for the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12-22). In her next waking moment, her body will no longer be riddled with cancer and pain.

I hope my experiences and the lessons I learned encourage and help many of you who are now going through the same challenges. Keep the faith and trust God. He will see you and your family through this or whatever else you are facing! **GN**



## **Our family made a team effort to help. We all pulled together, leading me to love and appreciate them so much more.**

many help groups on the Internet, including one just for caregivers. Find a positive, patient friend who will listen to your frustrations and calm your fears. Churches can be a great strength when going through such difficulties. Here is a great website that can offer a lot of help and advice: "Caregiving Support & Help, Tips for Making Family Caregiving Easier" (at [helpguide.org/elder/caring\\_for\\_caregivers.htm](http://helpguide.org/elder/caring_for_caregivers.htm)).

• *Families must make it a team effort.* Our family made a team effort to help with my mother-in-law. My sons, daughter and husband would sit with her while I took a much-needed break. They helped with taking her to the doctor and other tasks that arose. We all pulled together as a team, leading me to love and appreciate my family so much more.

• *Learn to accept and adapt.* Accepting the battles we must go through and learning to adapt will make the course much easier. No matter what life throws at us, it's always

family. The caregiver is often so overwhelmed with many things and details that having cooked food provided can give welcome relief. Our church congregation sends out a notice through a meal train so others can get involved with helping to carry the burden. This tool can be found online (at [mealtrain.com](http://mealtrain.com)).

• *Keep in touch.* Don't say "keep me posted" or "let me know how you're doing." Make it a point to call and find out. This makes the person feel that you really care. Send a card. My mother-in-law often cried when she read the verses in the cards or the kind encouragements. It gave her hope. It showed that people cared and that others were in this fight with her.

### **What cancer can't do**

We've focused on what cancer can do—the suffering it brings to people's lives—and how we can offer support. But here is an encouraging list of what cancer *cannot* do, limited as it is in power and scope:

## **Learn More**

Dealing with disease can be a severe trial. But with a right perspective, we can face such challenges in faith and hope. To learn more, download or request your free copy of *You Can Have Living Faith* today!



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## Follow Me

# The Seven Beatitudes of Revelation

Jesus followed up on His Sermon on the Mount in His revelation to the apostle John. In it He gave seven more “beatitudes” central to the Christian walk. *by Robin Webber*

**A**n eager young man asked God, “What’s a million years like to you?” God patiently replied, “My son, it’s like one second in time.” The man then inquired, “And, what’s a million dollars like to you?” Once again, God complied, “A million dollars is but like a penny.”

The young man, thinking he had put two and two together, went for the bonus question and asked, “God, can you give me just one of Your pennies?” God smiled and replied, “Yes, my son, but you’ll have to wait a second!”

Just like that young man, all of us responding to Christ’s invitation of “Follow Me” would sincerely love to possess one of “God’s pennies” in recognizing the unfathomable spiritual riches of God’s Kingdom. Truth be told, just like the young man, we too have to wait out that “second.”

God knows that. Likewise we need to recognize that, as human beings, we want everything now! But God in His awesome wisdom is allowing something special to develop in us—His love, His patience and the same faith exhibited by Jesus when walking this earth. There’s no getting around the fact that such desired outcomes require those age-lasting “seconds.”

Many of us are familiar with the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1-11) from Jesus’ famous Sermon on the Mount. These are the statements beginning with the words “Blessed are . . .” or, literally, “How made happy are . . .,” such as “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (verse 8). Jesus recognized what lay ahead for those heeding His call, so he shared the incredibly high standards reflecting the character of His Kingdom. He offered rich blessings for those taking Him at His word and following.

Jesus recognized that the proverbial “second” would seem so long to His fol-

lowers that there was the potential for them to become disappointed with each other, despair over external pressures and, yes, even ultimately depart. So Christ in essence told them, “How made happy are you if you do these things—stay with it, for indeed there is a blessing when that eon of a second expires.”

But did you realize that nearly 60 years later, the ascended Jesus Christ once again offered additional beatitudes to reinvigorate

## Did you realize that nearly 60 years after the Sermon on the Mount, the ascended Jesus Christ once again offered additional beatitudes to reinvigorate His followers?

His followers to stick with it, to hold on and to realize that, while it wouldn’t be easy to be a Christian in A.D. 90 or A.D. 2015, *it would, yes, nevertheless be worth it.*

As a student of the Scriptures, perhaps you’ve never noticed it, but stuck right in the midst of this blueprint of biblical prophecy with its mention of seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets and seven last plagues are the seven last recorded beatitudes that Christ wants us to apply in our walk with Him.

### Seven jewels wrapped in encouragement

Long ago, Jesus recognized that His followers down through the ages would need some signposts along the way to guide and encourage them through the minefields of everyday human nature—and even more so the prophesied comings of false teachers, warring beast-like worldly kingdoms, famines, epidemics and natural disasters. So He offers us seven jewels of challenge and responsibility wrapped in encouragement.

Seven is often considered the biblical number that symbolizes completion, so let’s go through a thumbnail sketch of what God

says we need to do to be complete as we look forward to that day when He grants us His “pennies.”

**1 “Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near” (Revelation 1:3).**

Reading God’s Word or hearing it spoken by another person is much different from deeply embedding it within our hearts and allowing it to be our life’s compass. The “things which are written in it” are about the very real return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of God’s Kingdom. Knowing this and believing this with all your heart will draw you closer to God and change everything about your life.

Psalms 119:9-11 speaks of a wholeheartedness in which we hide God’s Word in our heart that we might not turn away. When the book of Revelation was initially written, the Roman Emperor Domitian was persecuting the Church—the hour was indeed near! But whatever age we live in, as mortal men and women, we are but one breath away from the ultimate establishment of God’s everlasting Kingdom. As Christians, God has offered us a head start, but we need a heart-set to match the revelation we have been granted.

**2 “Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, ‘Write: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’” (Revelation 14:13).**

Hearing a voice from heaven amidst the roar of self and the distractions of this world is a constant challenge. And yet when we do hear it, we are reminded this life is not an end in itself. Death, whether to our mortal actions or as martyrs for Jesus Christ, is not a stranger to the Christian experience. But understanding that is central to Christianity.





The Roman Emperor Domitian was severely persecuting Christians when Jesus Christ inspired John to write these words of encouragement.

into a home in the middle of the night (Matthew 24:42-44).

While we observe the times and events around us, Christ reminds His followers that it's equally important to look inside of ourselves and be sure that our inward person reflects the values brought at His second coming. Otherwise, all of our efforts in proclaiming His Kingdom lie bare before the weighty evidence of the fact that we are not striving to incorporate the first set of beatitudes found in Matthew 5.

**4** "Then he said to me, 'Write: **"Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!"** And he said to me, 'These are the true sayings of God'" (Revelation 19:9).

God never said it would be easy, but He did promise it would be worth it. He likens His second coming to a festive wedding supper. In ancient times this high point of village life would go on for days. It was deeply anticipated, diligently prepared for in every detail, and enjoyed to the full.

Likewise this invitation does not come without forethought from God or counting the cost by the recipient. The apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 11:2: "For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ." At our resurrection at His second coming, Christ intends to consummate this engagement by not only offering us His hand, but granting us entrance into His Kingdom, which will indeed be an incredible time of joy and celebration!

**5** "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:6).

When this was first written, many Christians were being slain under Domitian's persecution. Since then, many others of Christ's followers have been slain. The words of Revelation indicate more will join them (Revelation 6:9-11).

But here Christ provides a measurable contrast to let His followers know that, if they were true to Him through those painful moments, they could match those excruciating minutes, hours and days with an amazing, joyful stretch of time (1,000 years) plus eternity beyond it (no second death). Yes, He promises a reward extending far beyond their greatest moment of human trial!

**6** "Behold I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book" (Revelation 22:7).

This beatitude completely mirrors the first at the beginning of the book. But what is noteworthy in the text is that it appears as a personal interruption by none other than Jesus Christ—and His own messenger angel is put on hold. Christ wants to make a personal emphatic point.

While that proverbial "second" of God may seem like forever, it really isn't! Now, at the closing chapter, the informed reader of Revelation recognizes nothing stands in the way of Christ—be it death, beasts, false prophets, Satan or time. Why would he not want to "keep the words of this prophecy" central to his life? The God who owns eternity—past, present and future—always operates in the immediacy of now when it comes to His followers. *Now* is the time to surrender to Him. *Now* is the time to treat your fellow man differently. *Now* is the time to prepare for eternity—*quickly*, not tomorrow!

**7** "Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Revelation 22:14).

The end of God's Word returns to where it began at the Garden of Eden in Genesis 1-3. God is desiring to plant something incredible in our lives, but we have to reach for the right source. We have to reach for the tree of life grounded in God's commandments and with the reality of "waiting on the Lord" rather than following Adam and Eve's example of seizing for ourselves counterfeit treasures that can only follow us to the grave and come to an end.

How many have succumbed to that moment by holding on to as much as they can in this life rather than waiting on one of God's pennies? Don't you be one!

### **Pennies or eternity?**

The conversation that began this column was of course fictional, but it's hopefully helpful in capturing our attention. The following admonition of Jesus Christ is not made up, but is deeply personal advice to guide us in responding to His invitation of "Follow Me":

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there your heart will be also" (Matthew 6:19-21).

The question lies before you: Pennies now or eternity? The choice is yours! **GN**

Jesus' own death paved the way for this understanding. Even so, if this is required of us, we are promised that what we have done will not be forgotten. The pharaohs of Egypt tried in vain to take their earthly possessions with them to the next world. The truth is when we give our world to Jesus Christ, He promises to remember that and give us something so much richer and more meaningful that we could not possibly store up in this lifetime.

He is the One who declared Himself to be "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). He jolts us into His understanding that life and death are not two different worlds, but one world in His hands—and that on the other side of this life we will be repaid for what we did for Him!

**3** "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame" (Revelation 16:15).

It's important to realize that Christ never stated that the end is *here*, but rather that the end is *near*. His followers in every age have felt the tension between their present world and the end of the age. Most had a sense that Christ's return in their lifetime was imminent. So they watched for it and prayed about it, but Christ says no one knows when—just as when a thief bursts



# Lessons From the Parables

## The Parable of the Sower and Seed

I've planted many vegetable gardens over the years. The lessons I've learned match what Jesus Christ said about the sowing of the seed of the gospel and what it takes to grow a productive crop. They also teach us what we must do when the words of the Kingdom have been sown into our lives. *by Darris McNeely*

I'm a backyard farmer. Vegetable gardens have been a regular part of my life. Having been raised by parents who grew up in families dependent on backyard gardens for daily food, I know what it takes to produce enough food to see one through until the next harvest. It takes good soil, with good seed that is well tended by an attentive gardener. Without these we can't expect a crop to grow and produce abundant fruit.

That is exactly what Jesus Christ lays out for us in one of His longest and most important parables. Matthew 13 begins with a large crowd gathered around Him and Him getting into a boat so all those who stood on the shore could hear Him (verse 2).

In the first set of parables He spoke, He used an example from their everyday life that teaches crucial truths about one's calling to the Kingdom of God. He talked to them about a man sowing seed in the field. Let's notice what He said.

"Behold, a sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seed fell by the wayside; and the birds came and devoured them. Some fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth; and they immediately sprang up because they had no depth of earth. But when the sun was up they were scorched, and because they had no root they withered away. And some fell among thorns and the thorns sprang up and choked them.

"But others fell on good ground and yielded a crop: some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" (verses 3-9).

So let's hear and consider a few points.

### Soil conditions affect growth

In the setting of that time a farmer sowing a field was a well-known sight. He walked up and down his freshly tilled land

grabbing handfuls of seed grain from a sack slung over his shoulder and throwing it in front of him as he went.

The well-worn paths between towns and farms ran next to the fields. The passing of many feet, hooves and carts compressed the paths into hard-packed dirt unable to receive the seed.

But because the farmer's field went alongside the path, he would inevitably sow some

**Among Christ's parables about the land, this one stands out in its depth of teaching about how the seed of the gospel of the Kingdom is sown and works in the field of life.**

of the seed on the "wayside." Seed falling on a well-worn path won't work into the soil and take root. Birds in those days were as smart as birds are today and knew where to get an easy meal. They would swoop down and quickly fill their bills with seed. This is the seed that "fell by the wayside."

Jesus continued with His explanation, talking about seed that "fell on stony places, where they did not have much earth." Those who have visited the Holy Land know that much of it is literally "stony ground." Although farmers would try to keep their fields free of stones, inevitably some areas remained pocked with rocks. Because of the way the seed was sown, coupled with help from the wind, some seed would inevitably fall in these areas.

Stony ground has soil, but it isn't good enough for seed to germinate and put down deep roots. The stones block root growth, preventing plants from growing roots large enough to support much fruit. As Christ said, anything that begins to grow in stony soil lacks a deep root system and quickly withers and dies from the heat. It produces no fruit.

Christ continued His lesson, talking about seed that is sown among thorns. Thorns can grow just about anywhere—in poor soil, rocky soil and in good soil. In Jesus' day people didn't have sophisticated herbicides. Today we can spray these on the soil and they prevent virtually all weeds. Without thorns or weeds, we can have grain and other crops growing unhindered by the unproductive plants. Nothing is around to compete with and "choke" the life out of the good grain.

The last category He mentioned is the seed that falls on good ground and produces much fruit. The variance Christ mentions can be due to weather—too little or too much rain and temperatures that are too hot or too cool. But because there is good soil, properly fertilized and balanced with the right amount

of nutrients, seed can germinate, put down deep roots and produce optimum fruit.

### Learn from life

Christ finished this parable and then said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" We are of course to pay close attention to what He's saying. But not only that. We are to go further and draw out the meanings from life experiences and understand how to apply them. We must do more than just listen—He expects us to learn valuable life lessons.

I can think of a few from the gardening I've done through the years.

My father and mother planted a big garden every year. Growing up during the Great Depression, they learned the value of a productive garden. They couldn't afford to buy everything at a grocery store; most meals came from their garden. During my youth, my dad tended a large plot in our back yard. Every year he spread a load of manure, tilled it into the soil, and broke up the ground so it would be a good bed for the vegetable plants and seeds.

He would come in from work at night and



look at the garden. He kept the rows clean and free of weeds. If rain didn't come, he would water the garden enough to keep things growing. As each summer wore on, we were rewarded with tomatoes, corn and beans. There would be enough to eat and more left over to can and freeze for the winter. Having a can of store-bought beans or corn on our family table was considered by my parents to be something close to a mortal sin!

But we had all this because they knew the importance of “good ground.” They knew

As the weeks went on, the growth slowly came. But one day the growth stopped. The summer got hot, and most of the plants began to wither. Some eventually put on some buds and then some little fruit. But I don't recall getting more than a few quarts of beans. No corn grew on the sickly stalks, and I didn't get enough potatoes to fill a small sack. The lesson here? A seed can begin to grow in stony ground, but it won't amount to much, and in the heat of the season it will fade and die out.

draw some of His deepest and most profound teaching.

### **Vital lessons for all of us**

Among Christ's parables about the land, this one about the sower and the seed stands out as the most insightful in its depth of teaching about how the seed of the gospel of the Kingdom is sown and works in the field of life. No other parable shows us how the devil, the allure of the world and the cares of life conspire to root from our lives the eternal truths of the Kingdom of God. Our modern world is full of distractions—the rocks, thorns and birds that conspire to prevent God's Word and His calling from taking root and bearing fruit. In that knowledge is vital understanding for us all.

As a minister of the gospel, I've witnessed this parable at work in the lives of countless numbers of people. The lessons from this story are at work today, as the “seed” of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God are being sown via this magazine, the *Beyond Today* television program and our other efforts.

Right now you are holding a “bag of seed” in your hand as you read these words. The word of the Kingdom of God is being sown in your life. The question to examine from the parable is, what quality of “soil” is your life? Is it full of stones? Has it been packed down hard by the journey of life? Can Satan easily snatch the valuable and precious truth of God from your life?

Building spiritual success, confidence and eternal hope into your life depends on how you respond to these questions. The seeds of the gospel of God and His eternal Kingdom are spread before you to make good use of them!

In the next issue we'll look at Christ's interpretation of this parable and what it can mean for your part in the Kingdom of God. Don't miss it! **GN**



Jesus Christ's parable about the sower and the seed reveals remarkable lessons about how people respond to the message of the Kingdom of God—lessons important to each of us!

not to let the soil get hard-packed. Nor did they let weeds and thorns grow up between the healthy vegetable plants. They knew that thorns can thrive just about anywhere. They can grow in poor soil and good. They resist drought and blossom when it rains. Thorns don't care if it's hot or cold.

In my parents' later years before they died, they could no longer plant and work the garden. I once visited our home and walked out to the garden plot. What I saw wasn't pretty. Weeds, thorns, crabgrass and thistles abounded. It was an overgrown mess. When even good ground isn't properly tended, left to itself everything else moves in. Nothing useful can grow until it is cleared out.

### **My own garden plots**

Through the years I've worked several garden plots. Two in particular stand out.

One was full of rocks. I worked many hours one spring to clear out the rocks. The more I dug, it seemed the more came to the surface. I came to a point where I had to get seed in the ground or I would miss the growing season. So I went ahead and planted in stony ground. I was surprised when the plants grew, and I began to hope they would grow well enough to produce fruit.

And yes, I've even seen my sown seed eaten away by the birds. If you don't plant deep enough and cover the seed with soil, the birds are smart enough to peck around and dig it out. Even other animals like raccoons or squirrels will dig up plants and seed as it germinates and eat it, ending any hope of a good crop.

My longest use of a particular garden was 22 years. Year after year it produced vegetables. I learned the lessons from my dad and kept it fertilized. I kept the weeds down and hoed between the plants. I laid down mulch to keep moisture in during the hot weeks of summer. It was a small enough plot that I didn't need a mechanized tiller, so at planting time all I had to do was turn over the soil with a spade. It easily broke apart, and with a little raking it was ready for planting. I spent many enjoyable hours in that garden, and it was a delight to go out each evening and see how much the plants had grown.

This garden became a therapeutic tool through many episodes of my life. It gave me many illustrations for sermons and other messages. I could draw on other statements from Jesus that centered on the fruit of the land for spiritual lessons. Through the years I learned why Jesus looked to the land to

### **Learn More**

Jesus Christ's message revolved around the gospel, or “good news.” But the good news of what? And why is it good news? Many fail to grasp exactly what that good news is all about! Be sure to read our eye-opening study guide *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. A free copy is waiting for you!



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# How to Build a Close Relationship With God

In previous studies we've covered many aspects of understanding God. This study is a step beyond, showing how to really *know* God through developing a close personal and intimate relationship with Him.

This study explains several practical and specific ways to draw closer to God. If you are not already doing these things, it's our hope and prayer that you'll choose to start right away.

## God is near and does not forget us

Although God is not visible to us, He can become the most reliable, trusted and loving reality in your life!

King David poetically described his experience of God's greatness and nearness:

"Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in hell [the grave], behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, 'Surely the darkness shall fall on me,' even the night shall be light about me; indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to You.

"For You formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well" (Psalm 139:7-14).

David was inspired by God's omnipresence (meaning He is everywhere present) and His omniscience (meaning He is all-knowing and all-wise). When people are not close to God, they may blame Him for the feeling of separation. But it is not God's fault. People forget about Him, but God never forgets about us. He is always available to you if you "seek Him with all your heart" (Deuteronomy 4:29).

## Drawing near to Him

The author of Psalm 73:28 wrote, "It is good for me to draw near to God," and hopefully you are learning how good that is for you. A relationship with God begins when He calls us or draws us. Jesus said, "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up [resurrect him] at the last day" (John 6:44).

After God calls us, He expects *us* from then on to exercise initiative in seeking to draw near to *Him*. If we do, we have this very encouraging promise: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

The promise of a resurrection to life after death becomes a primary motivator. It is that "better hope, through which we draw near to God" (Hebrews 7:19).

## Specific keys to building a relationship with God

Again, this study will cover some specific ways to develop and maintain a close relationship with God.

### ► How valuable is it to read and study the Bible?

"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which

**After God calls us, He expects *us* from then on to exercise initiative in seeking to draw near to *Him*. If we do, we have this very encouraging promise: "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you."**

are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

"Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she [wisdom, personified here as a noble woman] is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her" (Proverbs 3:13-15, New International Version).

The Bible is more valuable than all the rest of the books in the world combined. It is *priceless*! It is the Creator's revelation to His creation regarding His plan and how we should live our lives to fulfill our purpose and to obtain, by far, the best results. Even kings were commanded to read the Scriptures daily (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). The Bible is God's *Word*—God speaking to each of us. We must listen, and listen carefully!

### ► What is a major key to making one's Bible study personally profitable?

"Never stop reciting these teachings. You must think about them night and day so that you will faithfully do everything written in them. Only then will you prosper and succeed" (Joshua 1:8, God's Word Translation).

"Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine . . . Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all" (1 Timothy 4:13, 15).

It's important to not read the Bible in a rush. Take time to really



think about what you are reading and you will get a lot more out of it. Meditate and reflect deeply on the meaning of the scriptures you read and their application to your life. Meditating on God's laws helps immensely to write them on your heart (Hebrews 8:10).

► **Can we talk to God at any time and know that He hears us?**

"Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him" (1 John 5:14-15).

Jesus said: "And in that day you will ask Me nothing. Most assuredly, I say to you, whatever you ask the Father in My name He will give you" (John 16:23).

Sincere prayer is powerful because the Creator of all the universe loves to hear our prayers and loves to answer them. The Bible has many scriptures that exhort us to pray, and many that give pointers on *how* to pray. God expects us to maintain daily two-way communication with Him—reading His messages in the Bible and talking to Him in prayer. And the more you pray, the more natural it will be



for you. The Bible compares the "prayers of the saints" with sweet-smelling incense, for they are pleasing to God (Revelation 5:8).

► **Can we walk with God—and what exactly does that mean?**

"He who says he abides in Him [Christ] ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

"This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it" (2 John 1:6).

"Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments" (1 John 2:3).

In the Bible, the word *walk* is often used to refer to one's *lifestyle*—how we live our life. To walk according to God's Word means to apply it, to put it into action. To walk with God means to obey His commandments and to follow—imitate—Jesus' example. This includes obeying the Fourth Commandment as Jesus did. Observing God's Sabbath day provides a whole day to focus on drawing close to God.

So we must talk *and* walk with God.

► **Does fasting also help in drawing close to God?**

"Then I [Ezra] proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions . . . So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer" (Ezra 8:21, 23).

"But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly" (Matthew 6:17-18).

"Now, therefore," says the LORD, "turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning" (Joel 2:12).

Among the spiritual tools for drawing closer to God, fasting is a real power tool! Fasting is valuable when we are faced with a big problem and we urgently need God's help. Even when we aren't faced with big problems, we should fast occasionally as a special form of worship and to draw closer to God. When you sincerely fast, God is pleased and will help you grow spiritually.

► **Can meditating on God's ways and His creation help us to learn valuable lessons?**

"For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse" (Romans 1:20, New International Version).

"I remember the days of old; I meditate on all Your works; I muse on the work of Your hands" (Psalm 143:5).

"I will meditate on the glorious splendor of Your majesty, and on Your wondrous works" (Psalm 145:5).

As we discussed earlier in this series, God has two primary means of revealing Himself to humanity: His written revelation—the Bible—and the evidence of creation. Creation is fascinating, because we never cease to learn from it and be inspired by it. From creation we learn many things about the Creator.

► **Will we be much closer to God if we stay away from bad influences?**

"Do not be deceived: 'Evil company corrupts good habits'" (1 Corinthians 15:33).

"The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray" (Proverbs 12:26).

"As God has said: 'I will dwell in them and walk among them. I will be their God, and they shall be My people.' Therefore 'Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.' 'I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty'" (2 Corinthians 6:16-18).

We are continually faced with choices. We often must choose between exposing ourselves to bad influences or surrounding ourselves with good influences (including other believers). God is very displeased when we choose evil or what will lead us toward it. The mind is like a sponge that will soak up whatever you expose it to, whether good or bad, and what goes in stays in, to a great extent.

A computer is a good comparison. A computer's output depends on what was input. Garbage in, garbage out, as the expression goes. God knows our every thought. Don't allow experiences and thoughts that you will be ashamed of when you face God.

### ► Do materialism and an overly busy life interfere with relationships?

“No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [material wealth]” (Luke 16:13).

“Now these are the ones sown among thorns; they are the ones who hear the word, and the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires for other things entering in choke the word, and it becomes unfruitful” (Mark 4:18-19).

“But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all

## Daily prayer is a principle key in our relationship with God, and a major part of our prayers should be thanking and praising God for His many blessings.

kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows” (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

Money is not evil, but the *love* of money is a major root of evil. So, yes, materialism and a super-busy life interfere with all our relationships and especially our relationship with God. They can choke to death our spiritual life like weeds choke to death the life of garden plants. When money and things become overly important to us, they are becoming our *gods*, which means we are breaking the first of the Ten Commandments (by prioritizing them over God).

### ► Are satanic and demonic influences a significant danger?

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:8-9).

“Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

“Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness” (Ephesians 6:11-12).

Satan “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9), so even followers of Christ can be deceived by Satan or a demon when we aren’t continually on guard. Satan hates all people, but he especially wants to deceive and destroy anyone trying to obey God. We attract Satan and the demons and become vulnerable to them if we are sinning, dabbling in spiritism or the occult, or letting down spiritually in some other way. And when one walks in the way of the devil, he or she is alienating himself or herself from God.

### ► What is the ultimate, most powerful way to stay close to God?

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38).

“For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His” (Romans 8:6-9).

How is it possible for a mortal human being to have an intimate and ongoing relationship with the divine Creator God? The most important key is God’s gift of His Spirit to dwell in one’s heart and mind! God’s Spirit works to transform human nature to a godly nature and the mind of Christ, so instead of being inclined to selfishness and sin, we become inclined toward love and godliness



(Philippians 2:1-5). To receive the Holy Spirit, we must repent of our sins and be baptized.

God desires a close relationship with everyone. In fact, He wants all people to eventually become, as we’ve seen, His “sons and daughters” (2 Corinthians 6:18).

### Start using these relationship keys now

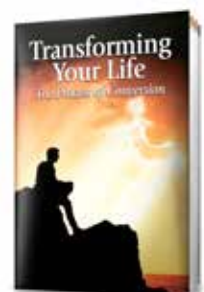
Daily prayer is a principle key explained above, and a major part of our prayers should be thanking and praising God for His many blessings. “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, *with thanksgiving*, present your requests to God” (Philippians 4:6, NIV, emphasis added).

Many, many scriptures throughout the Bible exhort us to thank and praise God in prayer and in song. Psalms 69:30, 106:1, 107:8 and 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18 are just a few examples.

God loves the attitude of gratitude! When God answers a prayer, protects us or blesses us in some other way, He’s not expecting much in return except our obedience and our thanksgiving. Make it a habit to count your many blessings and praise God for them!

Stop and think about many of the blessings and benefits that God has given you, and make a list of them. You probably will be pleasantly surprised at how many you can quickly think of. And God will be well pleased that you immediately took this wonderful step forward!

To learn more about how to build your relationship with God, download or request our free study guides *Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion* and *Tools for Spiritual Growth*. **GN**







# Letters From Our Readers

## America's War on God

Thank you so much for the November-December 2014 issue of *The Good News* magazine and the truth on world trends and the current demise of this country, despite what the media may have to say to the contrary. Thanks for making truth available to those of us who want it. May God bless your courage.

*Reader in Arizona*

Your November-December issue of *The Good News* is outstanding! I very much enjoy watching your *Beyond Today* television program too. I had written quite some time ago suggesting an article addressing the survivors of suicide victims (families and friends). This was addressed in the last section of the magazine and it was outstanding!

*Reader in Washington state*

I receive *The Good News* magazine and I've read through most of it. This last magazine is most depressing. I had to search for any "good news." In Philip-  
pines we are instructed to think on things that are noble and praiseworthy. This really speaks to me and you, I hope. Could you not find something good about Obama and our country and leaders?

*Reader in California*

*We certainly agree that we should occupy our minds with positive things—but not to the extent of avoiding the reality of the world around us. You would no doubt agree that the Bible itself is noble and praiseworthy—and yet it contains a huge amount of negative things, constituting a record of humanity's sins over the course of thousands of years. The prophets of the Old Testament period were inspired to issue a twofold message—concerning both the wonderful future that lies ahead and a warning of impending judgment for immorality and a call to repentance. Jesus Himself did the same, and His followers must as well.*

*People called on the prophets to instead say only smooth and pleasant things (Isaiah 30:10), but how would that help? Society must be confronted with the error of its ways (Isaiah 58:1). Jesus foretold a whole litany of bad things that would happen in the world in Matthew 24 and told His followers to be watchful of them. He even said the announcement of these things was part of "good news" (verse 14)—as they show that His return is near and that the world is experiencing what it needs to be shaken out of complacency and wrong paths.*

*That being said, we should still keep in the forefront of our minds the hopeful message of the Kingdom of God. And we do regularly proclaim this. We encourage readers to not consider a particular issue of our magazine to represent the totality of our message. Different issues of the magazine and episodes of our TV program focus on the various facets of the message we are to proclaim.*

I would like to thank you for the wonderful publication and the resources you provide us all. I first came across your magazine while in Sydney, Australia, in 2010, ironically at the home of an unbeliever! I subscribed to it and have been enjoying it ever since. Your articles in the November-December issue are right on target. However, what I was looking for is also a solution. It is one thing to scream "fire" in a crowded theater and quite another to also show the way out. As believers, what can we do to stop or at least slow down this war against God?

*Reader in California*

*The only thing we as believers can do in the face of societal rebellion against God is to turn to Him in repentance ourselves and start making changes in our own lives. This was stated in the issue quite directly. The more of us who take this step, the more the war against God is impeded. And of course we should strengthen and encourage one another in this resolve—coming together in regular fellowship and standing behind efforts to proclaim the gospel to the world, by which more people will be led to repent. But the reality is that very few will truly repent in this age—certainly not enough to bring about major societal change. The real solution to the problem is in the future return of Jesus Christ to remove Satan from power and set up the Kingdom of God over all nations. There simply is no other viable answer.*

## Appreciation for *The Good News* and study guides

Thank you very much for the material you have sent to me. Honestly, while I am still a Roman Catholic, I find that your materials reflect and are written with in-depth thought and analysis. These are indeed sources of inspiration for those

who suffer frustration, hope for those who are weary, and encouragement for those who are discouraged. And these are elements for spiritual conversion and human transformation.

*Reader in Bulacan, Philippines*

Thank you for *The Good News* magazine and booklets. I would like to encourage you to keep preaching the Word of God. Your publications and television program are thunderous bullets which are destroying evil all over the world.

*Reader in Marondera, Zimbabwe*

I would like to thank you very much for *The Good News* magazine. All your articles are enlightening, informative, and very well written. May God bless your church worldwide.

*Reader in Durbanville, South Africa*

Thank you so very much for sending *The Good News* magazine and the booklets I ordered. I am now studying your booklets. They help me a great deal.

*Reader in Yangon, Myanmar*

## **Beyond Today television program**

Thanks again for the wonderful work that you are doing. I record your shows on Saturday and Sunday mornings every week and watch them on the Sabbath. I watched one not too long ago about the rapture, and the presenter explained it so thoroughly and always using scriptures. I loved it. Just know that I love your shows and as soon as I can get on top of my debt, I would love to donate some money so you can stay on TV and help many other people who slowly are starting to see the truth and sharing it.

*Internet*

Would you please send me your Bible study aid *What Happens After Death?* and a subscription to *The Good News* magazine. I watch your program each week and cannot tell you how informative it is. Thank you for such terrific programs.

*Viewer in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada*

## **Looking for a congregation to attend**

I want to know if any of your churches are located near me. I have many of your booklets, and your magazine is important to me. They have changed my life.

*Internet*

I am trying to find a church that lives by God's calendar and participates in God's appointed feast and holidays. Thank you.

*Internet*

*Those interested in finding a United Church of God congregation can visit our website at [www.ucg.org/churches](http://www.ucg.org/churches). There you'll find the locations of congregations (many with their own websites) and the appropriate contact person.*

## **Helping support *The Good News***

Please give me details on how I can send my offerings to you for being a blessing in increasing my knowledge through these magazines I've received from you. Your magazines give me more understanding about the Word of God. God bless you with more wisdom to share with more people of the earth.

*Internet, Parañaque City, Philippines*

Thank you for all the wonderful information you've sent me. Where I can make a donation? Keep up the great godly service and may God bless y'all!

*Reader from Texas*

Enclosed is a donation. Thank you for giving us hope in a hopeless world and for spreading *The Good News*.

*Reader from Montana*

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# WHO IS GOD?

## Three Steps to Get to Know Him

How can we get to know God better? Here are several good ways to start! *by Randy Stiver*

**T**here are several ways you can start getting to really know God. The Bible tells us about this guy named Balaam—a sort of prophet for hire—who got to know God through a talking donkey and then a terrifying face-to-face with the point of an angel's sword (read about it in Numbers 22). I don't recommend that way though—especially since Balaam acted more stubbornly than his donkey!

The Bible tells us about another man who thought he knew God and who volunteered to track down Christians and haul them off to be fined, flogged or stoned to death. He was on one of his Gestapo-like missions on the road to Damascus with letters of extradition to bring more members of God's young Church back to Jerusalem for punishment.

He ended up with an eye problem—God

struck him blind for three days! That got the attention of this man, who would later become famous to history as the apostle Paul. He was well motivated to get to know the true God after that (see Acts 9).

Another person we encounter in the Bible was a very lovely lady—a beauty queen, really. She already knew God, having been reared as an orphan by her very faithful older cousin.

She had also become the queen of Persia. The politics of Persia had turned very anti-Semitic and she, Esther, was Jewish. At her cousin's urgent recommendation she took her knowledge of God to the next level by first fasting (going without food or water) for three days and nights and then hosting two very stressful banquets for her husband the king and his prime minister, Haman, the man who sought to murder her and her

people. Fasting for three days intensified her knowledge and deep appreciation for God (Esther 4-7).

Or, you can follow these three steps to begin to get to know God better:

### Know that God exists

One way to get to know God is to really prove to yourself that He exists. After all, thinking about or talking to someone who isn't there would be fruitless and lonely! So the first step in knowing God is to *know*—prove, prove some more, and reflect on that proof—that He exists.

You live in an age when millions of seemingly intelligent people take pride in “knowing” and proclaiming that God doesn't exist. Don't listen to them!

Take some time to study the natural world. Notice the incredible structures of the animals, the spectacular symmetry and beauty of the plants and trees. You name it in nature, and it is living proof by its complexity and inner working that God does absolutely exist. For fun you can read



a little about fractal geometry. Paintings don't happen by random accident; paintings demand a painter. Likewise, creation demands a Creator!

Now inventory what you already know and read about the laws of mathematics, aerodynamics or physics. Those laws are what enable the atheistic scientists (and believing ones too) to be able to calculate and predict rocket science or any other science.

Where did those laws come from? Where do the laws governing your nation come from? From a law-making, law-enforcing body called the government, right? Bingo! The same principle applies to the laws of physics and the spiritual laws that govern our relationships with each other and

above and then read from the beginning about God as Creator and Lawgiver. Then read about Jesus of Nazareth so you can really get to know Him as your Savior and Teacher.

Read some of God's book every day and never stop reading it. Always ask after reading, "What do I know about God from reading this section of Scripture?" Before long, you will begin to know Him well!

### Know God by living His way

A third way to get to know God is by living His way. Once when I was a small boy, I saw what looked like a bowl of pudding cooling on the kitchen counter. But I wasn't completely sure that it *was* pudding—and I really wanted to know. What to do? I sampled it, and it was pudding all right. It

**Thinking about or talking to someone who isn't there would be fruitless and lonely. So the first step in knowing God is to *know*—prove, prove some more, and reflect on that proof—that He exists.**

with God. Bottom line: Law demands a Lawgiver!

### Know God by reading His Book

How else can we get to know God? During World War II, at the close of the North African campaign of 1942, U.S. General George Patton said that he was victorious over the battle-hardened German Afrika Corps, led by their famous and brilliant commanding general Erwin Rommel, because he read Rommel's book—helping him come to know Rommel and the way he thought. Likewise, I read the biography of Patton so I could get to know him.

It's pretty elementary, isn't it? If you want to know God, you have to read *His* book. It's called the Bible.

You can start with our three examples

turned out to be my favorite flavor, too—butterscotch! The point? The proof of the pudding is in the eating (although the eating didn't please my mother at the time!).

Remember the spiritual laws of God listed in His book? He wants us to obey them. His divine law is a great teacher about Him. They define His way of life. In fact, Christianity was initially called "the Way," and a prime example is recorded where Paul was headed to Damascus to arrest some of its followers (Acts 9:2).

Summarizing the Ten Commandments in biblical law are what Christ called the two great commandments: 1) "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind," and 2) "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:34-40).

To know God, begin to live by these two great commandments and their ramifications. Show love and concern for others and help out where you are able. And love God by praying, reading His book (the Bible) and keeping—for starters—His prescribed Holy Day of rest, the Sabbath. Remember this: Most of Christianity doesn't even know which day that is. The Sabbath is the seventh day of the week—which is from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, not on Sunday. Begin to observe this weekly Holy Day and you'll really begin to know God like never before! **GN**

## Learn More

Who is God? What is God? Is there a way we can know? People have puzzled over these questions for centuries. But it doesn't need to be a mystery! Download or request your free study aid *Who Is God?* today!



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# Why?

**D**oes life have a purpose? Does it have real meaning? Is life anything more than a brief span on earth, with eternal nothingness on either side of this physical existence?

This is the question of the ages, a riddle that has challenged human beings since they came to be: Why am I here? *Why do I exist?*

Thousands of years ago, the biblical King David looked up into the night sky and wrote down his thoughts regarding man's relationship to his Creator: "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You care for him?"

David wondered about the purpose of man just as we do today. Every one of us was created for a purpose, but few understand what that great purpose is. Our free booklet *What Is Your Destiny?* will help you understand the incredible truth about why you were born! For your free copy, visit our website or contact any of our offices listed on page 2.



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