An aerial photograph of the Middle East region, showing the Mediterranean Sea to the west, the Red Sea to the south, and the Persian Gulf to the east. The landmasses are colored in shades of green, yellow, and brown, indicating different elevations and vegetation. The entire image is framed by a thin black line and a thicker red border.

# **The Middle East in Prophecy**

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**Focus of  
End-Time  
Events**

# INTRODUCTION

**W**hat events lie in store for the much-troubled Middle East region?

Bible prophecy reveals the answers! The problems confronting the world in the Middle East will trigger a sequence of events so staggering as to shake the very foundations of today's civilization!

The Middle East has been a troubled region throughout history. Since earliest antiquity, it has been a focus of conflict and confrontation. Invaders without number have swept across its sands, leaving a grim legacy of death and destruction.

Today, the region is again an area of vital concern to nations around the globe. It is widely recognized as "the most likely flashpoint for World War III."

The continuing arms buildup in the Mideast region is far and away outdistancing the search for peace. As weapons continue to pour in, the potential destructiveness of a future Mideast war is being raised to unparalleled new heights. And now, the involvement of nuclear weapons is a growing possibility.

Military analysts have rightly labelled the Middle East "the most militarized region in the world" and "the world's most dangerous hot spot."

Many are concerned. Many have asked, "Where will it all lead?" Will there be another Middle East war? Will events there spark a nuclear World War III? Newscasters describe the region as "volatile" and "unpredictable."

To many in the modern Western world, the Middle East remains strange and remote. It is probably the most misunderstood region on earth. Myths, misconceptions and

stereotypes abound. Yet few topics are as vital to understand during this momentous last quarter of the 20th century! Superficial understanding of this explosive part of the world will no longer suffice.

Yes, the Middle East is an enigma, a mystery, for many.

The reason?

It is *impossible* to fully understand what is happening in

the Middle East, the past and present seem to be "all jumbled up." And what they perceive is true! Current attitudes in the Middle East spring from deep-rooted spiritual and emotional foundations. The present and future of the Middle East cannot be understood apart from its past. Only against the *broad sweep* of history can we fully appreciate today's fast-moving

headlines—and the unexpected turn of events that lies ahead.

It is also crucial that we understand the biblical *prophecies* for the Mideast region. Prophecy is history written in advance. If we know, in general, where events are leading, today's headlines will take on greater meaning.

A tempest is brewing in the Middle East. A storm is approaching of such magnitude that it will engulf *all nations* in its wake!

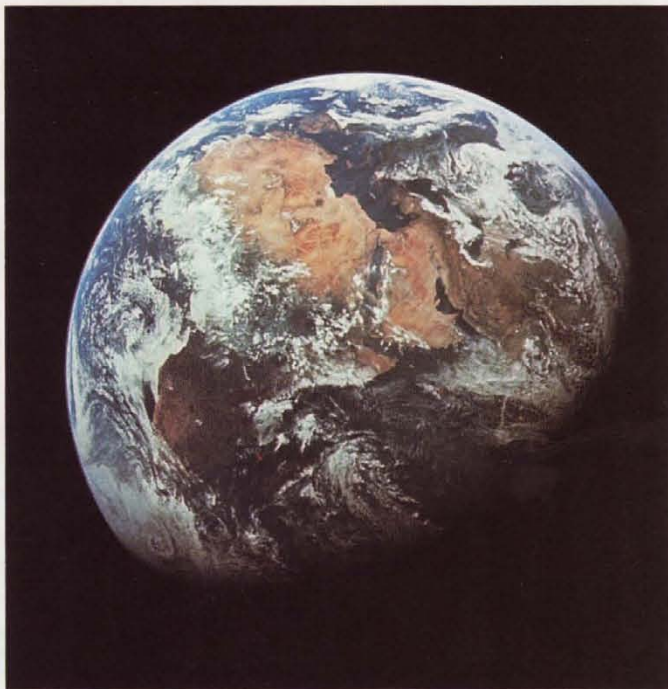
Bible prophecy reveals that the pivotal Mideast region will be at the center of a nightmarish confrontation that will

plunge the entire world into a crisis without parallel in all of history. The region will become the vortex of a struggle for *world control*!

*You* need to understand what Bible prophecy reveals before it is too late! Powerful forces are even now at work in the Middle East that will shape the destiny of mankind for the next 1,000 years! *Your future* is being determined now by what is happening there.

Yet there is *good news* beyond the cataclysmic events that lie just ahead!

We begin with a survey of essential background events that give insight into this complex region. Here is *understanding* you will find in no other source!

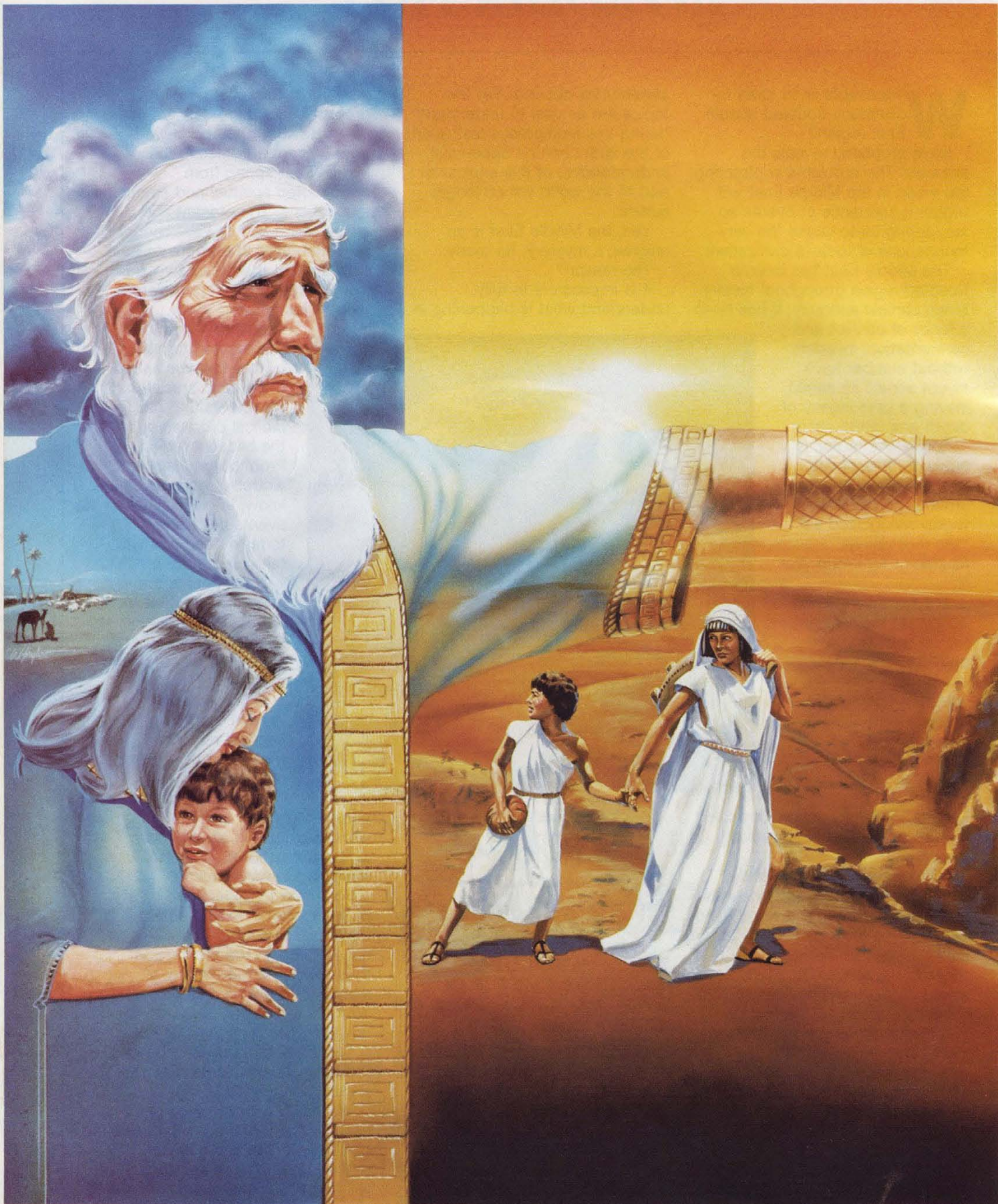


## Bible Prophecy Reveals...

the Middle East today on the basis of the morning's news alone. Newspapers concentrate on day-to-day developments. But today's events—and tomorrow's headlines—have deep *historical* roots.

Travelers often remark that in

Photo: NASA



**T**oday's Mideast conflict involving Arabs and Jews is actually a relatively recent phenomenon. Civilizations of the distant past waged wars there long before the Jews and Arabs existed as a people.

In fact, Western civilization *began* there—in the region commonly called the Fertile Crescent, renowned as “the Cradle of Civilization”—the birthplace and battleground of civilizations since the dawn of history.

The term Fertile Crescent refers to the well-watered crescent-shaped area extending from the Persian (Arabian) Gulf up the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, westward over Syria to the Mediterranean, then curving down along the coast of Palestine to the Nile Valley of Egypt (see map on page 4). It was in this mighty semicircle that the first great civilizations appeared.

The eastern portion of the Fertile Crescent—an alluvial plain encompassed by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers—was anciently known by the Greek name *Mesopotamia*, meaning “land between the rivers.” Some of the most influential cultures in the history of the world flourished on the banks of those rivers: the Sumerian, Assyrian, Babylonian and others.

### Enter the Hebrews

Turn back the pages of biblical history nearly 40 centuries—to the early second millennium B.C.—and you discover an important people coming onto the scene in the Fertile Crescent. A people

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At Sarah's insistence, Abraham sends Hagar the Egyptian and her son Ishmael into the wilderness after the birth of Isaac.

C. Winston Taylor

destined for greatness. The Bible calls them Hebrews.

The Hebrews derived their name from their ancestor Eber or Heber (Gen. 11:16), a great-grandson of Shem, the son of Noah. The Hebrews were thus a *Semitic* people.

Prominent among the Hebrews was the family of Terah, first mentioned in Genesis 11:26. Terah lived in a city of southern Mesopotamia (Iraq today), a great metropolis the Bible calls “Ur of

in pagan idolatrous worship. When he was about 75 years old, God commanded him to travel “unto a land that I will show you” (Gen. 12:1; Acts 7:2-4). God promised, “I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great . . .” (Gen. 12:2).

“So Abram departed” (Gen. 12:4). Obeying God's command, Abram left Haran after the death of his father Terah. On faith, he journeyed to a land he had not seen. Abram and his family followed the southward curve of the Fertile Crescent, “and into the land of Canaan they came” (Gen. 12:5).

When Abram arrived in Canaan, God promised him that the land would one day become the possession of his descendants (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-17). It would therefore come to be known as the Promised Land.

As a result of his obedience, Abram ultimately became the progenitor of numerous tribes and peoples—peoples who would become the *chief actors* in the Mideast drama being played out in *our* day! If we are to understand today's Middle East, it is crucial that we know something of these children of Abraham and their eventful history.

Abraham's nephew Lot became caught up in a rebellion of the city-kings of southern Canaan against their Mesopotamian overlords. Lot was taken captive. Abram responded by destroying the enemy kings and rescuing his nephew. Details are recorded in Genesis 14. It was the forerunner of innumerable hostilities that would take place on that contested soil in the centuries to follow.

History shows that most of the military activity in the Middle East through the millennia of time has focused on that very area, the region popularly called Palestine or the Holy Land. In fact, historians label that blood-soaked soil as the most fought-over strip of land on earth!

## CHAPTER ONE

# The Seed of Abraham

the Chaldees.” Powerful Ur was a flourishing economic and cultural center of that day.

About 1900 B.C.—just before the Elamites sacked and destroyed Ur—Terah and his household left the city and relocated 600 miles northwest to the thriving commercial city of Haran, in the fertile Balikh valley of northern Syria (Gen. 11:31).

Among Terah's sons was Abram (meaning “high father”), who would later be renamed Abraham (*Ibrahim* in Arabic). Abram was a descendant in the ninth generation from Shem, the son of Noah.

Centuries later, the three great religions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam would all trace their spiritual beginnings back to this great patriarch. Abraham would also become the physical progenitor of several great nations, as we shall see.

And significantly, the great figures of three world religions—Moses, Jesus and Muhammad—would all be lineal descendants of this great man of God!

Abram was one of the few men of his time who did not take part

In a sense, the fate of this land had been sealed at creation. Geographically, it was made the keystone in the arch of three continents. It was the ancient crossroads between East and West, the strategic land bridge lying astride the traditional routes of trade and communication between Europe, Africa and Asia. And as such, it became the object of perennial struggle.

### Son of the Bondwoman

The battle of Genesis 14 was fol-

Ocean—at the very focal point of world attention! The Arab peoples—today numbering over 120 million, in over 20 countries—are destined to play a significant role in the development of future events, as shall be shown.

The biblical story of Isaac, Jacob and their descendants is known to many. Most readers are familiar with the accounts of their enslavement in Egypt, the Exodus under Moses, the period of Joshua and the Judges, the reign of King David, the construction of

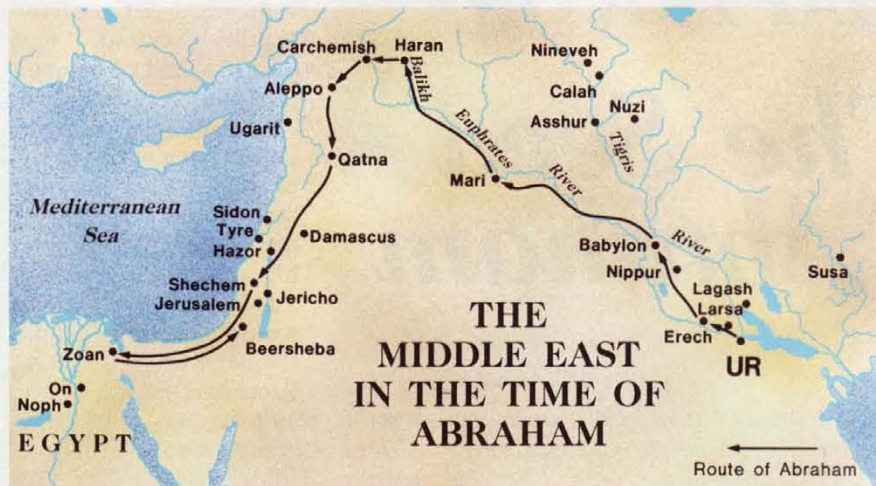
the Egyptian, her handmaid. Sarai would thus have a child by proxy. Abram agreed, and Hagar conceived a child (Gen. 16:1-4).

But friction soon developed between Sarai and Hagar. Sarai began to treat Hagar harshly. When she could endure it no longer, Hagar fled into the desert. There God instructed her to return to Sarai, promising, “I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude” (Gen. 16:10).

God further informed Hagar: “Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael [meaning “God shall hear”]; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction. And he will be a wild man [Hebrew *pere adam*, literally, “a wild ass of a man”]; his hand will be against every man, and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren [literally, “he shall *defy* all his kinsmen”]” (verses 11-12).

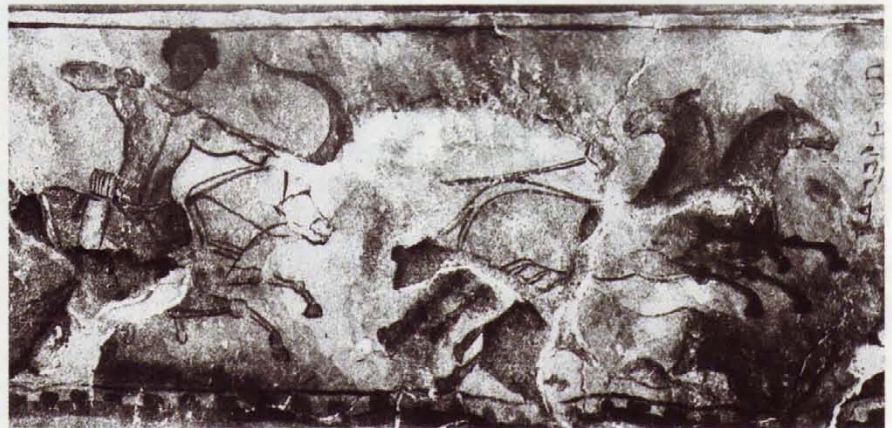
Here is an important prophecy about the Arab peoples!

The phrase “a wild ass of a man” is not an insulting one. On the contrary, the wild ass was the “aristocrat” of animal life in the



A third century A.D. wall painting (right) from the ancient Syrian city of Doura-Europus depicts a desert hunt for the prized wild ass.

Yale University Art Gallery,  
Dura-Europos Collection



lowed by a momentous event: the conception of Ishmael, and his birth when Abram was 86 years old (Genesis 16).

Ishmael (*Ismail* in Arabic) was the son of Abram by Hagar the Egyptian, whom Pharaoh Sesostris II had given to Abram and Sarai as a maidservant (Gen. 12:16).

Why was Ishmael’s birth significant? Because Ishmael would become the progenitor of most of today’s Arab world. The Arabs are essentially an *Ishmaelite* race!

Today, the Arab world is an area of vital concern to nations around the globe. Both political and economic considerations place that vast region—stretching from the Atlantic to the Indian

Solomon’s temple. Not nearly as familiar is the story of Ishmael and his offspring. Yet to understand today’s complex events in the Middle East, we *must* know something about those peoples.

First, notice the circumstances of Ishmael’s birth:

Abram’s wife Sarai was barren. Despairing of bearing children herself, Sarai suggested that Abram obtain an heir by Hagar

desert. It was the choicest beast of the hunt. It led a noble, free and untamed existence in the deserts south and east of Canaan.

The description aptly befits the proud and free descendants of Ishmael, known for their wandering and sometimes lawless and free-booting lifestyle. The Arabs’ unconquerable love of liberty and independence is well known. And, indeed, their hand *has* been fre-

quently against those peoples who would deprive them of their freedoms. Throughout its long history, Arab culture has successfully withstood all assaults, though politically the Arabs have at times found themselves temporarily under a foreign yoke. And they *have* defied their neighboring kinsmen—and continue to do so to this day!

Hagar obeyed God's command to return and submit herself to Sarai. Soon afterwards she presented Abram with a son. Abram was 86 years old (Gen. 16:15-16).

Thirteen years went by. During that time, according to Islamic tradition, Abram and Ishmael built the cube-shaped shrine called the Kaaba (*Ka'bah*) at Mecca. In later centuries, the Kaaba would become Islam's foremost holy place—the most sacred spot on earth—believed to rest directly beneath the heavenly throne of God. Muslims would turn their faces toward it during their five daily prayers, and visit it on the required pilgrimage or *Hajj*.

When Abram reached 99 years of age, God appeared to him (renaming him *Abraham*, meaning “father of many nations”) and announced that his wife Sarai (henceforth to be called *Sarah*, meaning “princess”) would bear him a son!

Abraham and Sarah were incredulous. Moreover, Abraham had grown to love Ishmael dearly, and desired that he be his heir and receive the birthright blessings. “O that Ishmael might live before thee!” Abraham entreated God (Gen. 17:18). But the birthright was denied to Ishmael.

God replied, “Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and

I will establish my covenant *with him . . .*” (Gen. 17:19). But God understood Abraham's concern for Ishmael's future, and assured him:

“And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; *twelve princes* shall he beget, and I



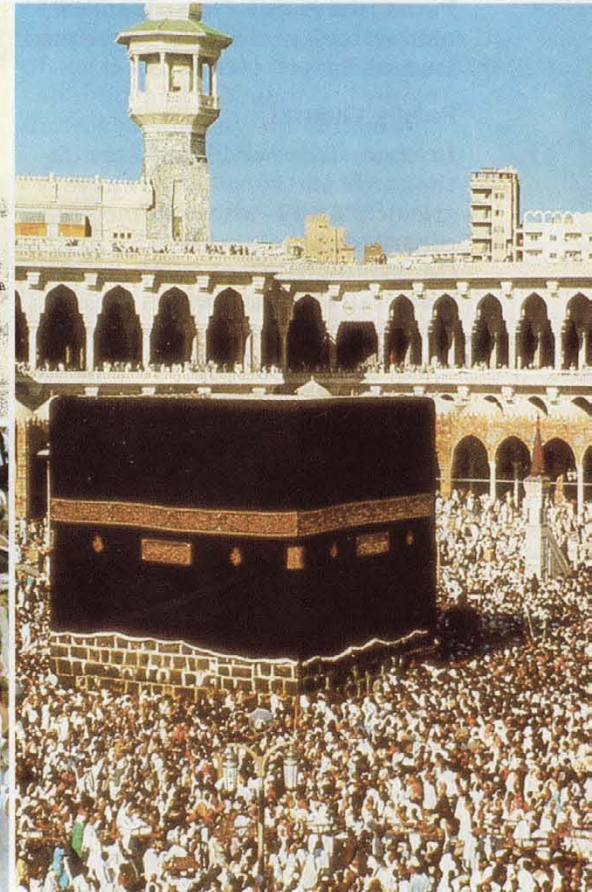
According to the Koran, Abraham and Ishmael “raised the foundations” of the Kaaba shrine at Mecca (above, right). For centuries, Muslims have traveled there on pilgrimage (top). Modern-day pilgrims (bottom).

*Culver Pictures; Elkovssy—Sygma; Lochon—Gamma-Liaison*

will make him a *great nation*” (verse 20; emphasis added).

After the birth of Isaac, Hagar and Ishmael were sent away at Sarah's insistence. “Cast out this bondwoman and her son,” Sarah demanded (Gen. 21:10). The reason? Ishmael had mocked little Isaac at a feast celebrating his weaning (verse 9; see also Gal. 4:29). He had belittled whom the others were praising.

Ishmael's was not a spirit of implacable hatred and murder against Isaac, simply one of envy and rivalry. Ishmael's position in the family had been radically altered by Isaac's birth. This had wounded his proud spirit, and provoked him to jealousy. Angered by his blighted hopes,



Ishmael had resorted to insulting expressions of mockery.

Time has not softened this spirit of envy. Attitudes and historical perspectives are often transmitted by father to son from generation to generation. The effects of the domestic rivalry in the household of Abraham are being felt to this day in the ongoing Arab-Israeli confrontation. Again today, rights and precedence have become issues between the descendants of Ishmael and Isaac.

Sarah was adamant that Ishmael should not inherit along with Isaac. God instructed Abraham to do as Sarah desired, but he reassured Abraham that “also of the son of the bondwoman will I make

a nation, because he is thy seed” (Gen. 21:13).

Ishmael, too, was destined to become a great nation!

God looked after Ishmael, this half-Hebrew, half-Egyptian son of Abraham. “And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer. And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran [the Negev Desert]; and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt” (verses 20-21).

### Family Quarrel

In time, Ishmael became the father of 12 sons—Abraham’s grandchildren—whose names are recorded in Genesis 25:13-16. (Muhammad, prophet of the Islamic faith in the seventh century A.D., would rightly claim descent from Ishmael’s son Kedar.) Ishmael also had a daughter, called Mahalath or Bashemath, who would later marry Esau, a grandson of Abraham. The descendants of Ishmael and Esau would remain closely associated throughout their history. (In prophetic Psalm 83—as we shall see in Chapter Four—the descendants of Esau and those of Ishmael are found in alliance against end-time Israel.)

As God had foretold, a great people sprang from Ishmael. Today’s Arabs are the family of Ishmael grown great!

The relationship between the Ishmaelite Arabs and the biblical Israelites is thus clear: Ishmael was the elder half-brother of Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah. Isaac, in turn, had twin sons, Esau and Jacob. From Jacob—later renamed Israel—descended the Jews and the other tribes of Israel.

The Israelites and the Arabs are *cousins!*

Consider the additional fact that Edomites intermarried with the stocks of Ishmael and Canaan. The Edomites were descendants of Esau (who was also called Edom), the elder son of Isaac and Rebekah.

Earlier, when Jacob and Esau were yet in Rebekah’s womb, “the children struggled together within her” (Gen. 25:22). God explained that “two nations are in thy

womb” (verse 23)—the nations of Edom and Israel. Both brothers were destined to father a great nation.

As firstborn, Esau was the legal inheritor of the birthright, which fell to the eldest son in each generation. But Esau undervalued it and sold it to Jacob for a bowl of red lentil soup (Gen. 25:28-34). Later, Jacob—disguising himself as Esau—tricked Isaac into bestowing upon him the blessing confirming the birthright (Gen. 27). By this piece of deception, Jacob earned Esau’s implacable anger. Bitterness and vengeance filled Esau’s heart. “And Esau hated Jacob . . .” (Gen. 27:41).

Forty centuries have not sufficed to wipe out the effects of this deep-seated enmity between Esau and Jacob! The two peoples have continued in their antagonism up to this present day! Historically, the Edomites—especially the Amalekites, the chief tribe of the Edomites—have been bitter foes of Israel.

Significantly, descendants of Esau mingled and intermarried with Ishmaelites and their neighbors. As kinsmen, a close affinity existed between them. Some *yeshivas* (rabbinical schools) in Israel today teach that the Palestinian Arabs—the most ardent adversaries of the Israeli state—are Amalek. There may indeed be some validity to this notion, in view of the prophecy of conflict between Amalek and Israel from generation to generation (Ex. 17:16).

A mixture of Edomite with Ishmaelite in the Palestinian bloodline would shed further light on the *ancient roots* of today’s bitter conflict over the land of Palestine.

East of the Jordan River the Moabites and Ammonites—descendants of the daughters of Lot, Abraham’s nephew (Gen. 19:37-38)—also merged their interests with the Ishmaelites. The descendants of the ancient Moabites and Ammonites today live in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

Another line with which the Ishmaelites intermarried was that of the Keturahites. Those peoples were descendants of Keturah,

whom Abraham married after the death of Sarah. Abraham and Keturah had six sons (Gen. 25:2), some of whose progeny—which included the renowned Midianites—became closely associated with the house of Ishmael (Gen. 37:25-28; Judg. 8:22-24).

Geopoliticians have generally overlooked the part human nature plays in family quarrels. And as we have now seen, today’s Middle Eastern conflict *is* a family squabble! This understanding gives the Arab-Israeli dispute a dimension of historical depth unrealized by most observers today.

### Origin of the name Arab

Ishmael died at the age of 137 (Gen. 25:17). As God had promised, his 12 sons grew into “a great nation.” In subsequent centuries, these Ishmaelites intermingled with related peoples living near them, as has been shown. But Ishmael was clearly the preeminent forefather of the Arab world.

Why, then, are not Ishmael’s descendants called “Ishmaelites” or “Ishmaelites” today? How did the Ishmaelites acquire the name “Arab”?

The answer may come as a surprise: There were “Arabs” *long before* Abraham and Ishmael!

The peninsula between the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf was *already* known as “Arabia” before Ishmael was born. The word “Arab” is derived from an ancient Semitic root meaning “west” or “dusk”. It was first applied by the ancient inhabitants of Mesopotamia to designate the peoples to the *west* of the Euphrates valley. The same word can also mean “sterile,” implying a desert region.

Thus, anyone who dwelt in the vast arid peninsula west and south of Babylonia came to be known as *Aribi* or *Arabu*—“Arabs”!

Arabian history begins with the life of the biblical Joktan, whom the Arabs call *Kahtan* or *Qahtan*.

In our modern 20th century, skeptics dismiss the Bible as myth and legend. In doing so, they discard the only accurate source of information about the origins of today’s nations and peoples. Notice what the Bible reveals about

the family of Joktan and its relationship to the Ishmaelites, supplemented by the careful records of Arab historians:

Joktan was one of the sons of the patriarch Eber (*Abir* in Arabic), mentioned earlier as father of the Hebrews (Gen. 10:25). Arab scholars consider this Joktan the ultimate forefather of the *southern* Arabs, those living on or near the southern coast of the Arabian peninsula.

One of Joktan's 13 sons was Jerah (in Arabic, *Yarab*), men-

the destinies of the Ishmaelites and Jorhamites.

Kedar, in turn, was the ancestor of Adnan (or *Qais*), considered the progenitor of all the tribes claiming origin in *northern* Arabia. Adnan's line would become the more important family of the Arabs. Many descendants of Joktan would migrate into northern Arabia before the coming of Islam and intermarry with the more numerous Ishmaelites of Adnan's line. Adding even greater honor to this line, Arab genealogists would

## Israel Scattered

Meanwhile, the tribes of Israel were also caught up in national upheaval. The northern 10 tribes (called the "House of Israel") were taken into captivity by the Assyrians in the late eighth century B.C. and disappeared from history. Early in the sixth century B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon overran the southern tribes (the "House of Judah" or Jews). Jerusalem was captured and Solomon's Temple destroyed. The city was burned and its inhabitants carried to Babylon. Some decades later, the Persians permitted the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild the Temple and Jerusalem. (Request your free copy of our booklet *The United States and Britain in Prophecy* for a fuller account of those momentous events and their significance.)

Later, Judah came within the orbit of the Roman Empire. In A.D. 70—about four decades

after Jesus' crucifixion—Jerusalem was again destroyed, by legions under the command of the Roman general Titus. Seeking to obliterate the Jewish identity of the land, the Romans changed its name to *Palestine*, derived from the Philistines (*Peleste*) who lived there in early times.

The Jewish people were dispersed, driven from nation to nation, scattered over the known world, with no home of their own. But wherever they went, they carried with them an undying love for their Promised Land. For nearly 1,900 years, that land would be ruled by foreign governments. Those centuries of exile outside of Palestine would come to be known as the *Diaspora* or Dispersion.

Meanwhile, as the Holy Land lay under Roman and Byzantine rulers, the sons of Ishmael were growing in numbers and strength. The stage was being set for a major upheaval—a violent and unexpected eruption of the Arabs out of their ancient desert homeland.

Titus, conqueror of Jerusalem (below). Detail of arch of Titus in Rome commemorates his victory over the Jews in A.D. 70 (right).

Gene Hogberg—  
The Plain Truth Magazine



list Adnan as a forebear of the prophet Muhammad.

Thus, after making due allowance for intermarriage with Joktanites, Edomites and other related stocks, the Arab peoples of today may still be regarded as largely an *Ishmaelite* race.

In Bible usage, the name *Kedar* is often employed as the collective name of the Arabs generally, as Kedar apparently had been the largest and most conspicuous of all the Ishmaelite tribes. The tribe's importance can be inferred from the mention of the rich "princes of Kedar" in Ezekiel 27:21 and elsewhere.

The prophet Isaiah, in his "burden [or proclamation] upon Arabia" (Isa. 21:13-17) prophesied the demise of the "glory of Kedar"—a reference to the invasion of Arabia by the Assyrian king Sargon in 716 B.C., during the wars between Egypt and Assyria. The glory of Kedar did fade, and the Arabs slipped for many centuries into obscurity.

tioned in Genesis 10:26. Jerah is believed to have founded the kingdom of Yemen at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula.

Jerah's brother Hadoram (*Jorham* to the Arabs) is believed to have founded the Hejaz, an important kingdom along the western coast of Arabia, where Jorhamite princes reigned until the days of Ishmael. (The holy Islamic cities of Mecca and Medina are located in this Hejaz region.) According to Arab genealogists, the daughter of a Jorhamite prince named Mudad later married Ishmael. From that marriage was born Ishmael's illustrious son Kedar (*Qaidar* in Arabic). This marriage alliance bound tightly





**T**hrough the period of the Medo-Persian kingdom and on into Roman times, the sons of Ishmael lived in semi-isolation from the rest of the world, breeding camels, goats and sheep in the deserts of the Arabian Peninsula and warring among themselves. Divided, they had little impact or influence on the world scene.

When it came to religion, the Arabs were idol worshipers. The great temple in Mecca—overseen by the high-ranking Koreish (or *Quraysh*) tribe—is said to have contained 365 idols, one for each day of the year. Mecca's main sources of revenue were the profitable pilgrimages to this ancient shrine.

At the beginning of the seventh century A.D.—nearly six centuries after the death of Jesus—the curtain again rises on Ishmael's descendants. Onto the stage strides the most illustrious of all Ishmael's progeny, the prophet Muhammad. He was a member of the Hashemite family (*Beni Hashim* in Arabic) of the powerful Koreish tribe.

According to Muslim belief, the archangel Gabriel appeared to Muhammad at Mt. Hira near Mecca, first in A.D. 610, and imparted to him revealed wisdom from God. This and later revelations would be collected to form the Koran (*Quran*), the Islamic holy book.

Muhammad (meaning "highly praised") became a zealous and courageous preacher of monothe-

ism—the belief in *one God*. The old Koreish aristocracy feared that Muhammad's new religion might threaten their leadership and cut into their revenues from the pilgrimages to the shrine of idols. Their plots against his life proved unsuccessful.

Despite stiff opposition, Muhammad succeeded in abolishing the idolatry that had long held sway over pagan Arabia and bringing his fellow Arabs a new monotheistic faith called *Islam*

## CHAPTER TWO

# The Banner of Islam

(meaning "submission to God"), based on belief in a single, all-powerful God, Allah.

(Islam is pronounced Is-LAM, stressing the last syllable. Allah, the Arabic word for God, is pronounced ahl-LAH, again placing stress on the final syllable. A follower of the Islamic faith is called a Muslim or Moslem, meaning "one who submits." Muslims should never be referred to as "Muhammadans," for this implies they worship Muhammad. Contrary to popular opinion, Muslims do not venerate Muhammad as a divine being, nor do they worship him in any way.)

Muhammad's preaching forged the divided Arab tribes into a socially, culturally and religiously united people. Islam provided them for the first time with a powerful unifying force, making it possible for them to aspire to greatness as a nation.

The one-sentence Islamic creed, called the *shahadah* ("testimony"), summarizes the core of Muslim belief: *La illaha ila Allah, wa Muhammadun rasul Allah*—"There is no god but God, and

Muhammad is the Messenger of God." A solemn, heart-felt recitation of this profession of faith (just eight words in Arabic) is the sole requirement for becoming a Muslim.

### 800 Million Muslims!

In the eyes of his followers, Muhammad held a lofty office. He was the "Seal of the Prophets"—the last and greatest in a series of messengers from God which had included Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus.

Muslims believe that Muhammad completed the work begun by his predecessors, bringing God's final and absolute word to all mankind. They claim he was the *Paraclete* or Comforter, whom Jesus prophesied would guide men into "all truth" (John 16:7, 13).

And through the centuries since Muhammad's death, *multiple millions* have believed this message!

Today's Islamic world encompasses more than 40 countries. Geographically, the Islamic world represents fully *15 percent* of the world's land mass. There are over *800 million* Muslims in the world today—*one person in six!*

Here is a power bloc that cannot be ignored—an enormous bloc with great potential influence, holding in its hands the economic fate of many nations. Today's much-publicized "Islamic revival"—a resurgence of Islamic fundamentalism—has sparked concern among Western observers who foresee enormous implications should hard-line Islamic conservatives gain further influence in the strategic Middle East region. Yes, even today—nearly 14 centuries after Muhammad—Islam remains a force to be reckoned with on the world's geopolitical and diplomatic fronts!

Unrealized by many in the West, the majority of Muslims are not Arabs. Islam was *born* among the Arabs, but it has spread *far beyond* Arab lands. In fact, *over*

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Sixteenth-century portrayal of the prophet Muhammad receiving divine revelation from the angel Gabriel at Mt. Hira in A.D. 610.

Photo: E. Trachman—Telephoto

three fourths of the Islamic world lies outside the Arabic-speaking heartland!

Besides the Arabs, there are today hundreds of millions of non-Arabic-speaking peoples who also follow the Muslim faith, including the inhabitants of Indonesia (the world's most populous Islamic nation, with 150 million Muslims), Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Turkey and Iran. Muslims in India number 82 million; in China, about 40 million.

Even in the Soviet Union, Islam is deeply entrenched. A Muslim population explosion in the Soviet Central Asian republics is becoming a major concern to Kremlin planners, worried over the implications of shifting ethnic balances. By the year 2000, every second child born in the Soviet Union will be of Muslim parentage!

A survey of the turbulent history of Islam will be useful in showing how the stage was set for the crucial events of our 20th century—and for prophetic events that lie ahead.

### Succession Crisis

The death of Muhammad (June 8, A.D. 632) came as an unexpected shock, and led to confusion and uncertainty within the Muslim community. The Prophet—master of the Arabian peninsula—had left no sons. Neither had he dictated a political or religious testament to provide clear guidelines for succession to the leadership of the Muslim Empire, by then fully one third the size of today's continental United States.

Muhammad's beloved first wife, Khadija, had given him two sons, Qasim and Abdullah, and four daughters: Zainab, Ruqayyah, Fatima and Umm Kulthum. But both sons had died in infancy, and of the daughters only one—the beautiful Fatima—had survived her father and produced children who lived. (None of the many wives Muhammad married after Khadija's death bore children who survived infancy.) It is thus through Fatima that all Muhammad's present-day descendants (who are called *sharifs* and *sayyids*) trace their descent.

Fatima's husband was Ali ibn Abi Talib, Muhammad's first cousin and adopted son. In the early days of the faith, the teenaged Ali had been the Prophet's second convert to Islam after Khadija, Muhammad's wife.

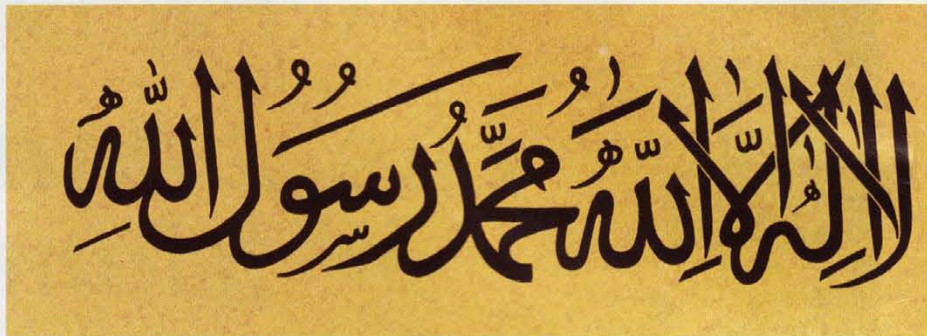
Ali and Fatima had two sons, Hasan and Hussein (Husain). These were Muhammad's only grandchildren, and he was profoundly devoted to them. He called them his "two precious plants," the chief treasures of his life. At Muhammad's death they

year of 354 or 355 days. Because a lunar year is eleven days shorter than a solar year, Islamic months gradually "move" through the Gregorian calendar, working their way backward through the seasons. As a result, conversion tables must be consulted to deter-

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The Islamic creed or *shahadah* (below) declares, "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God."

Bill Wilson



were but six or seven years old.

Many Arabs felt that Ali—nearest in blood to the Prophet—should succeed Muhammad as head of the Muslims. He was, after all, Muhammad's adopted son, son-in-law, cousin and the father of the Prophet's only grandchildren. But other Arabs supported alternate candidates, men of wealth and position in the Koreish tribe.

Clearly, *someone* had to take charge. But who?

After much disputation, a wealthy Meccan cloth merchant named Abu Bekr was elected. A devout and humble man, Abu Bekr had been the Prophet's closest friend and adviser. One of the first to believe in the new religion, Abu Bekr had been the Prophet's sole companion on the *Hijra* (anglicized as *Hegira*), Muhammad's epoch-making camel-back flight from hostile Mecca to Medina in A.D. 622. The *Hijra* had marked the start of Islam as a world force, and from that event Muslims date time.

(To Muslims, the year A.D. 622 is A.H. 1 [Latin, *anno hegirae*, "in the year of the *hijra*."] The Islamic calendar is based on a lunar

mine corresponding "A.D." years for the Islamic "A.H." years.)

Moreover, Abu Bekr had been appointed to take the place of the Prophet as leader of public prayer during Muhammad's last illness. And he was the father of Muhammad's favorite wife, the beautiful black-eyed Ayesha.

Abu Bekr thus assumed the leadership of the Muslim community, succeeding to Muhammad's political and administrative functions. He was accorded the title *Khalifah rasul Allah*, "Successor to the Messenger of God." (The title is usually anglicized as "caliph.") He successfully consolidated the support of the tribes within the Arabian peninsula.

Ali—Fatima's husband—was bypassed, to the chagrin of his supporters.

With Abu Bekr's election began the historic institution of the Islamic Caliphate (the office or dominion of a caliph). It would endure nearly 1,300 years, until abolished in March, 1924, by the Turkish Republic. The caliph was Head of State of the Muslim community, successor to the temporal (secular) authority of the Prophet. (As the "seal" or last of the

prophets, Muhammad could have no *spiritual* successor.)

### Commander of the Faithful

Just before his death, Abu Bekr appointed Omar ibn al-Khattab as his successor. Caliph Omar (also spelled Umar) was the first to assume the illustrious title *Amir al-Muminin*, "Commander of the Faithful." It was during Omar's decade-long reign that the first great wave of Islamic territorial expansion occurred. The children of Ishmael began to push outward from their ancient desert homeland.

Early in the seventh century A.D., much of the known world was divided between two great rival powers. To the north and west of Arabia was the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire, centered at Constantinople (Byzantium). The

Exhausted by long and destructive conflicts, the two warring monarchies had become "sitting ducks" for the vigorous new Islamic power storming out of the trackless deserts of Arabia.

An able general and superb strategist, Caliph Omar proved a formidable foe against both empires. To cries of *Allahu Akbar!* ("God is Greatest!")—the Islamic call to arms—camel-mounted Arab warriors swept with lightning speed into vulnerable neighboring territories, carrying the Divine Word—and the sword.

Not since the days of Alexander the Great had such swift and far-reaching conquests been seen. The world marvelled at the astonishing vitality of these scimitar-wielding followers of a deceased Arab prophet. The new religion of Islam was in the full strength of its youth. "The Believers smote and slaughtered till the going down of the sun," recorded one early Arab historian, "and the fear of the Arabs fell upon all kings." Even the Arabs themselves were astonished at the rapidity of their con-

ward ever-distant horizons. Once-invincible armies fell like ripe fruit before the saber of Allah. Arabia moved into the forefront of history.

As Yazdegerd, the Sasanid Persian emperor, faced oncoming Muslim forces, he declared to the Arabian ambassadors in a now-famous exchange: "I have seen and known many nations, but none so miserable as you! Mice and serpents are your food! How dare you call upon me to surrender and worship your God when it is evident that you have been driven to your exploits not by the desire for Paradise, but by hunger for bread and dates?"

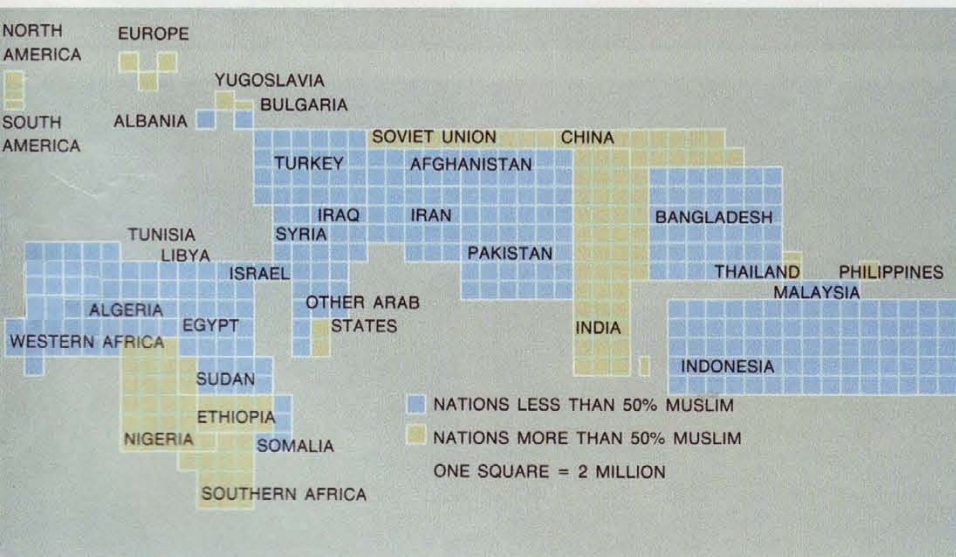
To this the Arab ambassadors replied: "It is true, we were miserable men; but God took pity on us and sent us a Prophet who taught us to value men not according to their wealth or arrogant nobility but according to their rectitude before God and his commandments. . . . We are poor, and we have come to cast our poverty on you, stripping you of all your goods in the name of the one true God."

When his capital, Ctesiphon, was occupied by the Arabs, Yazdegerd fled and was slain.

Possibly the greatest prize of all in the eyes of the Muslims was the conquest of Jerusalem, early in 638. Called *Al-Kuds*—"the Holy"—by the Arabs, Jerusalem is the third holiest city of Islam after Mecca (Muhammad's birthplace and site of the Kaaba) and Medina (Muhammad's burial site). It was from Jerusalem that Muhammad is said to have ascended to heaven by night on his winged steed, Burak. And Muslims believe it was there that Abraham (*Ibrahim*) had prepared to sacrifice Ishmael (not Isaac, as in Jewish and Christian belief).

After 10 years of conquest, the caliphate of Omar met an abrupt end. In November, 644, while leading prayers in the mosque of Medina, Omar—Commander of the Faithful—was assassinated by a Persian slave. A body of electors bestowed the caliphate on Othman ibn Affan, an early convert to Islam and a close companion of

The "Islamic Crescent" stretches from West Africa to Southeast Asia. Sizes of countries on map below are proportional to their Islamic populations. *Map: Jeffrey S. Dowd*



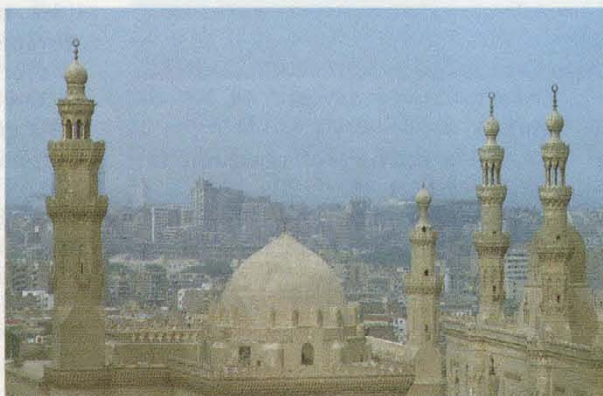
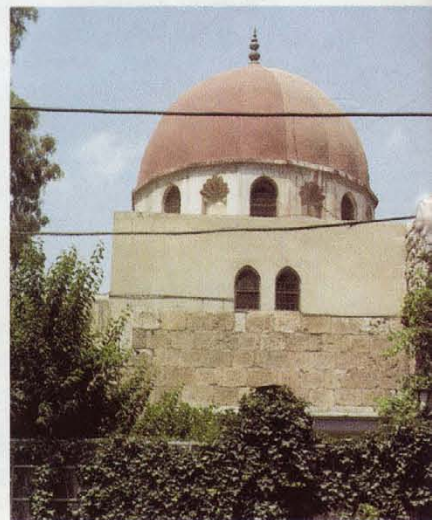
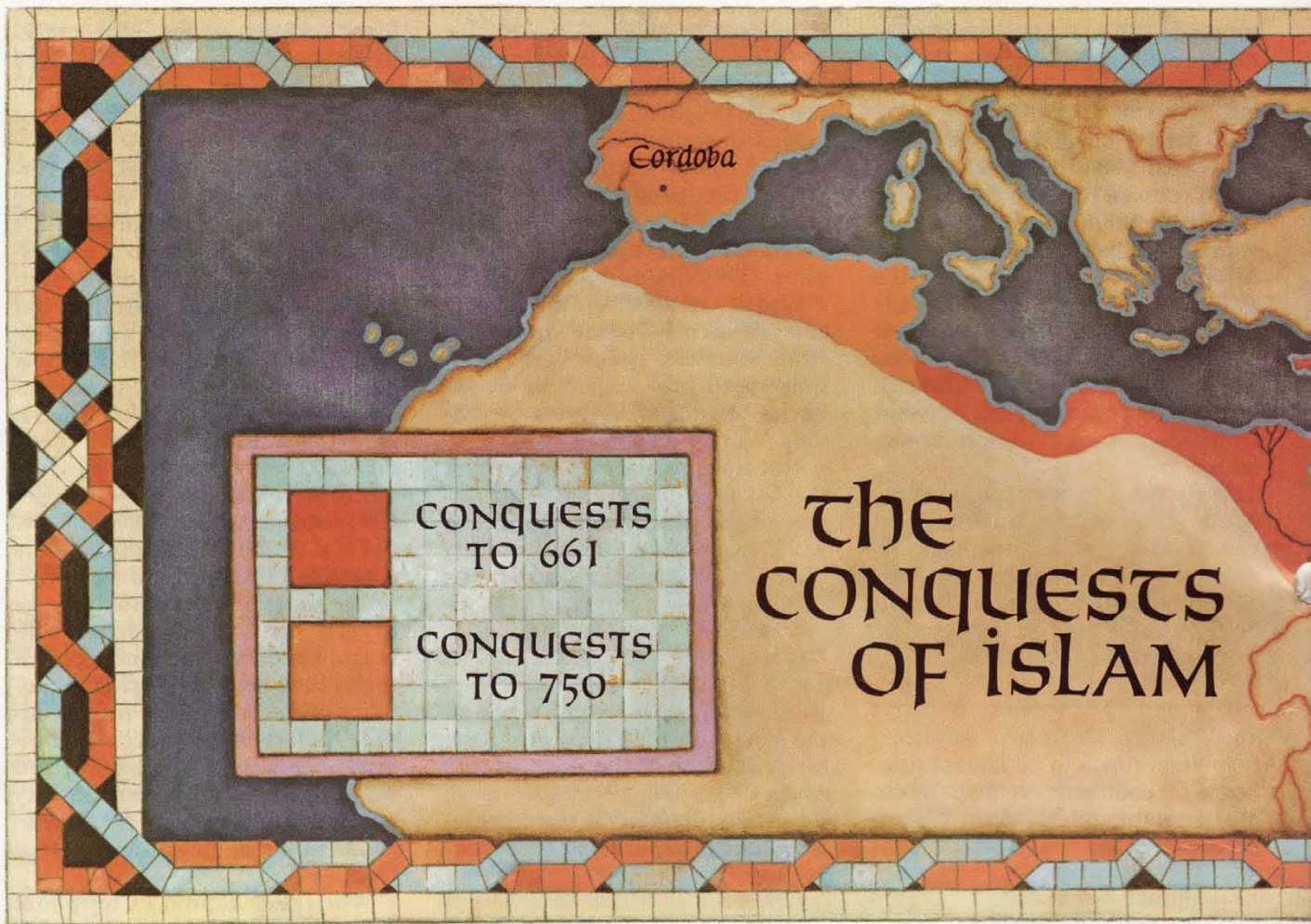
Byzantine Empire controlled Asia Minor and much of North Africa and the Near East. To the northeast of Arabia was Byzantium's longtime adversary, the Sasanid Empire of Persia.

Byzantium and Persia were the two "superpowers" of the day. But the protracted rivalry between them had sapped their strength.

quests.

And a century of conquest lay yet ahead!

Neighboring lands fell like dominoes. Syria and Palestine were taken in 635-6. Iraq was next to succumb, in 637. Egypt and Persia (Iran) were brought under Muslim rule by 641. Muslim armies moved relentlessly on to-



From left: Court of the Lions at the Alhambra, palace of medieval Moorish monarchs of Granada, Spain; courtyard of Omayyad mosque, Damascus; Cairo skyline; tomb of Saladin, Damascus. Dan Deha; Keith Stump—*The Plain Truth Magazine*; H. Trachman—*Telephoto*; Keith Stump—*The Plain Truth Magazine*



Expanding from their Arabian heartland, Muslim armies subjugated vast areas (map, left); Below: Islamic design, Iran; detail at the Alhambra; evening view of Blue Mosque in Istanbul.

Below: E. Trachman—Telephoto; David Ryan; Frerck—The Stock Market; Map: Daniel Andreasen

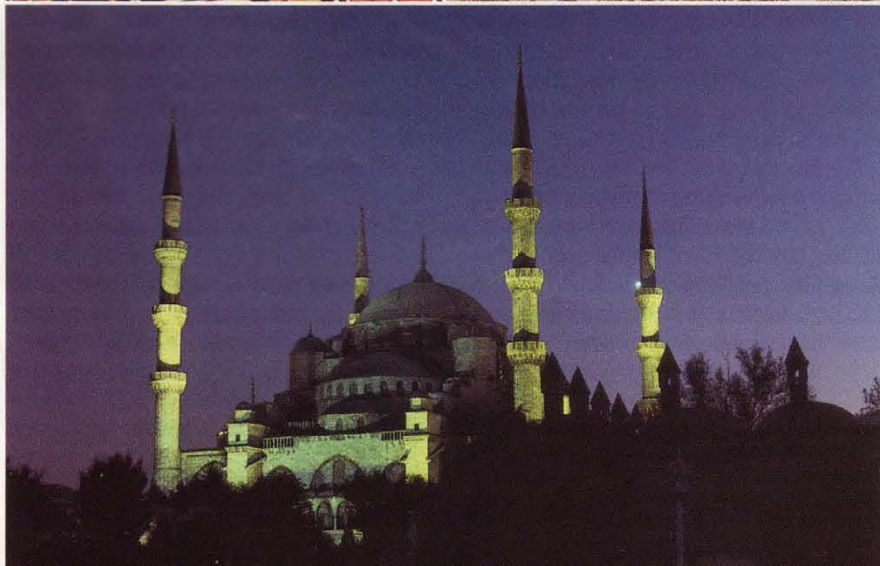
the Prophet. Again, Ali's claim to rulership was rejected.

It was during Othman's 12-year reign (A.D. 644-656) that the Koran was completed in its present form. Eighteen years earlier, many of the best Koran reciters—those who knew the scriptures by heart—had fallen in battle. Fearing that the knowledge of the Koran might be lost, Caliph Abu Bekr had ordered the scholar Zayd ibn Thabit to collect the sacred verses from all available sources. Zayd copied down on sheets whatever he could find at the time.

In subsequent years, many diverse texts and variant versions had appeared in different parts of the Islamic empire. To erase all doubt as to the correct reading, Othman resolved to establish an official version. In 651 he asked Zayd to head a learned committee to produce an authoritative written version by comparing all the available written source materials and consulting the "living texts" (i.e., Koran reciters). By this means an official text, today known as the "Othmanic recension," was established.

Muslims believe the Koran (meaning "reading" or "recitation") to be the final revelation of God, for all times and all peoples, superseding all previous revelations (including the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures—the Bible) and correcting the alleged errors and textual corruptions that had crept into Christianity and Judaism.

The Koran is, to Muslims, the literal Word of God (*Kalimat Allah*). Its author, they believe, was *God himself*, not Muhammad. In length the Koran is about the size of the Christian New Testament. It consists of 114 chapters or *suras*. The first words of the Koran are *Bism'illah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim*—"In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate."





Othman was assassinated in Medina, the seat of the caliphate, in June, 656. His death was significant in that it marked the start of open religious and political conflicts within the Islamic community.

### Origin of the Shiites

With the passing of Othman, leadership of the Faithful fell, at last, to Muhammad's aging son-in-law, Ali. During the reigns of the first three caliphs, Ali had lived in quiet retirement as a religious scholar. Now the high-risk office devolved to him.

By his longtime supporters, Ali was regarded as the first *rightful* caliph. Most Muslims accepted him as the *fourth* caliph. Others bitterly *opposed* his succession.

Ali's caliphate was plagued by continual uprisings and rebellions. The five tragic years of his reign ended in his assassination by a fanatic. Muawiya, head of the Omayyad (or Umayyad) branch of the Koreish tribe and nephew of the late Caliph Othman, immediately assumed the leadership of Islam, wresting the office from the sons of Ali.

This development brought to a head the longstanding dispute over the right to leadership. Some Muslims continued to maintain that the leadership of Islam had to remain within the family of Muhammad. They asserted that Ali and his descendants *only* had the right to rule. These supporters of Ali's family were called the

Entry of Caliph Omar into Jerusalem in A.D. 638 (above); "Dome of the Rock" shrine (right) was later constructed on site previously occupied by Omar's mosque. *Historical Pictures Service; The Plain Truth Magazine*

*Shiat Ali* ("party of Ali"), or *Shiites* for short. (They are also called Shiis or Shiahhs.)

The *majority* of Muslims, however, believed that a leader could be chosen from among all qualified candidates, regardless of their ancestry. This majority became known as *Sunni* Muslims—a reference to the *sunna*, the "path" or "way" of the Prophet, the orthodox code of Islamic practice based on Muhammad's acts and sayings. Unlike the Shiites, the Sunnis have historically accepted the temporal authority of the caliphs.

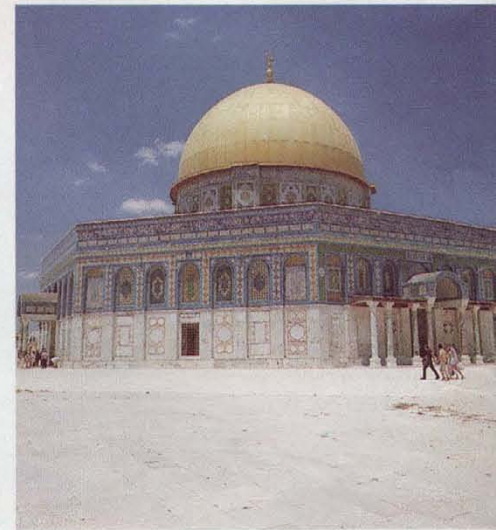
The more numerous and powerful Sunnis won out, and the minority Shiites grudgingly endured the rule of the Sunni "usurper" caliphs who were not of Muhammad's bloodline through Ali and Fatima. But the Shiites did not abandon belief in the preeminence of Ali's family.

Then, in 680, Ali's son Hussein—Muhammad's grandson—and 72 of his relatives were massacred by foes of Ali's family at Karbala (in modern Iraq). The bloody incident triggered an uproar in the Muslim world.

It was a black day for the Shiites—but now they had a martyr. Nurtured by Hussein's blood, the

Shiite sect would grow in number and resolve, laying up a store of bitterness that would be drawn upon time and again in succeeding centuries.

Since that time, numerous political, theological, philosophical, legal and ritual differences have further widened the breach between Sunni and Shiite, though they agree on almost all the basic essentials of Islam. Of the 800 million Muslims in the world today,



85 percent—about 680 million—are Sunnis. Fifteen percent—120 million—are Shiites. Shiism, in turn, has split into an array of subjects and offshoots.

Shiite communities are sprinkled throughout the Muslim world. Shiites are most heavily concentrated in non-Arab Iran, where they are currently led by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. (The title *Ayatollah* means "reflection of Allah.") Shiites are also found in large numbers in southern Iraq. In multifaith Lebanon, the Shiites—with a million members—constitute the largest religious community.

Though known for their fiery enthusiasm, the majority of the world's Shiites are not terrorists, as many in the West seem to believe. Ruthless, religiously motivated violence is limited to a frustrated minority and is repudiated by most Shiites. Westerners, Muslims urge, should not judge the followers of Islam by their worst examples.

## Golden Age of Islam

The supreme office of caliph, originally elective, soon became hereditary—first in the Omayyad family (from A.D. 661 to 750) and later in the Abbasid family (750 to 1258). The dynamic Omayyad dynasty of caliphs, ruling from Damascus, was responsible for the conquest of the remainder of North Africa and most of the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal).

In the East, Omayyad armies swept over Central Asia toward India and China. In less than 100 years, the Omayyads had built an empire larger than that of Rome at its height. Millions were added into the fold of the Islamic faith.

It was also during the Omayyad period that the world-renowned "Dome of the Rock" was constructed in Jerusalem (between 688 and 691) by the Omayyad caliph Abd al-Malik. A half-century earlier—shortly after the conquest of Jerusalem by Caliph Omar in 638—a modest place of worship had been erected on the site previously occupied by the Second Temple. But Omar's small mosque was only the forerunner of this larger structure—Abd al-Malik's magnificent "Dome of the Rock" (*Qubbat as-Sakhrah*), still standing today after 13 centuries. The oft-heard name "Mosque of Omar" is thus inaccurately applied to the current structure.

The subsequent Abbasid Dynasty, ruling from opulent Baghdad on the Tigris River, consisted of 37 caliphs. Among them was the famous Harun ar-Rashid (786-809) of *Arabian Nights* fame, who enjoyed friendly relations with the Frankish ruler Charlemagne. The first two or three centuries of Abbasid rule marked the "Golden Age" of Islamic culture and literature. Arabs kept the torch of knowledge burning throughout their far-flung domains. Islamic



Saladin after capturing Jerusalem in 1187 (top); enthusiasm of Crusaders at their first sight of Jerusalem in 1099 (above); Richard the Lion-Heart in unsuccessful battle to retake Jerusalem in 1191 (right).

*Culver Pictures;  
The Bettmann Archive*



scholars excelled in mathematics, physics, chemistry, astronomy, geography and medicine.

But eventually the flame died.

Increasingly, the Abbasid caliphs grew soft, abandoning themselves to leisure and sensual pleasure. The dynasty fell into stagnation and decay. Cracks began to appear in the empire's

fiber. The deterioration of central authority led inevitably to a breakdown of the political solidarity of the Muslim world, and its disintegration into autonomous or semi-autonomous states. The unity of Islam was shattered.

During the first few centuries after the death of Muhammad, Islam had been politically united as a *single world empire*, extending from the Atlantic Ocean to the Indus River. With the collapse of the Abbasid caliphate, those glory days became but a vague memory. Despite a deep and abiding desire among Muslims to re-create the political and theological unity of the early Islamic caliphate, all such efforts have, to date, met with utter failure.

Finally, in 1258, the Mongols under Hulagu Khan sacked Bagh-

dad and murdered the city's last Abbasid caliph. For a time, the foot of the Mongols lay on the neck of Islam.

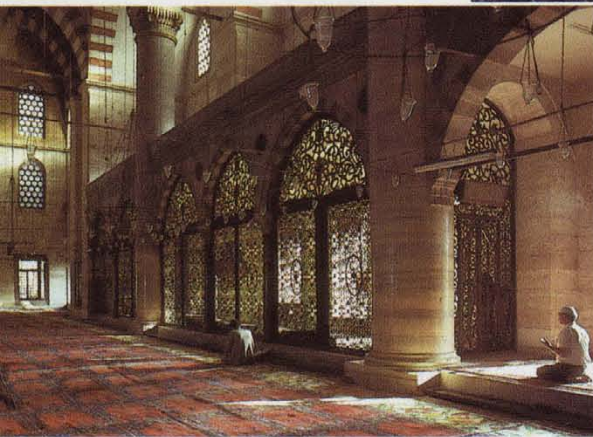
## Cross vs. Crescent

It was during the waning years of the Abbasid caliphate—on July 15, 1099, to be exact—that Jerusalem was wrested from Islam



by Christian-professing Crusaders from Europe. It was the beginning of a long and debilitating contest between the Christian West and the Muslim East.

Amid cries of *Deus le vult*—"God wills it!"—the Crusaders slaughtered the holy city's defenders and inhabitants in a frenzy of carnage virtually unparalleled in history. In their lust for blood, the spirit of Christ was forgotten. "Christians" pillaged, raped and enslaved. Through the blood of the conquered, the Crusaders came at last to pray at the Holy Sepulchre. The Dome of the Rock was converted into a Christian



Church, called *Templum Domini*—"Temple of our Lord."

The Western world rejoiced. Jerusalem was regained for Christianity! But the grisly European victory triggered immediate Muslim counter-campaigns to recover the city and its Dome of the Rock from the Christian "infidels," as they were labeled.

The Muslim leader who succeeded in retaking Jerusalem from the Crusaders was the great Saladin (*Salah ad-Din*, meaning "Righteousness of the Faith"), the medieval Sultan of Egypt and Syria. Saladin proclaimed *jihad*, or holy war, to retake Palestine for

the Muslim world. His campaign was successful.

It was a major blow to Christendom. After nearly nine decades in the hands of the Crusaders, Jerusalem surrendered to Saladin's Muslim army on October 2, 1187. The golden cross surmounting the Dome of the Rock was torn down. But in stark contrast to the terrible carnage of the Christian-professing Crusaders late the previous century, the compassionate Saladin—called the "chivalrous enemy" by Europeans—treated both the defeated Crusaders and the city's civilian population with exemplary mercy and kindness.

Jerusalem was back in Muslim hands. Christendom's loss of the holy city again roused Europe. The monumental Third Crusade (1189-1192) was mounted in an attempt to free Jerusalem from Saladin's army. Despite the valiant efforts of England's Richard the Lion-Heart and others, the Crusaders were unable to retake the holy city. A truce was concluded with Saladin that granted access to the Holy Sepulchre to Christians. But Cross would contend with Crescent for yet another century until the fighting completely ceased.

All told, some two million perished in the carnage of the Crusades. The expeditions had worn on for nearly 200 years. The final Crusade ended in 1291 when Acre, the last stronghold of the Christians in the Holy Land, fell to Muslim forces. (The Christian goal of liberating Jerusalem from Muslim forces would not be realized for another *six centuries*, until the capture of the city by Britain's General Allenby in 1917.)

In the 15th century, a new power burst upon the world scene. In 1453, the Ottoman Turks—a non-Arab Muslim people—captured once-mighty Constantinople, bringing about the final destruction of the Byzantine or Eastern Roman Empire. The Turks renamed the city Istanbul and made it the center of their rapidly growing empire.

In 1517, the Turks under Sultan

Ottoman sultan Suleiman the Magnificent (above); interior of Istanbul's Suleimaniye Mosque (left), Shehzade Mosque in foreground, with Suleimaniye in distance (top).  
*The Bettmann Archive; Ferreck—The Stock Market*

Selim I “the Grim” took possession of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Turkish rule over Jerusalem would last exactly 400 years (1517-1917). Under Selim’s son Suleiman the Magnificent, the Ottoman Empire reached the zenith of its power and glory. It was Suleiman who built the walls which surround the “Old City” (Hebrew, *Ir Hakodesh*) of Jerusalem to this day.

The majority of Arab lands thus came under the sway of the Ottoman Turks. The Arabs bristled under the despotic rule of the Ottomans. For the following four centuries, there was no independent Arab state. The sons of Ishmael waited—not always patiently—for an opportunity to break free from the Ottoman yoke!

### “Next Year in Jerusalem”

But what of the Jews during the centuries following Jerusalem’s destruction in A.D. 70?

Driven into exile, dispersed into foreign lands, the Jews became a race of wanderers. They were a people without a land, hounded from country to country, with no true home of their own. In time, however, large Jewish communities emerged in many countries of Europe and the Middle East, where they developed distinctive cultures and languages (such as Yiddish, or Judeo-German, in Central and Eastern Europe).

Some Jews of the Diaspora lived in relative peace, and in a few cases rose to positions of considerable wealth and power and made substantial contributions to medieval society. But the majority of Jews were less fortunate. In many countries, the legal and economic basis of their life was progressively undermined. Ugly anti-Jewish violence often reared its head, especially in Christian-professing countries of Europe. Jews were routinely set upon by mobs which condemned every Jew as a descendant of the “murderers of Jesus.” Conversion to Christianity was frequently coerced by threats or inducements.

In Islamic lands, Jews generally fared better than in Christian Europe. As a “People of the Book,”

Jews, like Christians, were considered by Muslims to be a “protected people” (*ahl al-dhimma*), unlike heathens who had no revealed scriptures. They were, however, subjected to heavy taxes and restrictions, and held a subordinate rank in Muslim-dominated society. And despite their “protected” status, they were not always immune from persecution. The more fanatical Muslim sects often departed from the general Islamic policy of toleration and brutally oppressed the Jews as



Exodus of the Jews from Frankfurt, Germany in 1614 (above, right); Theodor Herzl, Hungarian-born Austrian Jew, was founder of political Zionism (left).

*The Bettmann Archive; Historical Pictures Service*

“wicked infidels.”

Through these centuries of travail, Jews learned the meaning of fear, and the bitterness of oppression. They were despised and humiliated, yet they dared to dream of survival. Living a precarious existence among alien faiths, the Jews never abandoned the hope that one day a restoration would come. Longing for a return to their ancient homeland in Palestine became a principal theme in Jewish life. “Next year in Jerusalem” was a common salutation. Their songs were

tinged with a sentimental desire for the Holy City which they could not forget. On the ninth of Ab—the day on which the Temple had been twice destroyed (in 587 B.C. and A.D. 70)—the exiles wept over their *Yerushalayim*.

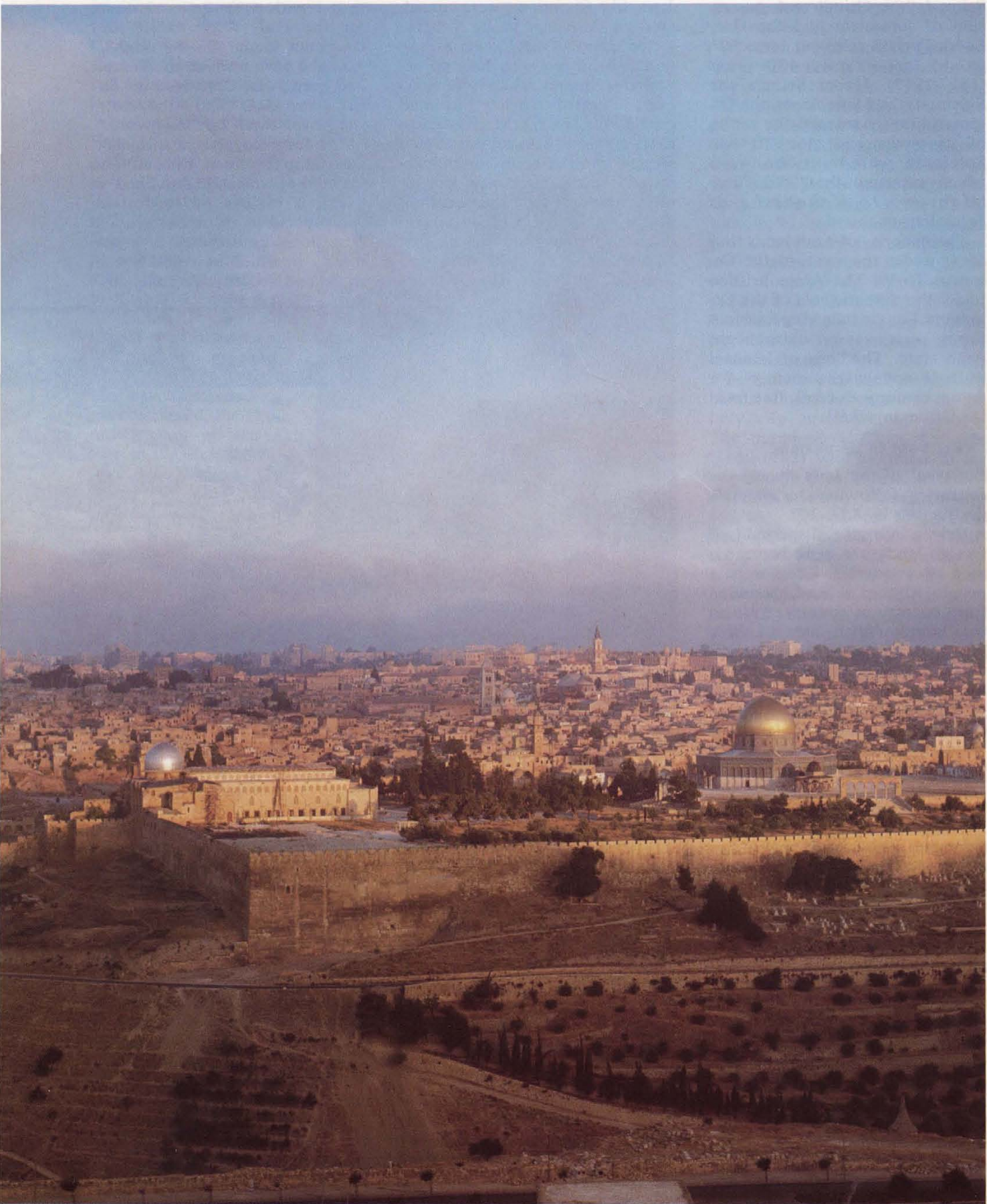
The Jew recognized a special relationship between himself and the land of Israel. He remained, in heart, a citizen of Jerusalem. Amid persecution, massacres and expulsions, he dreamed of a new society in which he could live in peace and security. In time, Jew-



ish suffering in foreign lands gave rise to movements calling for a return to Palestine.

During the second half of the 19th century, renewed oppression and outbreaks of persecution in Eastern Europe and elsewhere caused many Jews to actively support the establishment of a Jewish homeland. In the 1890s, Theodor Herzl founded the political movement known as Zionism. (*Zion* has been the traditional synonym for Jerusalem and the entire Holy Land.) Zionism’s goal: to effect a revival of Jewish national life in its historic homeland, and attain a publicly recognized, legally secured home for the Jews there.

But at the same time, Arab national aspirations were also coming to the fore—preparing the way for a monumental clash of ambitions that persists to this day.



**T**he early decades of this 20th century were instrumental in setting the stage for today's crisis—and the prophesied events that lie ahead. Those momentous years largely determined the modern map of the Middle East.

Few really understand the forces and events that have shaped today's Arab-Israeli conflict. The story is a dramatic one, and a crucial link in the chain of events leading to today's crisis situation.

From the time of the Ottoman Turkish conquest of Egypt in 1517 until after the First World War, there was no independent Arab state. During those four centuries, most Arabic-speaking lands lay under non-Arab Muslim (i.e., Turkish) rule. The majority of today's Middle Eastern nations did not exist before the First World War!

The Arabs never acquiesced to this galling yoke. During those four centuries, Arab nationalism (the Arab desire for independence as a people) was largely a reaction against the corrupt and despotic rule of the Ottoman Turks, with its privileged positions of pashas, effendis and beys.

Arab nationalists dreamed of the creation of an independent union of the Arab territories then within the multinational Ottoman Empire. The area they had in mind for this giant Arab nation was the ancient Fertile Crescent, encompassing the modern-day countries of Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and Israel (Palestine).

The First World War at last

provided Arab nationalists the opportunity for which they had waited so long.

### Revolt in the Desert

During the First World War (1914-18), the Ottoman Empire sided with the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary against the Allies, led by Britain and France. The opportunity for an Arab uprising, supported by Britain, against the Turks thus presented itself.

## CHAPTER THREE

# Seeds of Strife

It was the climax of an old struggle. The Revolt in the Desert (also called the Arab Revolt or Arab Awakening) was an uprising of a loose union of Arab tribes in an attempt to throw off the yoke of their longtime Turkish Muslim overlords. It began on June 10, 1916, and was centered in the Hejaz (Red Sea coastal region) of western Arabia.

Arabia was awakening from a long sleep.

The Revolt in the Desert was proclaimed by Hussein ibn Ali (1852-1931), the Grand Sharif of Mecca and leader of the illustrious Hashemite clan. Hussein (also spelled Husain and Husayn) was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad through Muhammad's grandson Hasan. (The Grand Sharif was also the great-grandfather of today's King Hussein of Jordan.)

By the prestige of his blood, the Grand Sharif proclaimed himself "King of the Arabs," and was recognized as such by Britain, France and Russia. Sharif Hussein claimed title not only to the Fertile Crescent but

to the entire Arabian Peninsula as well.

The uprising of the Sharif of Mecca was inspired by national rather than religious motivations. The Arabs knew the Turks were Muslims like themselves, and that the British—allies of the Grand Sharif—were Christians. But the aims of nationality and those of religion are not always compatible. "Christian fights Christian," the Arabs reasoned, "so why should not Muslims do the same?" The Arabs' desire for a government that spoke their own language—rather than Turkish—overrode all other considerations.

What were the Arabs to receive in return for assisting the British against the Turks?

Between July 14, 1915 and March 30, 1916, ten confidential letters had been exchanged between Sharif Hussein and Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Egypt. These letters, which discussed the terms under which the Sharif would join the British cause, are today known collectively as the "McMahon-Hussein Correspondence."

In brief, Sharif Hussein asked Britain, in exchange for his revolt against the Turks, to recognize the independence of the Arab countries of Asia—all of the Arabian Peninsula except Aden, plus the whole of the Fertile Crescent. Britain accepted the proposal, with the exclusion of certain areas she felt to be not purely Arab.

The Arabs were to be free, at last, to forge their own destiny!

Such was the dream.

Two of Sharif Hussein's sons, Faisal and Abdullah, led the Arab forces in battle, financed by the British and assisted in the field by the able T.E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia"). For a brief time, the sons of Ishmael—long divided by tribal feuds—were successfully knit together by

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Skyline of Jerusalem viewed from Mount of Olives includes gold-domed Dome of the Rock shrine at right, silver-domed Al Aksa mosque at left. Photo: *The Plain Truth* magazine

tact and diplomacy to accomplish the defeat of the Turks.

### Allenby Takes Jerusalem!

The Revolt in the Desert was successful.

In October 1917, Allied forces under General Sir Edmund Allenby launched their invasion of Palestine. On Sunday, December 9, 1917, Allenby's troops expelled the occupying Turks from Jerusalem. The general made his official entry into the city two days later, on foot through the Jaffa Gate. One historically minded journalist noted at the time that this was history's 23rd recorded fall of Jerusalem.

The dream of the medieval Crusaders was realized at last! The holy places of Christendom were delivered from Islamic domination.

Later the next year (October 1, 1918), Arab forces entered Damascus, chief city of the Arab East and headquarters of the Turkish-German forces. General Allenby and Prince Faisal arrived three days later. Faisal rode into Damascus at the head of 1,000 horsemen, to a frenzied reception by the Arab populace. After so long a time, the Arabs rejoiced to taste again the clean, fresh air of freedom.

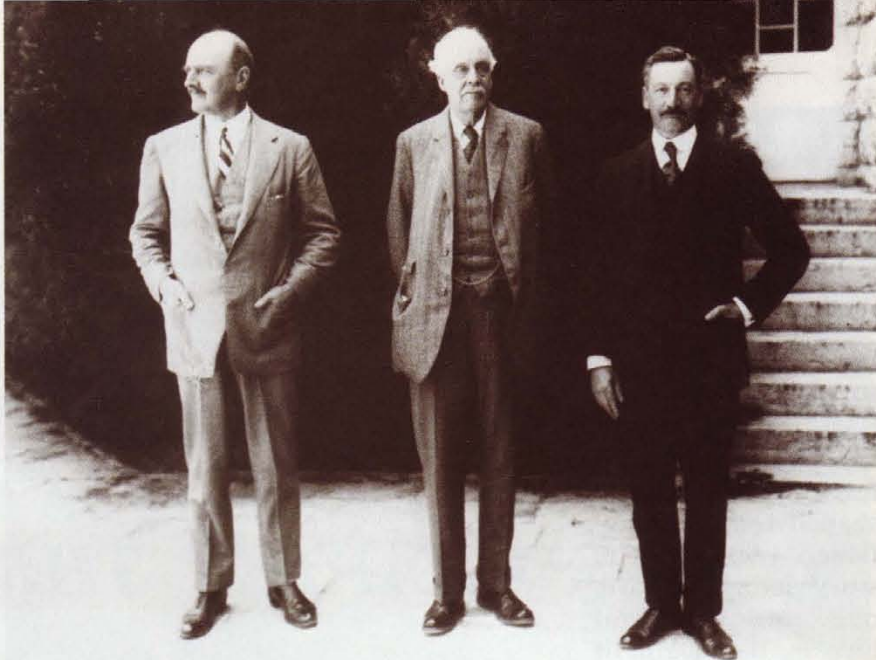
A month later, the First World War ended. With Turkey's defeat, Ottoman rule over Arab lands came to an end. The Arab Revolt had contributed substantially to the Allied victory. The Arabs had won the war—but they were to lose the peace.

### Conflicting Promises

Across the national hopes of the Arabs lay the shadow of British duplicity.

The free and united Middle Eastern Arab empire envisioned by Sharif Hussein and the Arabs was not to materialize. As it turned out, Britain and France—as victors in the war—had other plans for the Arab world. The charade was over.

Matters had become complicated. At war's end, Britain found herself caught in a whirl of contradictory policies and secret pledges.



Field Marshal and First Viscount Allenby (left, above), director of Palestine campaign in World War I; First Earl of Balfour (middle), author of Balfour Declaration; First Viscount Samuel, first British high commissioner for Palestine (right); Below: Delegates to Paris Peace Conference of 1919 included Prince Faisal (foreground) and T.E. Lawrence (right).

*Eric Matson; The Bettmann Archive*



As T.E. Lawrence observed, “The airy birds of promise so freely sent to the Arabs in England's day of need were homing now, to her confusion.”

Expediency had led to conflicting wartime promises. The net effect: the Arabs would not be per-

mitted to keep the lands they had helped to liberate. The postwar scene would see, instead, the division of ex-Ottoman territories in the Near East into British and French spheres of control.

The first clear indication of a conflict between Franco-British



Surrender of Jerusalem to the British on December 9, 1917 (above). Two days later, Field Marshal Allenby made his official entry into the city. Below: Field Marshal Allenby (right) and staff with Prince Abdullah (left), a son of Sharif Hussein and brother of Prince Faisal.

Eric Matson; The Bettmann Archive



aims and Arab independence had come in November, 1917. In that month, the new Bolshevik regime in Russia had made public the details of the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement of May, 1916 (named for Sir Mark Sykes and Georges Picot, the chief British and French negotiators).

This clandestine agreement—concluded secretly in May of 1916—had completely disregarded the interests and expectations of the Arabs and proposed to carve up the crumbling Ottoman Turkish Empire in line with *European* interests only. Stated bluntly, Britain and France had “divided the spoils” among themselves as the booty of war.

The Arabs were startled. They strenuously denounced the Anglo-French arrangement as being inconsistent with the promises Britain had earlier made to them in the McMahon-Hussein Correspondence. The Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Arabs stressed, had been concluded months *after* the British had promised Sharif Hussein his independent Arab kingdom in exchange for Arab wartime assistance against the Turks.

### Balfour Declaration

In the same month that the Sykes-Picot Agreement was made public came news of Britain’s controversial “Balfour Declaration” (dated November 2, 1917). This historic document—named for the British foreign secretary, Arthur James Balfour—pledged the British government’s support for the establishment of a national home in Palestine for the world’s scattered and persecuted Jews, without prejudicing the rights of Arab residents there.

After more than 18 centuries of dispersion, the world’s Jews were handed an official declaration of British sympathy with their aspirations for a national home!

Welcomed enthusiastically by Jews the world over as a Jewish “Magna Carta,” the Balfour Declaration was vigorously denounced by Arabs as a brutal betrayal and bitter “double cross.” Palestinian Arabs believed that

such a Jewish “national home” would, by definition, prejudice the rights of the Arab majority—that it could be established only at Arab expense. The Balfour Declaration, Arabs declared, was totally incompatible with the promises made to Sharif Hussein of Mecca.

Arabs had fought alongside the British in ousting the hated Turks from Palestine. Arab leaders had expected to receive, in return, *full control* over the Arab world—including Palestine—following the war. Palestine, they declared, had a predominantly Arab population and was therefore inseparable from the rest of the Arab world. With some 700,000 Arabs and fewer than 85,000 Jews in Palestine at that time, the land, the Arabs argued, was undeniably an *Arab* region, and therefore an integral part of the promised Arab realm.

The Arabs explained they did not object to Jews *living* in Palestine. Jews through the centuries had been treated better in Arab lands than in Europe, Arab leaders observed. Jews, like Christians, are “People of the Book” (*Ahl al-Kitab*)—a protected minority. Indeed, Arab leaders acknowledged that Jewish immigrants had brought many benefits to Palestine. Yes, Jews could *live* there—but *within an Arab state!* The Arab leadership adamantly refused to recognize any Jewish national rights in the region.

But Arab protestations fell on deaf ears. Britain replied that she had never really intended to include Palestine in the proposed area of Arab independence. Moreover, Britain declared, Arab leaders had not, as yet, laid a solid foundation in the political consciousness of the people. It was “too soon” for Arab independence!

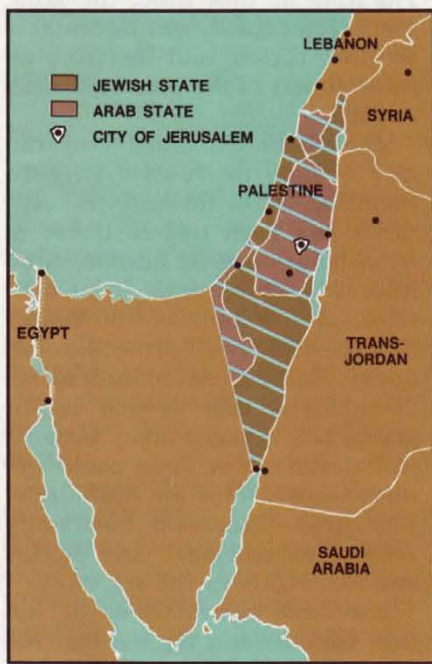
Arab dreams of a free and united Arab realm had turned into a nightmare of treaties, declarations and mandates.

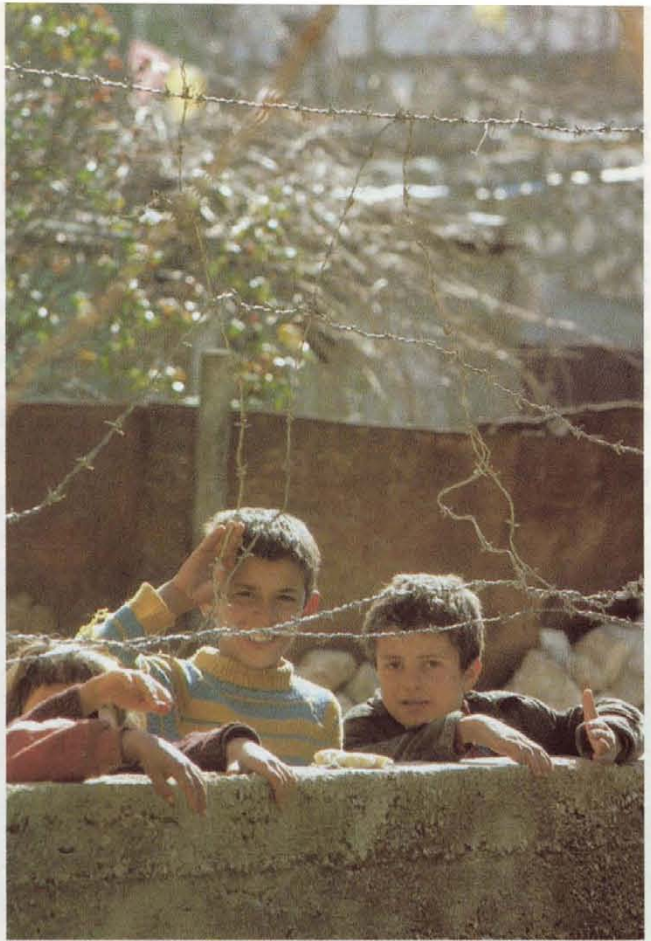
But the Arabs would not be the only party to suffer broken pledges. *Jewish* national hopes would also go unrealized for the time being. Though the Balfour Declaration had not outrightly



British and French Mandates following World War I (above). Below (from left): 1947 UN partition plan; Israel after 1949 armistice; Territories occupied by Israel in the "Six-Day War" of 1967.

Maps: Jeffrey S. Dowd





Israel's Prime Minister David Ben Gurion sees off last contingent of British troops at the Haifa docks in 1948 (previous page, top left). Israeli soldiers at the Wailing Wall after seizing East Jerusalem in 1967 Six-Day War (bottom left). Arab refugees leave war-torn Palestine in wake of fighting in 1948 (bottom right). Palestinian children at a refugee camp near Bethlehem (this page, above). Israeli Army Centurion tank in action in the Golan Heights during the "Yom Kippur" or October War of 1973 (below, left). Israeli troops survey Jordanian section of Jerusalem just prior to outbreak of June 1967 Six-Day War.

UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos; Caron—Gamma-Liaison; UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos; Karel—Sygma; UPI/Bettmann Newsphotos.





promised a Jewish state, it had aroused enthusiastic hopes in that direction. Zionism—the political movement dedicated to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine—had been given great impetus by the declaration. The age-old yearning of the Jewish people to return to its land at last appeared to be nearing realization.

But Jewish optimism proved to be premature. Britain would discover she could not completely



Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud (1880-1953) united central Arabia and created the modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Photo: Royal Geographical Society

follow through on her promises to the Jews any more than to the Arabs.

In short, neither Jews nor Arabs were to “call the shots” in Palestine. Europeans were now to replace the Turks as overlords in the Middle East!

The effects of this unhappy situation are still being felt in these latter years of the 20th century. Historians—some British historians included—generally agree that Britain’s wartime policies contributed greatly to the misunderstanding, distrust, fear and hatred that continues to plague the Middle East scene to this day.

### Conflicting Nationalisms

Britain thus found herself caught between two opposing movements—Zionism and Arab nationalism. Jews wanted their *Eretz Yisra’el*; Arabs, their independent Palestine—indeed, their independent *Fertile Crescent*!

In July, 1922, the League of Nations entrusted Britain with the Mandate for Palestine—that is, with authority to establish a government over the area. Iraq and Transjordan were also placed under British mandate. France received mandates over Lebanon and Syria. The Sykes-Picot agreement was thus legitimized.

For a time, Britain freely allowed immigration of Jews into the Holy Land. But as more and more Jews migrated into Palestine, it became clear to the Arabs that the aim of Zionism was not merely a “national home” for the Jews, but a national *state*. Fearful of a takeover, Arabs demanded that Britain halt all Jewish immigration.

The British sought to mollify the Arab population by imposing increasingly tight Jewish immigration quotas into Palestine. In 1939, a British White Paper (the Jews called it a “Black Paper”) limited Jewish immigration to but 10,000 a year, and restricted Jewish land purchases. A resentful Zionist leadership denounced these limitations as a betrayal, charging that Britain was failing to fulfill her obligations under the Balfour Declaration and the League of Nations Mandate. The new policy all but closed Palestine’s doors to Jews. Even news of Hitler’s attempts to expel or annihilate the Jewish population of Europe failed to alter Britain’s immigration policies.

For their part, Arab leaders asked why Arabs should be required to pay the price for the evils perpetrated on Jews by Europeans.

But the Jews came anyway, and entered into a direct struggle against British power. (Leon Uris’ bestselling novel *Exodus* is set during this turbulent period.) The Zionist goal: to force Britain to

abandon the Palestine Mandate and allow Jewish refugees to freely “return home.”

Clearly, Britain had misrepresented her intentions to both Jew and Arab, using Palestine as a political pawn. Observers would suggest, in retrospect, that had the matter been left wholly to Jews and Arabs to work out for themselves, perhaps they might have discovered a mutually agreeable accommodation—possibly a binational state that would not have divided Palestine but would have reconciled both nationalist factions. But British policy had fostered incompatible expectations, forcing a head-on collision of Zionism and Arab nationalism which persists to this day.

As enmities flourished, tensions erupted into violence on a growing scale. Neighbors who had peacefully coexisted in Palestine for centuries were transformed into enemies competing for territorial rights. As the breach widened, atrocities were committed on both sides.

Meanwhile—during the 1920s, 30s and 40s—Arabs were beginning to achieve independence in various parts of the Middle East. This independence, however, came *piecemeal*—as *separate* kingdoms, emirates and republics—not in the form of the single, great, all-encompassing “Arab realm” envisioned during the First World War. The modern states of Egypt (1922), Iraq (1932), Lebanon (1941), Transjordan (1946) and Syria (1946) slowly made their debut one by one, under varying circumstances. Additional Arab states would emerge in North Africa and on the periphery of the Arabian peninsula during the 1950s and 60s.

In the Arabian Peninsula, the forces of Abdul-Aziz Ibn Saud of Nejd—longtime bitter rival of Grand Sharif Hussein and the Hashemite family—drove the Hashemites from the Hejaz, including Mecca, in 1925. In 1932—after uniting other areas under his control—Ibn Saud renamed his vast domains the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Huge oil deposits were discovered in 1935.

Despite a deep-seated desire on the part of many Arabs to unite these separate, newly independent Arab states into a greater union—the long-dreamed-of “giant Arab Nation”—no significant progress was made. True to their history, the Arabs again began to go their own way, and fell to bickering among themselves.

### The Jews a Nation Again!

Meanwhile, tensions in Palestine continued to build.

Britain found herself caught in the grip of rapidly escalating violence. Unable to find a satisfactory solution, the British government turned the troublesome dilemma over to the United Nations early in 1947. After 25 hopeless years of trying to keep peace, the British gave up.

Later that year, a UN special committee recommended the partitioning of Palestine into two independent states, one Jewish and one Arab, with Jerusalem under international control.

On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly voted to approve the partition recommendation. Both the United States and the Soviet Union supported the resolution. The plan was accepted by the Jews, rejected by Arab leaders. The Arabs demanded a single state wholly under Arab rule—and vowed a war of extermination should any Jewish state be established.

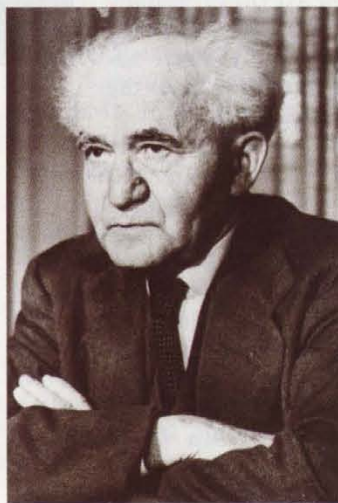
Britain withdrew its last forces from Palestine six months later, on May 14, 1948. As the last British soldiers pulled out, David Ben-Gurion—leader of the Jewish struggle against British power—rose at a special session of the Jewish National Council in the Museum of Modern Art in Tel Aviv and declared the independence of the state of Israel “on this Sabbath eve, the fifth day of Iyar in the year 5708.”

The Zionist dream of a national home for the Jews had suddenly come true! The Jews were once again a *nation* of their own in Palestine. Some observers called it a “20th-century miracle.”

A few hours later, however, the fledgling Jewish state was invaded

by neighboring Arab armies, fearful of what they saw as “expansionist Zionism.” The Jewish population fought back successfully. This first Arab-Israeli war continued into early 1949, when cease-fires were finally concluded. The new Jewish state’s borders were enlarged by nearly 50 percent beyond the territory the UN had originally allocated it.

The fledgling Jewish state had



David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister (above, left); Jewish immigrants from Italy come ashore at Haifa on May 15, 1948, the first group to reach the newly proclaimed Jewish state (right); Prime Minister Ben-Gurion signs document in Tel Aviv on May 14, 1948, proclaiming the creation of the state of Israel (left).

Photos: AP/Wide World

survived. The Zionist dream of a national home for Jews in Palestine was at last realized.

After nearly 19 centuries of being dispersed throughout the world, a part of the house of Judah had successfully forged, with Soviet and Western help, a new Jewish nation in Palestine.

But Jerusalem had become a divided city. The Israelis controlled modern west Jerusalem. The kingdom of Jordan controlled the predominantly Arab eastern portion

of the city—the walled “Old City” of Jerusalem—as well as the West Bank of the Jordan River. Israelis were denied access to their holiest religious site, the Western Wall (*Ha'kotel Ha'ma'aravi*) of the Temple Mount, commonly called the “Wailing Wall.”

A second round of Arab-Israeli war erupted in 1956, when Britain, France and Israel allied themselves against Egypt in an ef-

fort to regain control of the strategic Suez Canal, which Egypt's President Nasser had seized. While Israeli forces overran the Sinai, Anglo-French troops landed at Suez. Following assurances that the Canal would be open to Israeli shipping, Israel withdrew its forces to the 1949 armistice lines. In the end, Nasser retained control of the Canal—a major political victory.

In 1967, a third war broke out between Arabs and Israelis. Dur-

ing this “Six-Day War,” the Israelis captured all of East Jerusalem, the West Bank of the Jordan, Syria’s Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip and the Sinai peninsula. Jerusalem was united under independent Jewish control for the first time in 19 centuries. (The Temple Mount with its Dome of the Rock, however, remained under Muslim *religious* control.)

It was a lightning war that *shattered* Arab unity. A sense of humiliation and despair hung over the Arab world. But in Israel, euphoria reigned. The 1967 victory left Israel with borders much easier to defend. Israeli settlements were subsequently established in the occupied territories, but were vigorously condemned by Arabs and others as being in violation of international law.

In early October, 1973—during the Jewish “Yom Kippur” observance—President Anwar Sadat of Egypt sent his troops storming across the Suez Canal in an operation that caught the Israelis by surprise. Other Arab nations joined this fourth Arab-Israeli war, which lasted 18 days. Though

ultimately defeated militarily, Egypt scored an enormous psychological victory. The war did much to rebuild Arab self-respect that had been severely shaken in the disastrous Six-Day War of 1967. The October War (or “Yom Kippur War”) of 1973 also resulted in a worldwide fuel crisis when Middle East oil-producing nations cut off petroleum shipments to Western nations unsympathetic to the Arab cause.

In the end, the Israelis had again scored a major military triumph. When the fighting stopped, Israeli troops occupied a large enclave west of the Suez Canal, leaving the Egyptian Third Army stranded on the east bank, surrounded by Israeli forces. In Syria, Israeli soldiers had moved far beyond the 1967 cease-fire lines, advancing to within 20 miles of Damascus.

In retrospect, some observers believe that had the Israelis pushed their offensive to a decisive conclusion rather than yielding to U.S. pressure to stop short of all-out victory, Israel might have been in a position to militarily impose a long-term settlement on her devastated Arab neighbors. But as it turned out, the 1973 war solved nothing.

Superpower involvement in the region was further spotlighted by a U.S.-Soviet confrontation in the final days of



the October War. President Nixon placed U.S. strategic forces—including the nuclear strike force—on a worldwide military alert in response to an expressed Soviet intention to unilaterally dispatch troops to the Middle East to supervise a truce. The confrontation was defused by a UN resolution establishing an international peacekeeping force without big power participation.

Four years later, in 1977, events took a dramatic turn. Egyptian President Sadat stunned the world by announcing his intention to visit Israel. Sadat’s history-making journey to Jerusalem (November 19-21, 1977) broke a 30-year deadlock in which Arab leaders had refused to meet face to face with Israeli officials. Sadat’s initiative culminated in the 1978 U.S.-mediated Camp David Accords, and a peace treaty signed with Israel in Washington in March, 1979.

This separate peace treaty, however, did nothing to bring about the withdrawal of Israeli occupation forces from the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It left untouched the status of the Palestinians. Hardline Arab states condemned Sadat as a “traitor to the Arab cause” and blackballed Egypt from the Arab community.

The assassination of President Sadat by radical Muslims in 1981 (on the eighth anniversary of the October War) raised new uncertainties about the fu-



Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, U.S. President Carter and Israeli Prime Minister Begin conclude 1978 Camp David Accords (top); President Sadat just moments before his assassination (above); the assassination (right).

Kennerly—Gamma-Liaison;  
Elkoussy—Sygma



ture of the Middle East. Observers agree that the potential for renewed Mideast war remains high.

### The Struggle for Palestine

As we have seen, at the heart of today's Arab-Israeli confrontation is the clash of two intense nationalisms over the same territory. And both sides are certain they are "right."

The emotional, highly charged Palestinian question is seen by many as the crux of the conflict, and possibly the most explosive issue in the world today. Experts agree that no permanent and comprehensive peace will be seen in the Middle East until the question is somehow resolved.

Each side claims the land as its own by virtue of history and religion.

Undeniably, the land was the ancient homeland of the Israelites. But the Palestinians—those Arabs who are native to the West Bank and to much of the territory which is now the State of Israel—also have strong religious and historical interests in the area.

Palestine has been Arab in language and culture for some 1,300 years, having been wrested from the Byzantine Empire in the 7th century A.D. by the Muslim armies of Caliph Omar. Some Palestinian Arab families can trace their lineages back for well over a millennium on that soil.

Today, over three million Palestinian Arabs reside throughout the Middle East, roughly half of them in Israel and Israeli-occupied territories and half of them in nearby Arab nations, many in squalid refugee camps. (These refugees were displaced from their traditional homes during the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948 and 1967.) Over 850,000 Palestinians live in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, some 500,000 in the Gaza Strip on Israel's opposite flank, and about 550,000 in Israel itself.

Most Palestinians desire that the West Bank and Gaza attain true self-government. They seek the creation of a full-fledged sovereign Palestinian state—a publicly recognized, legally se-

cured homeland. They demand total withdrawal of Israeli military forces and the Israeli civilian settlements from the West Bank and Gaza. Arabs also demand that East Jerusalem (the "Old City") be returned to Arab sovereignty.

The Israeli Knesset's enactment of the Jerusalem Law in 1980 further fueled the fires of controversy. The law—affirming that Jerusalem is Israel's "united and eternal capital"—was vigorously condemned by Palestinians. Joining the Palestinians in their criticism was the Vatican, which repeated its longstanding call for an international "free city" status for Jerusalem. The Vatican and Israeli officials have long held sharply divergent views on Middle East matters. Pope John Paul II's repeated calls for a "special internationally guaranteed status" for Jerusalem have been firmly rejected by Israel.

But what about the Jews' alleged biblical claim to Palestine? Zionism's desire to establish a national homeland in Palestine was predicated on the premise that God gave the land to the Jews. How do the Arabs view this alleged *divine mandate* or *title* to the Holy Land—the notion that the land belongs to Jews by *divine right*?

Many Palestinian Arabs allow that Palestine was the Jews' Promised Land centuries ago. But they point out that God drove the ancestors of today's Israelis from the Promised Land because they had sinned against him. Thus, modern Jews have no biblical claim whatever to the land, these Arabs allege. It is now—and has long been—*Arab* land, they assert. Arabs have lived on it continuously for centuries as the *majority* population.

If the Jews can reclaim Palestine after such a lengthy period, Arabs ask, then why not allow the American Indians to repossess the United States and Canada?

The Israelis can have land, or they can have peace, but they cannot have both, Palestinian Arabs declare. The consensus of moderate Palestinians is to make peace

with Israel on the basis of the pre-1967 borders—meaning Israel must relinquish control over occupied territories in accordance with UN Resolution No. 242 of 1967. Currently, the occupied territories are administered by a combination of Israeli military and civilian Defense Ministry officials.

Can Israel make significant territorial concessions in the interests of peace, but without jeopardizing its security? Israelis remain divided on this question.

Most Israelis believe they must retain sovereignty over *at least a portion* of the occupied West Bank, viewing it as a vital defense buffer, indispensable if they are to have secure and defensible boundaries. *Total* withdrawal is incompatible with national security, they declare.

Some Israelis—a minority—go even farther. They adamantly resist *any* territorial concessions whatever. They hold a fierce belief in Israel's biblical title to "Judea and Samaria," as they prefer to call the West Bank. To them, any discussion of independent Palestinian statehood must be rejected out of hand.

But for most Israelis, reluctance to give up the occupied territories rests on worries about security, not biblical arguments. Moreover, the minority of Israelis who are religious are bitterly divided theologically. Interestingly, one small faction known as the *haredim* or ultra-Orthodox refuses even to recognize the State of Israel, holding that Jews should not be a nation until the Messiah appears!

With tensions mounting in the occupied territories, Israel today faces fundamental questions of peace, territory and identity.

Palestinian Arabs want their lands back.

Israel wants secure borders.

Both sides want peace—but on their own terms.

It is the kind of deadlock typical throughout the region.

And because of this deadlock, the Middle East remains the world's most dangerous hot spot—a political and military powder-keg just waiting for a spark to ignite it!



**T**oday, the Middle East remains a region of tense confrontation. Many unresolved issues continue to irritate relations between Israel and her Arab neighbors.

On top of that, the Arab-Israeli confrontation is but one of *numerous* crises in the violence-prone region. The Middle East is *rife* with trouble spots! Among these explosive concerns are the protracted Iran-Iraq war, the complex struggle within multi-faith Lebanon, internal stresses in Egypt and other Arab nations, and the growing specter of Islamic fundamentalism throughout the Middle East—to name but a few.

Many people wonder what lies ahead for the Middle East. Will there be *another* major Arab-Israeli war? Is the Soviet Union about to invade the Middle East, as some students of Bible prophecy claim? Will peace *ever* come to this war-torn land? Or will World War III erupt in the wake of a superpower confrontation over the oil-rich region?

Newsmen and geopolitical analysts wonder what will happen next, and call the Middle East a volatile and *unpredictable* region.

Or *is it* unpredictable?

To men, the Middle East is indeed unpredictable. But using the Word of God, *we can know* what lies ahead! The answers to these questions are *revealed* in Bible prophecy. Yet almost *no one* understands what the Bible says!

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Hilltop site of the ancient city of Megiddo provides a commanding view of the expansive Jezreel Valley or Plain of Esdraelon.

*Photo: The Plain Truth magazine*

### Key to Understanding

An important key to understanding prophecy is to realize that the present Jewish state in Palestine is *not* the triumphant final return of Israel to the Promised Land mentioned so often by the Old Testament prophets. This may come as a surprise to some readers. But consider these facts:

Anciently, Israel was composed of 12 tribes, descended from the 12 sons of the patriarch Jacob.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# What Lies Ahead?

Following the death of King Solomon in 928 B.C., the 12-tribed nation of Israel split into two separate nations, as explained in I Kings 12.

The southern nation was called the “House of Judah,” with its capital at Jerusalem. It was composed of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and part of the tribe of Levi. Collectively the people of this southern kingdom became known as “Jews,” a word derived from the name Judah.

The larger, northern kingdom was called the “House of Israel,” with its capital at the city of Samaria. It was composed of 10 tribes. The people of this “House of Israel” were *not Jews*. The Jews were the inhabitants of the *southern* kingdom, the “House of Judah.” In fact, the first place in the Bible where the word “Jews” occurs—II Kings 16:6—the Jews are found to be *at war* with Israel!

This northern kingdom was carried away into captivity by Assyria late in the eighth century B.C. The 10 tribes never returned to their homeland, and have since been popularly known as the “lost 10 tribes” of Israel. (To learn the

surprising modern-day whereabouts of these “lost” tribes, request our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*.)

The House of Judah—the Jews—was also carried off into slavery, at the hands of the Babylonians early in the sixth century B.C. Solomon’s Temple was destroyed by the army of Nebuchadnezzar in the summer of 587 B.C., after a 1 1/2 year siege. A remnant of this house of Judah returned to Jerusalem a few decades later, but Judah remained a land under subjection.

Finally, in A.D. 70, Judea was invaded and Jerusalem destroyed by Roman troops. The Jews were forcefully driven from their homeland, as related at the conclusion of Chapter One of this brochure.

Now we jump forward to this present century. After nearly 19 centuries of being dispersed throughout the world, a part of the house of Judah returned to forge a new nation in Palestine, as recounted in Chapter Three. They called it, as we have seen, the “State of Israel.”

This end-time physical restoration of the Jews as a nation was indeed forecast by the Old Testament prophets. Chapters 12 through 14 of Zechariah, for example, clearly require Jewish sovereignty over at least a part of Palestine in the end time. And, as Zechariah prophesied, the leaders of Judah—today’s State of Israel—*have been* “like an hearth of fire among the wood, and like a torch of fire in a sheaf” (Zech. 12:6). What better description of the State of Israel’s spectacular performance in the 1967 Six-Day War?

But the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 was *not* the much-prophesied great restoration of the *entire* nation of Israel!

The vast majority of the Israeli tribes—the so-called “lost 10 tribes”—*have not yet* returned home! Not just Judah—today’s “Israelis”—but *all 12 tribes* of Is-

rael were given their inheritance in the Promised Land!

The prophesied return of *all* Israel to the Promised Land in peace and security is *yet* to occur—*after* the coming of the Messiah. The Messiah will lead them back home. It will be a greater Exodus than the one under Moses (Jer. 23:7-8)!

By contrast, today's State of Israel is a remarkable *human* endeavor, born of strife and war—not the divinely established and protected 12-tribed nation foretold in prophecy.

Understand this: God has a great Master Plan for all mankind, including the tribes of Israel and their cousins, the Arabs. That plan entails the nations and peoples of this world learning some hard but essential lessons in the years just ahead.

God is generally keeping "hands off" the world for the time being. He is allowing the world to go *its own way*, to learn for itself—by *hard experience*—a great lesson: that apart from God, mankind will *never* have lasting peace and prosperity! Disobedience to God's laws will, in the end, bring nothing but *calamity*.

Mankind has rejected and cut itself off from the *source* of peace! It has followed, instead, the way of Satan—the way of GET, rather than GIVE, the way of vanity, jealousy, lust and greed!

Mankind must be brought to the place where it will be *willing* to change, willing to live the *way* that produces peace. In the years just ahead, *all* nations of the world—including modern-day Judah, the State of Israel—will have to learn the great lesson that peace and prosperity can be realized only through obedience to the laws of God. Contrary to the notion of some today, the State of Israel does *not yet* have God's automatic protection!

And in that vein, Bible prophecy speaks of calamities *yet to befall* Judah—the modern-day state of Israel—in the years just ahead!

### Unbridgeable Differences

Sadly, despite the continuing peacemaking efforts of men of

good will, Bible prophecy indicates that the future holds *war*, not peace, for the Middle East. Though the region might experience periods of relative calm—or even appear to make progress toward a meaningful resolution of issues—such trends, unfortunately, will prove to be only of a short-term, temporary nature.

Such a statement is not defeatism or pessimism. It is sad realism. We cannot pretend the world is other than it is. Realistic observers admit that no foreseeable human settlement will really satisfy the belligerents. From the standpoint of the present time and the present world, no lasting, workable means of erasing deep-seated hatreds and suspicions is in sight. Because of spiritual attitudes and mindsets, it is simply not diplomatically or humanly possible to resolve the explosive issues so as to bring lasting peace to the Middle East.

Understand this basic truth: Man's relationship with his fellowman is essentially a *spiritual* relationship. The world's problems have a deep-rooted *spiritual* basis. Problems cannot be solved through the use of human, physical, materialistic knowledge alone.

Before men can change the external aspects of their lives, they must change the inner attitudes of their hearts and minds. Before they can cooperate, they must possess the *attitude* of cooperation—the attitude of sharing, of serving, of giving, of concern for the welfare of others equal to one's own self-concern.

The world does not have peace today because its peoples do not have peace in their minds and hearts. They are not living the *way* that produces peace. That way is the way of cooperation and of wholehearted *loving concern* for others. Instead, within nations and among nations, humans live the way of competition and strife, the way of greed, jealousy and hatred, based on the philosophy of GET. And it has brought nothing but discontent, unhappiness, violence, human suffering and war.

The root cause of war lies in the nature of the warring parties

themselves. "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members? Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not...." wrote James, the brother of Jesus, 19 centuries ago (James 4:1-2).

In today's Arab-Israeli confrontation, both peoples "desire to have," as James pointed out. Unfortunately, Israelis and Arabs remain far from any kind of genuine agreement. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" asked the prophet Amos (Amos 3:3).

Mankind simply does not know the *way* to peace, the way to replace mutual distrust with love and outgoing concern (Isa. 59:8; Rom. 3:17). Mankind cut off from contact with the great Creator God *cannot* and *will not* overcome its propensity for violence and destruction. Mankind lacks the will and the knowledge to solve its troubles and problems. The solution to mankind's problems—*spiritual* problems—lies outside the realm of our competence. The record of history permits no other conclusion!

Today's Mideast dilemma is simply beyond human ability to solve! *Only God* can untangle this knotty problem—and he *will*, in his good time.

Could, then, another major Arab-Israeli war erupt in the months or years just ahead—*prior* to the prophesied Great Tribulation at the end of this age?

*Yes, indeed!*

While prophecy focuses on a *larger-scale* conflict farther down the line, it does not rule out yet another localized Arab-Israeli war. There have already been *four* such wars in the past four decades.

Your own daily newspaper will tell you that the Arab armies are better equipped today for the waging of war than at any time in the past four decades. And in view of the continuing massive arms buildup in the region, a future Arab-Israeli confrontation might well place in danger the *very existence* of the State of Israel—espe-

cially if today's *disunited* Arab nations become able to effectively coordinate their efforts.

While Israel might be severely "wounded" in such a conflict (notice Hosea 5:13, for example), it is unlikely that the militarily powerful Jewish state would totally succumb to any future Arab onslaught. The Bible reveals that the state of Israel is destined to fall—but *later*, to a



Muhammad Ahmad, 19th-century *Mahdi* ("divinely guided one") of the Sudan, was one of the more notable of the many self-styled messiahs of Islamic history.

Photo: The Bettmann Archive

totally *different* power, as we shall see.

Observers agree: A new Arab-Israeli war would be *far more bloody* than any in the past!

And such a war could present numerous prophetic possibilities. It might, for example, so *stun* and *traumatize* the Israelis as to spur a *mass return to religion* in Israel. (Though most Israelis are Jews by race, many of them do not actively practice the religion of Judaism). Such a religious revival might prompt the re-institution of the daily sacrifices as offered in ancient times. Indeed, prophecy reveals that such sacrifices *will* be

reinstated in Jerusalem, for one reason or another. Later, those sacrifices will be suspended by a hostile occupying force (Dan. 12:11).

### Arab-Muslim Confederacy

To date, however, Arab nations have been unable to set aside their rivalries and effectively unite their efforts. One reason for their lack of success has been the absence of capable and dynamic leadership.

History shows that unity is not a condition which men achieve by some natural and inevitable tendency. It is a condition created or imposed by *human action*, by effort and will—by energetic and intelligent *leadership!*

The Arabs have long yearned for such leadership—leadership that would resurrect their dreams of glory, that would give new focus to their energies. Indeed, the entire Islamic world recognizes the tremendous possibilities that might be realized through closer cooperation. Muslims worldwide consider themselves one *ummah* or community, yet much divides them. It is a vexing state of affairs, but they have as yet found no remedy.

For centuries, Muslims have looked for the appearance of the prophesied *Mahdi*—the "Divinely Guided One"—as the solution to this problem of disunity. This Mahdi will be the "Great Unifier" of the Muslim world. Muslims believe he will breathe new life into Islam, give new direction, overthrow the infidels, and make the religion of Muhammad a force to again be reckoned with on the world scene! Many pretenders to this messianic office have arisen through the centuries, but all have proved a disappointment.

Whether through the emergence of another Mahdi figure or through some other set of geopolitical circumstances, Bible prophecy reveals that a measure of unity *will* be forged in the Arab/Muslim world in the years just ahead!

Notice an amazing prophecy about the Middle East in Psalm 83. In this astounding prophetic psalm, King David of ancient Is-

rael discloses that Israel's adversaries *will* succeed in achieving at least a degree of unity in the not-too-distant future.

David foretells a powerful coalition of Arab and Muslim nations, a vast confederacy bound together in an effort to crush out the name *Israel* from the face of the earth! This confederation will play a crucial role in endtime events.

Notice what prophetic Psalm 83 says about this coming Arab-Muslim confederacy in verses 4 and 5:

"They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. For they have consulted together with one consent: they are *confederate* against thee."

What nations are these united against the Jews of Israel?

Psalm 83 lists the peoples who will join together in this anti-Israel confederacy (see verses 6-7). They are Arabic and Muslim nations of the Middle East, supported by sympathetic elements in Europe.

It is probable, in view of growing ties between Europe and the Arab world, that some sort of mutually advantageous alliance of convenience between Islam and European Christianity will eventually be forged. Europe is fully aware of the overwhelming strategic importance of the oil-rich Mideast region!

In the eyes of most observers today, the centuries-long quest for Arab and Islamic unity remains but a distant dream. Disunity and fragmentation continue to be the general rule within Islam. Yet this important prophecy of Psalm 83 clearly foretells a dramatic *reversal* of that trend. A degree of unity *will* be forged in the years ahead, creating a Middle Eastern power bloc—a formidable confederacy—that will wield great influence on the world scene!

### Soviet Intervention NOT Imminent!

Now notice a *further* important point.

Additional prophecies reveal that the major military threat to the Middle East will *not* come



Armies of revived Roman Empire will strike eastward during the prophesied "First Woe," dealing death and destruction to millions. Photo: Kyriazis—Sygma



from within the region itself, but *from the outside!* The prophesied Arab/Muslim confederacy will not itself overturn the regional status quo. It will be a great world power from *another* quarter that will ultimately step into the Mideast arena to *radically alter* the developing geopolitical picture!

That power will *not* be the Soviet Union!

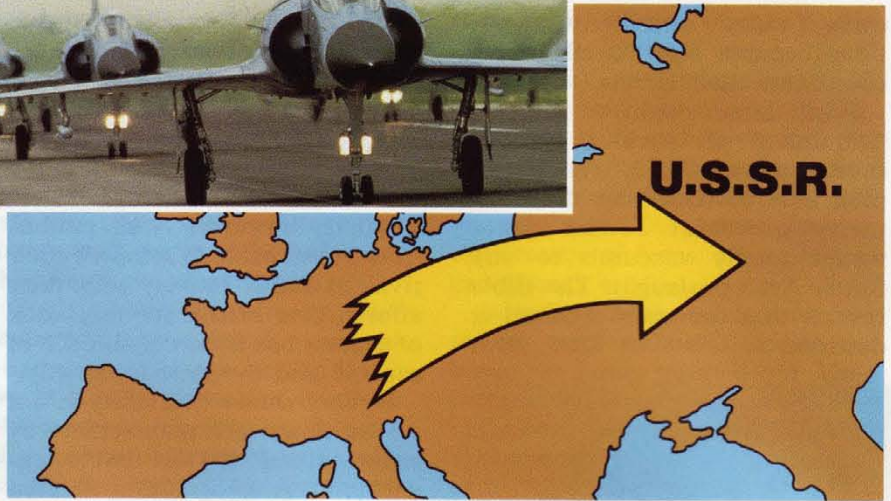
This may come as a shock to some readers. The prophecies contained in chapters 38 and 39 of Ezekiel *do not* foretell an imminent Soviet invasion of the Middle East, as many today believe! The U.S.S.R. is *not* prophesied to strike the region of historic Palestine before the return of Jesus Christ. That widespread notion is without foundation! The events in those chapters of Ezekiel will occur *after* the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, not before.

Ezekiel describes the time setting of his prophecy as being "in that day when my people of Israel dwelleth *safely*" (Eze. 38:8,14). This is certainly not the situation in the state of Israel today! Nor will it be at *any* time during the perilous last days of this age. *No nation* will "dwell safely" during the dangerous years of tribulation that lie ahead!

The Israel described by Ezekiel is a nation that dwells in "*unwalled villages*"; that is, unarmed and totally unprepared for war (38:11). It is a nation "at rest" (same verse)—the *millennial rest* of God (Isa. 11:10)!

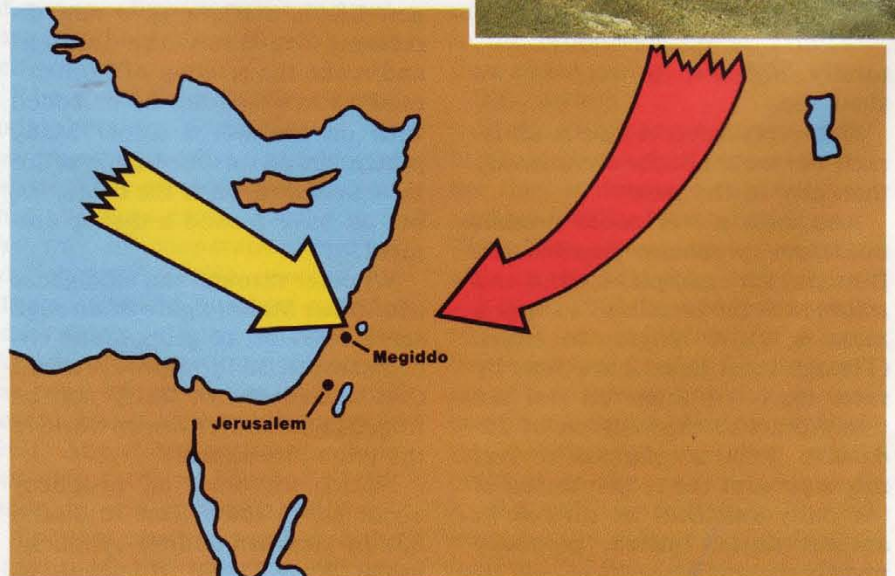
Read it for yourself! These circumstances will be extant only *after* the coming of the Messiah. At that time, surviving remnants of the Communist forces will regroup and invade the restored *12-tribed* nation of Israel—and be supernaturally punished by the King of kings who rules over and protects it!

Unrealized by many, the great



Eurasian army will overrun Europe during "Second Woe" (above). Later, nations will gather at Megiddo in Jezreel Valley (inset photo and map) before converging on Jerusalem.

Photo: The Plain Truth magazine; maps: Bill Wilson



power that *will* intervene in the Middle East in the years just ahead—thereby triggering the terrible “Great Tribulation” prophesied by Jesus Christ—will not be Russia, but rather a union of *European* nations, an end-time revival of the ancient Roman Empire!

As in the days of the Crusades, the countries of Europe will again lay aside their differences to focus on a common objective. Europe will again become deeply enmeshed in the turbulent Middle East. The effects of that involvement will be felt throughout the world!

### “King of the North”

A great military crisis is *yet to occur* in the Middle East—one last cataclysmic upheaval just prior to the end of this age! Here is what prophecy says will happen:

The book of Revelation refers to a coming sphere of power in Europe, symbolically labeled the “Beast.” Prophecy tells us that this “Beast” power will be a mighty union of 10 European nations or groups of nations, a union *even now* evolving. It is destined to become a potent new “Third Force” in world affairs. (Request our free publications *Who or What is the Prophetic Beast?* and *The History of Europe and the Church* for full details.)

This European power—led by a coming military superdictator also referred to in prophecy as the “Beast” (Rev. 17:12-13)—will be the final, end-time revival of the ancient Roman Empire. Working hand-in-hand with the beast will be a great miracle-working religious figure the Bible calls the “false prophet” and “man of sin” (Rev. 13:13-14; 16:13; 19:20; II Thes. 2:3-4). This charismatic figure will preside over a great, centuries-old false religious system, an apostate Christendom labeled as “MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT” (Rev. 17:5).

The prophet Daniel refers to this European confederacy—this coming “United States of Europe”—as “the king of the north.”

All Bible scholars acknowledge that in Old Testament times,

Syria was the “king of the north.” But Rome conquered Syria and made it a Roman province in 64 B.C. Thereupon, the ancient Roman emperors assumed the role of “king of the north” (Dan. 11:36-39). The coming end-time *revival* of the Roman Empire in Europe will thus be the “king of the north” referred to in the latter prophecies of Daniel! Now notice what the Bible reveals about this power:

In verse 40 of Daniel 11, we find that “at the time of the end,” the “king of the north”—this powerful union of European nations—will move southward into the Middle East “like a whirlwind”—with dire consequences for Jew and Arab alike!

Read Daniel 11:40-41: “. . . and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind . . . and he shall enter into the countries . . . He shall enter also into the glorious land [the Holy Land], and many countries [including certain Arab countries of the Middle East] shall be overthrown . . .”

Notice, however, that the kingdom of Jordan will *escape* occupation by the Beast power—see end of verse 41. In this prophecy, the geographic areas of Edom, Moab and Ammon refer unmistakably to modern-day Jordan, which has close ties with Europe. Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia—*not* mentioned as part of the confederacy in Psalm 83—*will* be subject to or occupied by European forces (Dan. 11:42-43).

*Why* will Europe feel compelled to intervene in the Middle East? Here prophecy is silent. Europe’s ire might well be precipitated by a sudden cutoff of vital oil supplies—the industrial lifeblood of the Continent. Or it might be triggered by some sort of *jihād*—“holy war”—waged against the West by Muslim fundamentalists. Or possibly European forces will intervene in the Middle East under the pretext of “peacekeeping”—in an attempt to end escalating regional hostilities before they spiral out of control.

Whatever the provocation, prophecy reveals that Europe will

act *swiftly* to protect its interests—dispatching troops into the Middle East!

The European power—this king of the north or Beast—will occupy both the state of Israel and some of her Arab neighbors, according to this clear prophecy of Daniel. Europe will attempt to *impose* peace on the war-torn Middle East—by force of arms! The Beast will seek to do what diplomats and statesmen have failed to do. In some quarters, the Beast might even be *welcomed* as a kind of savior!

### Jerusalem Compassed with Armies

In his Olivet prophecy of Matthew 24 and Luke 21, Jesus Christ looked down the stream of time to the end of this age—*our* generation—and described world conditions. He spoke of a soon-coming period of violence and upheaval called the “Great Tribulation.” It will be the most terrifying international catastrophe in earth’s history (Matt. 24:21), the time of *Satan’s wrath* unleashed on the world. And Jesus predicted that an *occupation of Jerusalem* would immediately precede it. Notice his words, in Luke 21:20:

“And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.”

The prophet Zechariah also foresaw this. In verse 2 of chapter 14 he declares that “the city [Jerusalem] shall be taken”! Daniel reveals that the daily sacrifice will be suspended at that time (Dan. 12:11).

This will be the *opening move* of the great and final crisis at the close of this age!

Continuing in Luke 21:22-24: “For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled . . . for there shall be great distress in the land, and wrath upon this people. And they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the *times of the Gentiles* be fulfilled.”

Prophecy is clear. Jerusalem

will be trodden down again! Today, Jerusalem is under the control of Jews, not gentiles. But the gentile Beast power will dramatically overturn the status quo. God will permit European occupation troops to occupy Jerusalem for 42 months or 3 1/2 years (Rev. 11:2).

### “Men of the East”

But now notice another critically important development.

Not all will go well for the European occupiers of Jerusalem and the Holy Land. Daniel tells us that eventually “tidings out of the east and out of the north shall trouble him [the ‘king of the north’ or Beast]” (11:44).

To the north and east of Palestine are the Soviet Union and the nations of the Orient. Threatening news from that vast Communist-dominated region will distress the leader of the revived Roman Empire. The beast will be challenged by the might of the entire communist East! These are the “men of the east” spoken of by Ezekiel in chapter 25. Ezekiel reveals that the U.S.S.R. and her allies will intrude upon the Arab world through Iraq and Jordan.

The stage will be set for a desperate battle to determine who will rule the world! (The United States and Britain will *not* be participants in this great armed conflict. To understand why, write for our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Prophecy*.)

Understand this: The book of Revelation describes a dramatic series of catastrophic events to *immediately precede* the return of Jesus Christ to this earth to restore the government of God and to bring world peace.

Among these events is the sounding of seven prophetic trumpets (described in Rev. 8-10), symbolizing God’s direct intervention in human affairs. These trumpets will be blown during a period of time the Bible calls the “Day of the Lord”—the time of *God’s* intervention in world affairs, the time when he punishes sinning nations just prior to Jesus’ return. The Day of the Lord immediately follows the Great Tribulation (the time of *Satan’s*

wrath on the nations). Request our free booklet *The Book of Revelation Unveiled at Last* for full details.

During this “Day of the Lord,” the European Beast will launch a war against the Communist East. This whirlwind European offensive is described in Revelation 9:1-12, where it is called the “first woe” or fifth trumpet plague. Terrifying war machines will deal death and destruction to millions.

Daniel foresaw this same offensive, in verse 44 of chapter 11: “Therefore he [the European king

conflict!

These two great power blocs—Europe and the Communist East—will become locked in a desperate struggle for world domination. As the conflict escalates, all nations of the earth will be sucked into the swirling vortex of Middle East geopolitics.

The Eurasian Communist army will move to engage the Beast’s European forces in a final great battle. The Beast will prepare to make his stand against the oncoming Communist hordes. The stage will be set for the mightiest strug-



Kidron Valley at Jerusalem (above) will be the site of the last climactic battle of World War III. Map shows the location of the Kidron Valley in relation to Megiddo and the Jezreel Valley, where rebellious nations will assemble their armies prior to converging on Jerusalem to challenge Jesus Christ.

Photo: Sylvia Owen

of the north] shall go forth with great fury to destroy, and utterly to make [or take] away many.”

The Communist-led nations of Eurasia will then counterattack on numerous warfronts—with *200 million men*, according to Revelation 9:16. Much of Europe will be devastated! This Soviet counterattack is labeled the “second woe” or sixth trumpet, described in Revelation 9:13-21. It is also detailed in Joel 2.

Full-scale world war will erupt—a final, climactic global

struggle for power the world has ever witnessed!

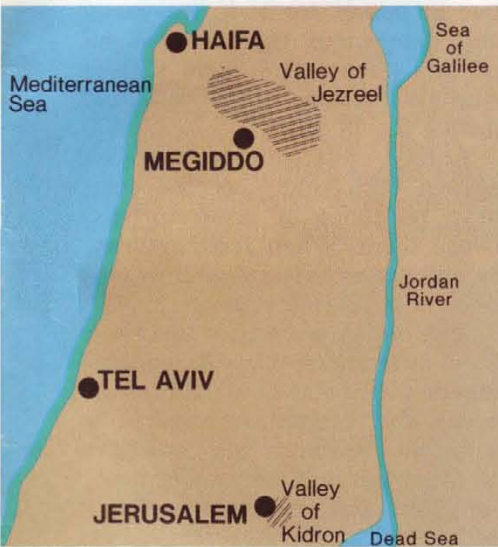
Mankind will stand on the very threshold of *total annihilation*—the terrible end result of its rebellion against God and its rejection of his laws and his government! Were the enormous power of the world’s armies actually to be unleashed, Satan’s goal of erasing all life from this earth would become reality!

As Jesus Christ declared in Matthew 24:22: “Except those days be shortened, there should *no*

flesh be saved [alive] . . .” All life would ultimately be wiped from the face of the earth if the battle were allowed to be fought to its conclusion! It would be *total, all-out war!*

### Christ Suddenly Returns!

But before that happens, the *seventh* trumpet sounds!



The seventh and last of the trumpets announces the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to establish his rule over the earth (Rev. 11:15; I Cor. 15:52; I Thess. 4:16).

Jesus Christ will step in—*intervene* at that last crucial moment—just before mankind would utterly annihilate itself. He will return from heaven with a vast army to put an end to international warfare. He alone *can*—and *will*—bring peace to Jerusalem and to the entire Middle East region!

But Jesus Christ, the new world ruler, will not be automatically accepted by the warring nations!

Consequently, this seventh trumpet will also initiate on a still-rebellious world a series of divine punishments known as the “third woe” or “seven last plagues” (Rev. 15 and 16). These plagues, designed to bring humanity to its knees in repentance, are pictured symbolically as seven vials, or small vessels holding liquids. These vials are “poured out” upon a corrupted earth by seven angels.

The sixth of these vials or plagues is described in Revelation

16:12-16 and introduces us to the subject of *Armageddon*:

“And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared” (verse 12).

Across this riverbed will come the “kings [rulers] of the east” and their armies. This is part of God’s plan to gather the armies of the nations for the final battle of World War Three.

Now notice verse 16: “And he [actually, *they* in the original Greek, meaning the demonic forces of verse 14] gathered them [the kings of the earth and their armies] together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue *Armageddon*” (verse 16).

Notice that there is no mention of a “battle of Armageddon.” The Bible describes Armageddon only as a place where the world’s armies *gather*.

Where is this place called Armageddon?

The word *Armageddon* is a Greek form of the Hebrew name *Har Megiddon*. It means “hill (or mountain) of Megiddo.” Megiddo is an ancient town of Palestine. It is in the modern state of Israel on the southern rim of the large flat expanse of the Plain of Esdraelon (also called the Valley of Jezreel in Scripture). Megiddo lies about 55 miles north of Jerusalem, and about 15 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea.

From the huge mound of Megiddo that today marks the site of the ancient city, one enjoys a commanding view of the valley of Jezreel stretching out to the northwest far into the distance. Jezreel is Israel’s largest and most fertile valley and is often referred to simply as *Ha’emek*, “The Valley.”

In ancient times, Megiddo was a city of great importance. It lay at the strategic crossing of important military and caravan routes. The Via Maris, the old coastal route linking Egypt with Damascus and the east, traversed the Jezreel Valley by Megiddo.

In view of the strategic nature of the area, it comes as no surprise that the valley of Megiddo has

been the scene of famous battles since the dawn of history. It is one of history’s bloodiest battlefields. Some historians believe that more battles have been fought there throughout time than at any other place in the world!

Now see what prophecy has in store for this ancient battlefield.

The world’s armies will *gather* there. But no battle will be *fought* at Armageddon!

### Last Great Battle

This world’s political, religious and military leaders will suddenly be confronted by what they conceive to be, in their deceived minds, a common “enemy”—the returning Jesus Christ. Jesus is coming to *rule*—from Jerusalem!

How will the assembled forces at Megiddo react?

“And the nations were *angry* . . .” declares Revelation 11:18. Men will not want to submit to God’s rule! Instead, they will seek to destroy Jesus Christ—whom they will undoubtedly regard, falsely, as the prophesied “Antichrist.” Instead of fighting each other, the nations, though in conflict with one another on many fronts, will *join forces* here—to “make war with the Lamb” (Rev. 17:14). From the staging ground or mustering area of Armageddon, their armies will move to confront Jesus Christ himself!

This opposition will culminate in the “battle of the great day of God Almighty,” described in Revelation 16, verses 12 to 16, and in Joel 3.

Where will that climactic battle be fought? The prophet Joel provides the answer. Read it in Joel 3:1-2, 9-14.

The last great battle involving forces from “all nations”—is this a symbol for a final world organization not unlike today’s United Nations?—will take place in the *valley of Jehoshaphat*! This deep valley or ravine borders Jerusalem on the east, between the city and the Mount of Olives. Today it is more commonly known as the Kidron Valley.

Jehoshaphat means “judgment of the Eternal.” The rebellious and unrepentant nations of this

world will be *judged* there by God for their disobedience! The world's armies will converge on *Jerusalem* to fight Jesus Christ.

Those involved will ignore the clear warning of Zechariah 12:3: "... I [God] will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be *cut in pieces*, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it."

Jerusalem will become the focal point of an all-out struggle for control of the world. Will *man* rule, or *God*?

Jesus Christ will destroy the world's armies gathered at Jerusalem (Zech. 14:12; Rev. 19). He will destroy those who would have destroyed the earth by nuclear war—intervene to spare the human race from total destruction (Rev. 11:18). He will deliver Jerusalem from gentile occupation, putting an end to the "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24).

The nations of the world will at last be brought to their knees. All Israel—the modern-day descendants of *all 12 tribes*—will be gathered from captivity and brought back to the promised land (Jer. 16:14-15; 23:3-8; 50:4-5, 19-20; Ezek. 20:34-43; 36:24-28; 39:25-29). The entire earth will be set on the path to peace and prosperity.

### The Desire of All Nations

Jews, Muslims and Christians look to the coming of a Messiah in some manner to set things right.

For thousands of years, Jews have awaited a Redeemer or great Deliverer foretold by the prophets of old. The word *Messiah* comes from the Hebrew word *mashiah*, meaning "anointed." (The Greek equivalent is *Christos*.)

Christians, especially those in the Middle East, likewise await a Messiah—Jesus the Christ—who promised his disciples that he would come again (John 14:3).

And Muslims, too, expect a Messiah or *Mahdi* who will restore pure religion and usher in a golden age. Though many imposters have arisen in past centuries claiming to be this Mahdi, most Muslims believe he is *yet* to appear. And interestingly, some Muslims believe that

Jesus or *Isa* will himself return as Mahdi in the last days—and they are *right!* (All Muslims revere Jesus as the "sinless prophet," though they deny that he is God or the Son of God.)

With the coming of Jesus—the messianic "Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6), the "desire of all nations" (Hag. 2:7)—the great dream of many faiths will at last be realized! *All nations and all peoples* will come to recognize Jesus as the true Messiah—the Messiah whom, by a variety of names in many religions, they have all long anticipated.

Jesus Christ will establish his government on earth, with Jerusalem as world headquarters (Mic. 4:1-2; Zech. 14:8-9). Church and state will be united under his rule. Satan the deceiver will be locked away (Rev. 20:1-3). All nations will at last dwell together in peace and in harmony through obedience to God's laws.

There will be one Church—one God—one religion—one Supreme Government (Rev. 19:16). Religious confusion will come to an end.

That is the good news—the gospel—that Jesus Christ brought. The gospel is a message about *government*, not just about the *person* of Jesus Christ. It is a message almost universally misrepresented and misunderstood. (Request our free booklets *What is the True Gospel?* and *The Wonderful World Tomorrow—What It Will Be Like* for more information.)

As the Jews were among the first to receive corrective punishment, they will be among the first to be delivered and resettled, along with the other tribes of Israel (Jer. 3:18). But Jesus Christ will not return as the Messiah of Israel only, but of the *entire world!*

The prophet Zechariah reveals that ultimately "many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord" (8:22). Isaiah also prophesied that "many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we

will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (2:3).

Former antagonists will join hands in international cooperation. Longstanding territorial disputes will at last be resolved by Jesus Christ, who will authoritatively determine the boundaries of nations and peoples so that all can live at peace! *He* owns the earth and determines the destinies of peoples (Deut. 32:8; Acts 17:26). And his solutions will be based on justice for all sides.

Today, nations go to war against each other because they have no judge or arbitrator between them. When Jesus returns, *he* will act as judge. And his decisions will be *enforced!*

Jews and Arabs will at last bury their differences. They and many others will dwell as neighbors in peace and mutual respect, in a common obedience to a God who is merciful and compassionate. Religious and territorial conflicts will come to an end as men experience the joyous dawn of a new world of peace and harmony. It will be a time of "restitution of all things" (Acts 3:21).

Yes, world peace will become *reality!* It will not be based on fragile treaties, tenuous compromise or a precarious "balance of power," but on obedience to the eternal Law of God—the *Ten Commandments*.

As the late President Anwar Sadat of Egypt observed in an interview shortly before his assassination in 1981: "There is one God. And there is one common mission: the Ten Commandments, which God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai... Those commandments are the basis for all three religions." And they will provide the basis of world peace in the years just ahead!

There is *good news* beyond the chaos and war prophesied for the close of this age—a millennium of peace and prosperity for all peoples! From the destruction of war, the world will erupt into *global peace*, based on the eternal laws of God!

Peace *will* come to the Middle East. But it will take *God* to bring it!

# CONCLUSION

**F**or over 50 years, the *Plain Truth* magazine and the *World Tomorrow* broadcast have urged their readers and viewers to *watch* the Middle East, the world's most dangerous hot spot and the focus of Bible prophecy.

We are now entering a new and dangerous period in earth's history, a time when the very survival of the human race will stand in jeopardy. Today's Middle East is a simmering caldron threatening to boil over. The region is irreversibly

approaching that moment in time when it will become the focal point of the fast-approaching last days of this age.

It is time to *wake up* to what's taking place today—the true significance of the perilous times in which we live, and *where it's heading!*

Never before in all history has mankind faced a future so seemingly dark and ominous. Many sense the gravity of present world conditions. Many feel ever-increasing anxiety and uneasiness.

There is no question about it! *Your* life will be affected dramatically by events developing in the Middle East!

But you needn't feel helpless! As surely as God predicted these events, he also promises protection during this prophesied crisis to those who sincerely seek to do his will—to those willing to change their prejudices and rid themselves of deep-seated hatreds and suspicions, to repent of their rebellion against God and his Law, to yield themselves to the authority of Jesus Christ, to call upon God for deliverance in heartfelt prayer!

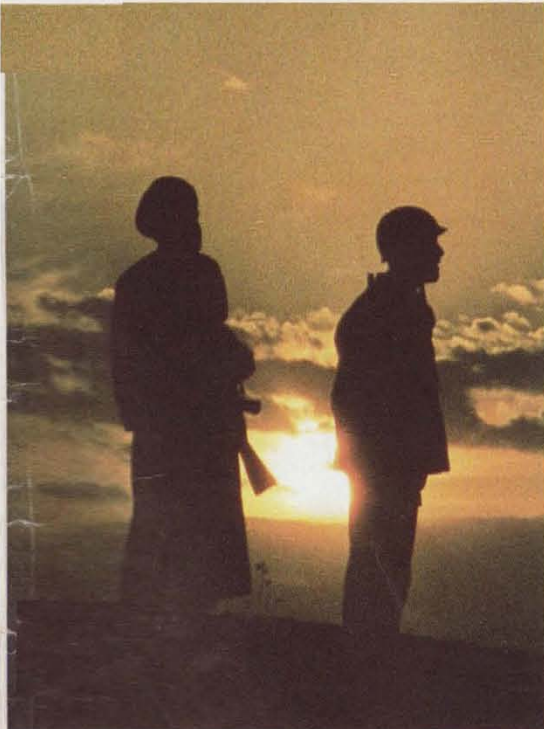
The punishments that lie ahead for all nations are God's merciful correction for a wayward world. It is for their own ultimate *good*. Those nations could yet avert these national tragedies—if they would only *heed!*

Today, God is warning the end time generation through a Work that he has commissioned (Matt. 24:14). A few will *act* on the knowledge God is revealing through His servants. Those individuals who heed the warning *now* and surrender voluntarily and unconditionally to God—see Revelation 12:14, where they are pictured under the symbol of a woman, meaning the true Church of God—may escape the frightful events at the end of this age! Jesus Christ said, "Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass" (Luke 21:36).

We must not be overcome by this world and its corrupt ways.

Listen to God's final warning: "*Come out of her, my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues*" (Rev. 18:4).

Tensions are building. The Middle East is a coiled spring straining to explode! We must watch and pray always. If we do, we may qualify to be protected from the holocaust that is soon to engulf an unsuspecting world!



*All nations will be drawn into the crisis now brewing in the volatile Middle East, focal point of Bible prophecy.*

*Kalari—Sygma;  
The Plain Truth magazine; Sygma*

