

The book cover is a dark blue, textured material, possibly leather or cloth, with a prominent embossed decorative border. The border consists of a series of repeating circular and floral motifs, creating a frame around the central text. The text is printed in a gold or yellow color, centered within the frame.

**The Middle East
in
Bible Prophecy**

The Middle East in Bible Prophecy



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Introduction: Worlds in Turmoil

Where were you on Sept. 11, 2001? If you're like most people, the horrifying images and emotions of that day are permanently etched into your mind. Who can forget the sight of a giant airliner slamming into the World Trade Center, the trapped men and women plunging to their deaths, the collapse of the towers and the cloud of pulverized concrete and debris that covered Manhattan?

The awful events of that day changed our world forever. At the beginning of a new century, it heralded a new age of mass terrorism directed at civilians. America's sense of security—that it could never happen on its shores—was forever shattered. Other nations quickly realized that similar catastrophes could strike their cities. Ever since, terrorism has become a very real threat for countless millions around the globe.

That day's horror also catapulted the Middle East to the forefront on news programs around the world. Suddenly, what was happening thousands of miles away could affect people regardless of where they lived. A region that, to many, had seemed irrelevant now became the focus of attention as nations everywhere awakened to the reality of how the Middle East impacts us all.

The reality quickly came home that problems thousands of miles away can have a greater impact on us than decisions made by our own local or national governments. The fall of the Twin Towers had an immediate effect on the American economy far greater than any decision made on nearby Wall Street, with an estimated \$100 billion loss in direct damages and \$2 trillion in short-term stock market losses.

The Middle East affects us all

But Sept. 11 was not the start of terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism or conflict in the Middle East. As part of a historic continuum, it was simply the date on which the accumulated problems of thousands of years finally reached America's shores.

Considering how much the Middle East now dominates the news, it's hard to believe that at the beginning of the last century the Middle East "was of only marginal concern" to the Western world. "The region had become a political backwater," according to historian David Fromkin, author of *A Peace to End All Peace* (1989, p. 24), a book about the birth of the modern Middle East. "Few Europeans of Churchill's generation knew or cared what went on in the languid empires of the Ottoman Sultan or the Persian Shah," he notes (p. 25).

A century later, however, nations around the world are all affected by what happens in this volatile region. The global economy runs on oil, most of which lies under the sand of Middle Eastern deserts. Oil is the lifeblood of Western economies and affluence, and a plentiful and cheap supply is essential to continued Western prosperity. This dependence on oil has fundamentally altered the Western nations' relationship with the region, transforming it into a strategically vital part of the world.

A second fundamental change has taken place in the Middle East in the last 100 years—the

creation of many new nations, which has vastly complicated the politics of the area. The establishment of one country in particular has led to a cycle of violence and upheaval that is seemingly without end. Yet, surprisingly, the Bible prophesied the establishment of this nation thousands of years ago and predicted the growing conflict that would follow its rebirth.

A peace to end all peace

World War I was often called "the war to end all wars." At the close of the peace conference following the worst conflict in history, Archibald Wavell, an officer who served with the British Army in Palestine and was later promoted to field marshal, prophetically declared, "After 'the war to end war' they seem to have been pretty successful in Paris at making a 'Peace to end Peace'" (Fromkin, p. 5).

Before World War I the Middle East was dominated by the Ottoman Empire, the empire of the Turks who ruled over all the lands whose names are now so familiar to us. The countries that are now Turkey, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, Jordan, Israel and others were all ruled by a declining empire that had once also presided over vast lands in both North Africa and southeastern Europe. Within this empire different peoples lived in relative harmony. About 40 percent of the people were Turks and 40 percent Arabs, with the remainder a mixture of different ethnic groups—Armenians and Jews being the most numerous of these.

It might have continued this way were it not for World War I. At the onset of war, it was not clear which side the Ottoman Empire would support. Both the British and the Germans courted the Turks. Finally the sultan opted to support the German kaiser, a fatal decision that ultimately led to the birth of many new nations—and wars seemingly without end. One of the nations that eventually came into being was the Jewish state of Israel, complicating the geopolitical situation in the region and destined to affect all nations on earth.

What few realize is this one crucial fact: After 1,900 years, the restoration of a Jewish homeland in the Middle East was necessary to fulfill ancient prophecies you can find in the Bible. This region, once a "political backwater" of little or no interest to the Western powers, is destined to become the center of the final global crisis that will usher in cataclysmic events leading humanity to the brink of extinction—and ultimately change our world forever.

In the following pages you'll learn the astounding story of the past, present and future of this crucial region that was laid out thousands of years ago—the story of the Middle East in Bible prophecy.

The Middle East: Worlds in Collision

You need to understand what is prophesied to yet happen in the Middle East. Whether you realize it or not, or understand it or not, events there are destined to affect the lives of every person on earth.

Why does the Middle East dominate the headlines so often? One obvious answer is oil, the lifeblood of modern economies. Without oil to run factories, heat homes, fuel transportation and provide energy and raw materials for thousands of uses, the economies of many nations would grind to a halt. The crucial importance of oil alone ensures that the Middle East will remain in the headlines for years.

But there's more that keeps the Middle East in the news. It is the birthplace of the world's three great monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Too often it has not been just their birthplace, but their battlefield, with adherents warring against each other for control of territory they consider holy.

Nowhere are these conflicts more obvious than in Israel, and specifically in Jerusalem. If you've never been to Jerusalem, it's hard to imagine how so much history, religion and culture can collide and stand in literal heaps. Nowhere is this more evident than at the Temple Mount, flash point for many a conflict over the centuries.

The site first came to the attention of Israel's King David, who bought a threshing floor and built an altar on it, intending it for the site of the temple (1 Chronicles 21-22). The Temple Mount is so named because it is the location of the temple built by David's son Solomon (destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.) and its replacement built by Zerubbabel and later enlarged by Herod the Great (ultimately razed by the Roman general Titus in A.D. 70).

Here Jesus of Nazareth worshipped, taught and confronted the money changers, scribes, Pharisees and other religious authorities. After His death and resurrection, Christianity was born in the temple's shadow. His followers continued to worship and teach there for several more decades until the legions of Rome crushed a Jewish rebellion and carted away most of the Jewish population they hadn't killed. A later Jewish rebellion, in 132-135, led to a Roman decree that no Jew was to set foot in Jerusalem on pain of death.

Centuries later, in 638, Muslim Arabs took the city. In 691 Muslims built the Dome of the Rock on that same Temple Mount, enclosing the spot from which, Muslims believe, Muhammad ascended to heaven. Today Muslims consider it the third-holiest site in Islam, after Mecca, where Muhammad was born, and Medina, where he found refuge and died.

Several more centuries passed before the Crusaders captured Jerusalem, slaughtered Muslim and Jew alike and converted the Dome of the Rock into a church. Their hold on the city lasted less than a century before Muslims recaptured it. Jerusalem changed hands three more times before Muslims took control of the city and held it from 1244 until 1917, when the Ottoman Empire lost its hold in World War I and the city came under British administration.

In 1948 the modern state of Israel was born, and in the 1967 war the Israelis gained control of

all of Jerusalem, though leaving the Temple Mount under Islamic authority.

Today one can watch Muslims praying at the Dome of the Rock atop the Temple Mount, Jews praying at the Western Wall barely a stone's throw below and Christians praying along the Via Dolorosa and at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher a few hundred yards to the north and west. And all around one sees the rubble of the centuries of conflict over this holy place.

Who will write the next chapter in the history of this troubled city? Believe it or not, the final chapters are already written—prophesied centuries ago in the pages of the Bible. Ominously, they mesh remarkably well with today's headlines. In the following pages we provide you with an overview of the past and the headlines of tomorrow.

The Sons of Abraham

It's impossible to understand the present Middle East without a knowledge of the three great religions that emanate from the area—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These three faiths all trace their spiritual roots back to the same individual, Abraham. The towering historical figures behind these three religions—Moses, Jesus Christ and Muhammad—were all direct descendants of Abraham.

Abraham, born in the Mesopotamian city of Ur, was the son of Terah, a descendant of Shem, a son of Noah. Born almost 4,000 years ago, Abraham's impact on the Middle East is still with us to this day. As a descendant of Noah's son Shem, Abraham and his descendants were a Semitic people. In Genesis 11 we see that Shem's great-grandson Eber (verse 14-16) was a direct ancestor of Abraham, and it is from Eber that the term Hebrew comes.

Called "the father of the faithful" (compare Romans 4:11), Abraham obeyed God's instruction to leave his native Ur and move to Haran. As Stephen, the devout first martyr of the Christian era, put it: "The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Haran, and said to him, 'Get out of your country and from your relatives, and come to a land that I will show you'" (Acts 7:2-3).

Both Ur and Haran were cities in Mesopotamia, which refers to the area between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers. Haran was a natural stopping-off point for Abraham and Sarah, who were about to be sent by God to a new land, a significant turning point in the history of the region.

We read of this move in Genesis 12:1-4, following the death of Abraham's father, Terah. Again, notice his example of unquestioning obedience: "Now the LORD had said to Abram [this being his original name, which was later expanded to Abraham]: 'Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house, to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing ...' So Abram departed as the LORD had spoken to him ..." Hebrews 11:8 adds: "And he went out, not knowing where he was going."

God was working with Abraham to establish him and his descendants in the land of Canaan (later called the Promised Land and often referred to as the Holy Land). At the crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe, this area was ideal for God's chosen people, who were to be an example to the rest of the world (Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

On arriving in the new land, God promised Abraham that He would give the land to his descendants (Genesis 12:7). "And the LORD said to Abram,... 'Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever'" (Genesis 13:14-15).

God added: "And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered" (verse 16). Significantly, God later changed Abram's name to Abraham (Genesis 17:5). His earlier name meant "high (exalted) father." God renamed him "father of a multitude," saying, "I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you" (verse 6).

At the time these prophecies must have seemed ironic to Abraham, for his wife Sarah was barren. Her infertility was to be very significant in the development of the modern Middle East.

God promised Abraham in Genesis 15:4 that he would have an heir: "one who will come from your own body." Impatient, Sarah told Abraham to take her Egyptian handmaid Hagar and to produce a child by her. This took place "after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan" (Genesis 16:1-3).

Abraham's first son is born

"So he went in to Hagar, and she conceived. And when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress became despised in her eyes" (Genesis 16:4). The relationship between Sarah and Hagar quickly deteriorated and Hagar fled.

But a divine message was given to Hagar, telling her to return. It also reassured her that her son would have many descendants—but descendants with traits that would be evident throughout their history: "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count ... You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael ['God hears'], for the LORD has heard of your misery. He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers" (verses 10-12, New International Version).

This description of Hagar's descendants is significant because many of today's Arabs are Ishmaelites—descendants of this same Ishmael, whose father was Abraham. Muhammad, the founder and prophet of Islam, was descended from Kedar, one of the 12 sons of Ishmael (Ismail in Arabic). Today 22 nations in the Middle East and North Africa are Arabic nations, most of whose people are adherents of Islam. An additional 35 countries are members of the Islamic Conference, most of them with Islamic governments, but whose people are of different descent.

Even before Ishmael's descendants arrived in the area, the term arab was used to denote the peoples of the Arabian peninsula. With the spread of Islam, Arabs and the Arabic language today encompass a vast region.

The divinely prophetic words spoken to Hagar are still of great significance today. The prophecy that Ishmael "will be a wild donkey of a man" is not meant as an insult. The wild donkey was the aristocrat of the wild beasts of the desert, the preferred prey of hunters. The prophecy is a reference to how Ishmael's descendants would emulate the lifestyle of the wild donkey, leading a free and noble existence in the desert.

"His hand will be against everyone, and everyone's hand against him" similarly refers to this independent lifestyle. Ishmael's descendants have always resisted foreign domination. "He will live in hostility towards all his brothers" is a reference to the enmity that has historically existed among the Arabs and between the Arabs and the other sons of Abraham.

Abraham's second son

Fourteen years after the birth of Ishmael, God blessed Abraham with another son, this time by

his wife Sarah. He told them to name their son Isaac (meaning "laughter" for the incredulous reaction they had when told they would have a son at their advanced age as well as the joy that he would later bring to his parents, Genesis 17:17, 19; 18:10-15; 21:5-6). Isaac in turn fathered Jacob, also named Israel, the father of the Israelites. Ishmael's and Isaac's descendants are therefore cousins.

"So the child [Isaac] grew and was weaned. And Abraham made a great feast on the same day that Isaac was weaned. And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, whom she had borne to Abraham, scoffing. Therefore she said to Abraham, 'Cast out this bondwoman and her son; for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, namely with Isaac'" (Genesis 21:8-10).

This displeased Abraham, who had grown to love Ishmael. "But God said to Abraham, '... Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called" (verse 12). God further reassured Abraham: "Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman [Ishmael], because he is your seed" (verse 13). "So God was with the lad; and he grew and dwelt in the wilderness ..." (verse 20).

It cannot be said that Ishmael hated Isaac. But after 14 years as an only child, Isaac's arrival fundamentally changed Ishmael's relationship with his father, Abraham. Afterward, Ishmael felt envy and rivalry toward his half brother, feelings that tribally have survived down through the centuries and which affect the politics of the Middle East today.

Isaac's two sons

Further family complications were ahead. Isaac, in turn, had two sons, Jacob and Esau, twins by his wife Rebekah. Even before they were born, "the children struggled together within her" (Genesis 25:22). God explained: "Two nations are in your womb, two peoples shall be separated from your body; one people shall be stronger than the other, and the older shall serve the younger" (verse 23). Both brothers were to father great nations, a blessing from God to Abraham's grandsons.

Normally the firstborn would receive the birthright, but here it was to be different. The Bible records that Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of lentil stew (verses 29-34), showing how little it meant to him. Sometime later, Jacob tricked his father into giving him the birthright blessing (chapter 27). For this, "Esau hated Jacob" (verse 41).

Again, the consequences of this are with us to this day. The descendants of Esau (also called Edom, Genesis 25:30) intermarried with Ishmael's descendants, their bitterness and resentment against Jacob's descendants intensifying through the centuries. Esau's grandson Amalek (Genesis 36:12) was the father of the Amalekites, who became bitter foes of the descendants of Jacob, the 12 tribes of Israel. A prophecy about Amalek foretold endless war between them "from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16). Some scholars believe that many of today's Palestinians are largely the descendants of the Amalekites.

Let's now turn to the remarkable story of the tribes of Israel—their prophesied rise and fall.

The Rise and Fall of Ancient Israel

One of God's most remarkable claims is found in Isaiah 46:9-10: "For I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand ...'" (emphasis added throughout).

Here God not only says that He can reveal the future; He also claims the power to bring it to pass!

Nowhere is this more evident than in the remarkable prophecies of what would happen to Abraham's descendants through Jacob's offspring, the 12 tribes of Israel.

God's promises to Abraham, while astounding in their magnitude, nevertheless started small—with the promise of a son, Isaac, to be born to him and Sarah (Genesis 17:19-21; 21:1-3). Isaac, in turn, had two sons, Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25:19-26). Jacob had 12 sons, from whom the 12 tribes of Israel are descended.

Prophesied birth of a nation

But long before this, before Abraham even had a son at all, God revealed to Abraham the fact that his descendants would go through one of the most remarkable "birth processes" a people could go through—they would be enslaved in a foreign land before emerging as a nation.

We find this prophesied in Genesis 15:13-14: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions."

This is referring, of course, to the Exodus. The remarkable chain of circumstances leading to the fulfillment of this prophecy is spelled out in Genesis 37-50 and Exodus 1-14.

While the Exodus itself is one of the Bible's best-known stories, the events that led up to it aren't so well understood. In brief, Jacob's favorite of his 12 sons, Joseph, was sold as a slave by his jealous brothers and ended up in Egypt (Genesis 37). There, through a series of events and God's blessings, Joseph thrived and amazingly rose to the highest position in the Egyptian government under the pharaoh (chapters 39-41).

When a famine struck the region, Joseph's family migrated to Egypt, which, thanks to Joseph's foresight, had stored enough grain to survive the famine (chapters 42-47). Joseph recognized that God had been behind all these events and that things had worked out this way so that his family would be spared and God's prophecies fulfilled (Genesis 50:19-20).

The 12 sons of Jacob—progenitors of the tribes of Israel—thrived in Egypt (Exodus 1:1-7). But then "there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph" (verse 8). The new pharaoh, feeling threatened by the growing number of Israelites, enslaved them and "made their

lives bitter with hard bondage" (verse 14).

God called the son of two of these Hebrew slaves, Moses, who through miraculous circumstances had himself been a prince of Egypt but was later a fugitive, to lead Israel out of their enslavement. "I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," He announced to Moses (Exodus 3:6).

God then followed with a remarkable prophecy of what He intended to do with Moses and his countrymen: "I have surely seen the oppression of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows. So I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up from that land to a good and large land, to a land flowing with milk and honey ... Come now, therefore, and I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring My people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (verses 7-10).

What God proposed to do was stunning –to deliver a people from enslavement at the hands of the greatest superpower of their day! The following chapters— covering the 10 plagues and the awesome parting of the Red Sea—show how God indeed miraculously delivered the Israelites, even down to the detail of fulfilling His promise to Abraham that "they shall come out with great possessions" (Genesis 15:14; compare Exodus 11:2; 12:35-36).

Israelites in the Promised Land

Following Israel's miraculous deliverance from Egypt came the periods of the 40 years in the wilderness, the conquest of the Promised Land and the period of the Israelite judges. Many specific minor prophecies were given and fulfilled during this time as recorded in the biblical books of Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua and Judges.

When we come to the establishment of the Israelite monarchy, we find that the dynasty of Israel's most famous king, David, had been prophesied to arise from the tribe of Judah centuries before, while the Israelites were still in Egypt (Genesis 49:8, 10). Like many prophecies, this was dual—meaning it had more than one intended meaning or fulfillment—in that it also foretold that the coming Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come from the tribe of Judah (compare Hebrews 7:14).

Because of space limitations we won't go into the dozens of specific prophecies that were given and fulfilled during the several centuries that the kingdoms of Israel and Judah existed, but will touch on only the most significant.

After righteous King David's passing, his son Solomon ascended the throne. Solomon had it all –a powerful kingdom he inherited from his father, humility, and wisdom and wealth granted to him by God (1 Kings 3:11-13). Under his reign the kingdom of the combined tribes of Israel grew even more powerful, dominating the region.

But, regrettably, while Solomon knew what he should do, he lacked the personal character and conviction to carry it out. His heart was turned from serving the one true God to serving the pagan gods and idols of the lands around him (1 Kings 11:4-8).

The kingdom divides

Solomon's ill-chosen path set the kingdom on a road from which there would be no recovery. Because of Solomon's sins, God announced that He would tear the kingdom away from him and give it to one of Solomon's subjects (verses 11-13). Indeed, most of the kingdom would split away to follow a rival; only a minority would remain to follow Solomon's son and the kings of David's line.

This prophecy was fulfilled a few years later at Solomon's death when most of the tribes broke away to follow Jeroboam, leader of the northern kingdom, Israel. The rest remained with Solomon's successor, Rehoboam, leader of the southern kingdom of Judah (1 Kings 12; 2 Chronicles 10-11). The two kingdoms would become rivals—and sometimes enemies—for the next two centuries.

Most people assume that the Jews and Israelites are one and the same. But this is clearly not true. Any look at history and these relevant Bible chapters shows they were two separate kingdoms, the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah (from which the term Jew is derived). As an interesting historical note, the first time the word Jews appears in the Bible, it is in 2 Kings 16:5-6 (King James Version) where Israel is allied with another king and at war with the Jews.

Israel's first king, Jeroboam, quickly established a pattern of idolatry and syncretism (mixing elements of true and false worship) from which the northern kingdom would never depart (1 Kings 12:26-33). God sent many prophets to warn the Israelite kings of the destruction that would come their way if they didn't return to Him.

The first of these was Ahijah, who gave this warning to Jeroboam's wife: "For the LORD will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River ..." (1 Kings 14:15).

This was a clear pronouncement of the northern kingdom's fate if they wouldn't repent—they would be taken captive "beyond the River" (the Euphrates) at the hands of the coming Assyrian Empire.

Many other prophets followed, repeating God's warnings to the Israelites and their kings, pleading with them to repent lest they suffer that awful fate. Among these prophets were Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, whose messages are recorded for us in the biblical books that bear their names.

But the messages of these prophets went unheeded. Finally, in 722 B.C., after a series of attacks, invasions and deportations, the northern kingdom was crushed and its people carried away into captivity at the hands of the Assyrians—"beyond the River" as God had warned their first king two centuries earlier.

Judah follows in Israel's footsteps

The story of Judah, the southern kingdom, is somewhat different though equally tragic. Both kingdoms quickly abandoned the true God and sank into moral and spiritual depravity. While the northern kingdom never once had a righteous king, Judah at least had a handful who turned to God and instituted religious reforms aimed at turning the people to proper worship of the true God.

These righteous kings were somewhat successful, at least for a while. As a result, the kingdom of Judah outlasted its northern neighbor by more than a century. Yet eventually those in Judah, too, would pay a heavy price for rejecting their Creator.

They should have learned a lesson from the captivity of the 10 northern tribes, especially since some of the same Assyrian invasions devastated much of Judah. In Hezekiah's day virtually all of Judah except for its capital, Jerusalem, was conquered by the Assyrians—and Jerusalem, too, would have fallen had God not supernaturally delivered the city (2 Kings 18-19).

The prophet Isaiah, speaking to Hezekiah, was the first to reveal the specific enemy that would subjugate Judah if they, too, refused to change: "... 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and what your fathers have accumulated until this day, shall be carried to Babylon; nothing shall be left,' says the LORD. 'And they shall take away some of your sons who will descend from you, whom you will beget; and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon'" (2 Kings 20:16-18).

God sent many other prophets—including Micah, Zephaniah, Habakkuk and Jeremiah—to warn Judah, but to no avail. As the Assyrians vanquished the Israelites in several waves of invasions and deportations, so the Babylonians took away the Jews in several deportations before and after the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Many details of the biblical accounts of the downfalls of Israel and Judah are confirmed by Assyrian and Babylonian records from the time, demonstrating again the accuracy of the biblical record.

Judah's exile and return

The outcome of Judah's exile, however, was far different from that of the northern kingdom. Israel was deported to the far reaches of the Assyrian Empire and its people lost their national and ethnic identity. But God gave Judah an encouraging promise through this prophecy from Jeremiah:

"For thus says the LORD: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart. I will be found by you, says the LORD, and I will bring you back from your captivity ..." (Jeremiah 29:10-14).

Here, too, we find a remarkable prophecy that was fulfilled to the letter. This 70-year period appears to have begun with the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon's temple—the center of Jewish worship—in 586 B.C. and to have concluded with the completion of a new Jerusalem temple in 516 B.C. The biblical books of Ezra and Nehemiah record the return of many of the Jewish exiles from Babylon.

The Four Empires of Daniel's Prophecies

Among the Jewish captives taken from Judah and exiled to Babylon was a young man whose Hebrew name was Daniel, renamed Belteshazzar by the Babylonians (Daniel 1:1-7). Daniel lived in the remarkable times of the downfall of the kingdoms of both Judah and Babylon. He served as a high official in both the Babylonian government and that of its successor, the Medo-Persian Empire.

Daniel's book prophesied events fulfilled many centuries ago as well as major events yet to come. It reveals a history of the region, written in advance, from Daniel's time right up to the return of Jesus Christ.

Yet at the end of the book God instructed Daniel to "shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase" (Daniel 12:4). This indicates that certain major prophecies that previously wouldn't have made sense will be understandable as the end approaches.

The prophecies of Daniel provide proof of the accuracy of the Bible. Many of his prophecies are so detailed and specific that they have long confounded Bible critics.

In fact, some skeptics have not challenged the content of Daniel's prophetic accuracy. Rather than admit that his words are indeed inspired, they have simply labeled his book a fraud. They claim that it was not written by Daniel in the sixth century B.C.—timing which is evident by events written of in the book—but that it was penned by an unknown author in the 160s B.C., long after many of the events prophesied in the book came to pass. This, the critics allege, is the real reason for the book's startling prophetic accuracy!

Daniel's testimony challenges the critics. But let's first consider the nature of the critics' approach. They dispute Daniel's authorship because he refers to himself in the early chapters in the third person, as if writing about someone else. However, as *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* points out, this "was the custom among ancient authors of historical memoirs ..." (1985, Vol. 7, p. 4). In relating some of his experiences Daniel did write in the first person (Daniel 7:15; 8:15; 9:2; 10:2).

The identity of Daniel's critics is significant as well. The first person to question the authenticity of Daniel's authorship was the Greek scholar and historian Porphyry, who lived A.D. 233-304. He is labeled by historians as a Neoplatonist, which means he subscribed to the doctrines of the Greek philosopher Plato rather than the Bible. "Porphyry is well known as a violent opponent of Christianity and defender of Paganism" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, Vol. 22, p. 104, "Porphyry").

Since Porphyry was an enemy of Christianity, his objectivity is open to question. He had no factual basis for his opinion, and his view contradicted the testimony of Jesus Christ, who referred to Daniel as the author of the book (Matthew 24:15).

The biblical scholar Jerome (A.D. 340-420) refuted Porphyry's contention. Thereafter no one took Porphyry's remarks seriously again until many centuries later. "... He was more or less

dismissed by Christian scholarship as a mere pagan detractor who had allowed a naturalistic bias to warp his judgment. But during the time of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century, all supernatural elements in Scripture came under suspicion ..." (Expositor's, p. 13).

Some of today's scholars with liberal leanings have recycled these centuries- old arguments. Old Testament historian Eugene Merrill says their beliefs are built on feeble evidence. "[Daniel's] rhetoric and language are eminently at home in the sixth century [B.C.] ... It is only on the most subjective and circular lines of evidence that the man and his writing have been denied historicity" (Kingdom of Priests, 1996, p. 484).

Phenomenal prophecy and fulfillment

The accuracy of Daniel's prophecies of remotely distant events is spectacular. For example, in the "70 weeks" prophecy recorded in Daniel 9:24-27, "Daniel predicts the precise year of Christ's appearance and the beginning of his ministry in A.D. 27" (Expositor's, p. 9).

Another amazing prophecy recorded by Daniel is his interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in chapter 2. In the second year of his reign the Babylonian king had a troubling dream that none of his counselors could explain. Babylonian culture placed considerable emphasis on dreams, and Nebuchadnezzar was convinced that this one was of great importance (Daniel 2:1-3).

His dream gives us a "disclosure of God's plan for the ages till the final triumph of Christ" and "presents the foreordained succession of world powers that are to dominate the Near East till the final victory of the Messiah in the last days" (Expositor's, pp. 39, 46).

Without prior knowledge of its content, Daniel explained the details of the dream to Nebuchadnezzar: "You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay" (Daniel 2:31-33).

Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that his Babylonian Empire was represented by the head of gold (verses 37-38). The silver, bronze and iron components of the image, or statue, represented three powerful empires that were to follow mighty Babylon (verses 39-40).

This interpretation provided an astounding preview of history. Nebuchadnezzar's dream occurred and was interpreted by Daniel about 600 B.C. The image represented, in symbolic form, the sequence of great empires that would dominate the region's political scene for centuries.

"The silver empire was to be Medo- Persia, which began with Cyrus the Great, who conquered Babylon in 539 ... This silver empire was supreme in the Near and Middle East for about two centuries" (Expositor's, p. 47).

"The bronze empire was the Greco-Macedonian Empire established by Alexander the Great ... The bronze kingdom lasted for about 260 or 300 years before it was supplanted by the fourth kingdom" (ibid.).

"Iron connotes toughness and ruthlessness and describes the Roman Empire that reached its widest extent under the reign of Trajan" (ibid.). Trajan reigned as emperor A.D. 98-117, and the Roman Empire itself ruled for many centuries.

The fourth empire was depicted as having 10 toes. The feet and toes were composed partly of iron and partly of clay, as verse 41 explains. "Verse 41 deals with a later phase or outgrowth of this fourth empire, symbolized by the feet and ten toes—made up of iron and earthenware, a fragile base for the huge monument. The text clearly implies that this final phase will be marked by some sort of federation rather than by a powerful single realm" (ibid.).

Another dream adds important details

Additional aspects of this succession of world-ruling empires were revealed to Daniel in a later dream. This time the four empires were represented by four beasts: a lion (Babylonian Empire), a bear (Medo-Persian Empire), a leopard (Greco-Macedonian Empire) and a fourth beast described as "terrible" and unlike the other three (Daniel 7:1-7).

Notice what verse 7 says about this fourth creature: "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth [paralleling the iron legs of the prior dream]; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns."

What does this description mean? It too is a reference to the great power of Rome, which crushed all who opposed it. "Thus the superior power of the colossus of Rome ... is emphasized in the symbolism of this terrible fourth beast" (Expositor's, p. 87).

Verse 8 of Daniel 7 elaborates on the 10 horns: "I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots." Later in the chapter we see that this little horn exalts himself to the position of an internationally powerful religious leader (verses 24-25), even commanding a false religious system that persecutes the true followers of God.

Daniel 7:9-14 takes us right through to Christ's establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth: "Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed." So this Roman system, through its periodic revivals down through history, continues right to the time of the end when Jesus Christ returns to rule the earth.

Revelation 17 also helps us in understanding this end-time power. In this chapter it is again depicted as a beast, but now we see that its final manifestation includes 10 "kings"—leaders of nations or groups of nations—who "receive authority for one hour" with the ruler of this end-time superpower, an individual the Bible refers to as "the beast" (Revelation 17:12-13). This final revival of the Roman Empire leads into Christ's return as they "make war with the Lamb" (verse 14).

All of this concurs with Daniel 2:44, which obviously indicates that the second coming of Christ will occur in a time during which vestiges of the fourth beast or kingdom (the Roman Empire)

still exist: "And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever."

The greater part of these prophetic events, as detailed by the two dreams, has already been fulfilled. Their detailed completion affirms the divine inspiration of the Bible. The odds of any person foreseeing this on his own defy credibility. "... There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days" (Daniel 2:28).

The Bible's most detailed prophecy

Daniel 11 records another phenomenal prophecy. The chronological setting is given in Daniel 10:1 as the "third year of Cyrus king of Persia." A "man" (verse 5), no doubt an angel (compare Daniel 9:21), came to tell Daniel what would occur "in the latter days" (Daniel 10:14).

The prophecy that follows is the most detailed in all the Bible. The third year of Cyrus was more than 500 years before the birth of Christ. Yet this prophecy foretells events that began to occur almost immediately and will continue until the return of Christ. The initial stages of the prophecy confirm the Bible because they have already been fulfilled, as can be verified by a study of the Persian and Greek empires. No man could foresee such fine historical detail.

Some elements of what follows are intricate, requiring close attention. But a comparison of the prophetic words with the historical record makes them clear.

Protracted political intrigue

The first 35 verses of Daniel 11 give an account, written years in advance, of the intrigue between two political entities— the "king of the South" and the "king of the North." In secular history, the king of the South is often referred to as Ptolemy. The Ptolemaic dynasty ruled from Alexandria in Egypt. The king of the North ruled from Antioch in Syria under the name Seleucus, or Antiochus.

With this in mind, let's examine some of the details of the prophecy. It is important because it reveals the political climate and tensions in the Middle East preceding both the first and second appearances of Jesus Christ as the Messiah. In both instances, Jerusalem is at the center of the political conflicts of the time.

You can find more information on the historical fulfillment of much of this prophecy in resources such as The Expositor's Bible Commentary, which we quote below, or other reliable reference works. Rather than our quoting the entire scriptural passage, we recommend that you read in your own Bible the verses we cite, and remember that these details were foretold far in advance of their occurrence.

Daniel 11:2: The "three more kings" are Cambyses, the elder son of Cyrus; pseudo-Smerdis, an impostor who passed himself off as Cyrus's younger son, who had been secretly killed; and Darius the Persian. "The Persian king who invaded Greece was ... Xerxes, who reigned 485-

464 B.C." (Expositor's, p. 128).

Verses 3-4: "Verse 3 introduces us to ... the rise of Alexander the Great" (ibid.). The language in verse 4 "clearly suggests that this mighty conqueror was going to have a comparatively brief reign ... In seven or eight years he accomplished the most dazzling military conquest in human history. But he lived only four years more; and ... died of a fever in 323 ..." (ibid.).

Alexander's kingdom was divided "among four smaller and weaker empires" (Expositor's, p. 129). Alexander's infant son had been murdered in 310 and an illegitimate brother assassinated in 317. "Thus there were no descendants or blood relatives to succeed Alexander himself" (ibid.). So his kingdom was not divided among his posterity (verse 4).

Alexander's generals warred for control of his empire. The ensuing struggles for domination eliminated all but four, who became heads of the four divisions of his empire. The four were Cassander, reigning in Greece and the West, Lysimachus in Thrace and Asia Minor, Ptolemy in Egypt and Seleucus in Syria. Of these four, two—Ptolemy and Seleucus—expanded their rule and territory. These were the kings of Egypt and Syria, respectively.

The machinations that follow relate to these two. They are referred to as the king of the South (Ptolemy) and the king of the North (Seleucus) because of their location relative to Jerusalem.

Verse 5: "The king of the South was to be Ptolemy I" (Expositor's, p. 130). The biblical expression "one of his princes" refers to Seleucus. He had originally served under Ptolemy. In the intrigue after Alexander's death, Seleucus ultimately gained control over Syria and became king of the North. Seleucus eventually wielded more power than Ptolemy. The dynasty of the Seleucid line was to continue until 64 B.C.

The Laodicean war

Verse 6: A state of tension and hostility existed between the king of the South and the king of the North. Ptolemy I died in 285 B.C. In 252 the two powers attempted a treaty under which Berenice, the daughter of Ptolemy II, was to marry Antiochus II, the king of the North. Laodice, the first wife of Antiochus II, was angry because he had divorced her. In retaliation, she manipulated a conspiracy from her place of banishment. She had Berenice and her infant son assassinated. "Not long afterward the king himself [Antiochus II] was poisoned ..." (ibid.).

Laodice established herself as queen, because her son Seleucus II was too young to rule. The prophecy "she [Berenice] shall be given up" refers to the coup that Laodice engineered to effect the execution of Berenice. Some nobles who had supported Berenice as queen were also brought down.

Verses 7-9: Retaliation followed. A series of military actions, which came to be known as the Laodicean War, resulted. Ptolemy II died soon after Laodice killed his daughter, Berenice. Ptolemy III sought to avenge his sister's death. He attacked the king of the North and captured the Syrian capital of Antioch. Verse 8 describes the recapture by Ptolemy of "long-lost idols and sacred treasures" (Expositor's, p. 131) that had been stolen from Egypt by Cambyses in 524 B.C.

Peace was concluded between Ptolemy III and Seleucus II in 240, and hostilities ceased until

221, when Ptolemy III died.

Verses 10-12: The sons of Seleucus II attacked the king of the South after their father died. One of these sons, Seleucus III, reigned for only three years. His military activity was relatively minor. He died by poisoning. Another son, Antiochus III (the Great), did "overwhelm and pass through." He conquered Judea.

Ptolemy IV, the king of the South, retaliated (verse 11) and defeated the larger army of Seleucus III at the Battle of Raphia. After his victory Ptolemy turned to a life of debauchery during which he slaughtered tens of thousands of Jews in Egypt (verse 12). Through all this he weakened his kingdom.

Verses 13-16: The phrase "at the end of some years" refers to an incident when, 14 years after his defeat, Antiochus III came against Ptolemy V, still a young boy. (Ptolemy IV had died in 203.) The Egyptian provinces were in turmoil because of the wretched rule of Ptolemy IV. Many of the people—including Jews sympathetic to the king of the North—joined with Antiochus against the king of the South. The rebellion was ultimately crushed by the Egyptian general Scopus (verse 14).

Scopus also rebuffed the forces of Antiochus during the winter of 201-200. The king of the North responded with another invasion. He captured the city of Sidon ("a fortified city"), where Scopus surrendered (verse 15). Antiochus acquired complete control of the Holy Land, the "Glorious Land" (verse 16).

Verse 17: The Revised English Bible reads: "He [the king of the North] will resolve to advance with the full might of his kingdom; and, when he has agreed terms with the king of the south, he will give his young daughter in marriage to him, with a view to the destruction of the kingdom; but the treaty will not last nor will it be his purpose which is served." Having defeated Scopus, Antiochus desired to gain control of Egypt itself. He gave his daughter, Cleopatra, to Ptolemy V in marriage. Antiochus believed she would act in his favor and betray the interests of her husband. But she frustrated his plans by siding with Ptolemy.

Verses 18-19: In his frustration, Antiochus attacked islands and cities of the Aegean area. He also gave asylum to Rome's enemy, Hannibal of Carthage, who assisted him in landing in Greece. Rome responded by attacking Antiochus and inflicting defeat on his forces. The Romans deprived him of much of his territory and took several hostages to Rome, including Antiochus's son. Rome exacted heavy tribute of him (verse 18).

Antiochus returned in disgrace to his stronghold, Antioch. Unable to pay the heavy fees exacted by the Romans, he attempted to plunder a pagan temple. His action so enraged local inhabitants that they killed him, bringing him to an inglorious end (verse 19).

Verse 20: While not Scripture, the apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees 3:7-40 says that Antiochus's other son, Seleucus IV, was also unable to pay the taxes. Seleucus sent a Jew, Heliodorus, to plunder the temple at Jerusalem. Heliodorus went to the holy city but obtained nothing. Seleucus was later poisoned by Heliodorus, and so killed, "but not in anger or in battle."

Antiochus Epiphanes

Daniel 11:21-35: These verses speak of the infamous Antiochus IV (known also as Epiphanes), the brother of Seleucus IV, who had earlier been taken hostage to Rome. He was a "tyrannical oppressor who did his utmost to destroy the Jewish religion altogether" (Expositor's, p. 136).

Antiochus passed laws that forbade the practice of the Jewish religion, under penalty of death. He was a man of incredible cruelty. On his orders "an aged Scribe, Eleazar, was flogged to death because he refused to eat swine's flesh. A mother and her seven children were successively butchered, in the presence of the governor, for refusing to pay homage to an image. Two mothers who had circumcised their new-born sons were driven through the city and cast headlong from the wall" (Charles Pfeiffer, *Between the Testaments*, 1974, pp. 81-82).

Verse 31: This refers to the momentous events of Dec. 16, 168 B.C., when a crazed Antiochus entered Jerusalem and killed 80,000 men, women and children (2 Maccabees 5:11-14). He then desecrated the temple by offering a sacrifice to the chief Greek god, Zeus. This outrage was a forerunner of a comparable event that Jesus Christ said would occur in the last days (Matthew 24:15).

Verses 32-35: These verses appear to describe, on one level, the indomitable will and courage of the Maccabees, a family of priests who resisted Antiochus and his successors. The Maccabees' revolt against the Syrian king was triggered when "Mattathias, the leading priest in the city of Modein ..., after killing the officer of Antiochus who had come to enforce the new decree concerning idolatrous worship ..., led a guerrilla band that fled to the hills ..." (Expositor's, p. 141).

Mattathias was aided in his cause by five sons, most notably Judah or Judas, nicknamed Maqqaba (Aramaic for hammer, whence derives the name Maccabees). Many of these patriots died in this cause, but their heroics ultimately drove the Syrian forces from the country.

On another level, these verses could even refer to the New Testament Church, with their references to mighty works, persecution and apostasy.

Indeed, at this point Daniel's prophecy definitely takes on a different tone, referring explicitly to "the time of the end" near the end of verse 35. To quote Expositor's: "With the conclusion of the preceding pericope [extract] at v. 35, the predictive material that incontestably applies to the Hellenistic empires and the contest between the Seleucids and the Jewish patriots ends. This present section (vv. 36-39) contains some features that hardly apply to Antiochus IV, though most of the details could apply to him as well as to his latter-day antitype, 'the beast.'

"Both liberal and conservative scholars agree that all of chapter 11 up to this point contains strikingly accurate predictions of the whole sweep of events from the reign of Cyrus ... to the unsuccessful effort of Antiochus Epiphanes to stamp out the Jewish faith" (Expositor's, p. 143).

From this point forward a little more than a century would pass before the Roman general Pompey would conquer Jerusalem. Much of the Middle East passed to the control of the Roman Empire, and much of its power in turn passed to its eastern leg, the Byzantine Empire, in the following centuries.

But then, as we'll see in the next chapter, a remarkable new power and religion arose on the scene to dominate the Middle East for centuries—the Islamic Empire.

The Coming of Islam

The descendants of Ishmael lived in relative obscurity throughout the period of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman Empires. They mostly kept to themselves in the Arabian Peninsula where desert life was hard, frequently fighting among themselves. But this changed early in the seventh century, less than 600 years after the time of Jesus Christ, when the most famous of Ishmael's descendants came on the scene.

Until the early 600s the Arabs were idol worshippers. The great temple in Mecca had 365 idols (one for each day of the year) and was a source of considerable revenue for local merchants who relied on pilgrims visiting the site for their income.

This religious landscape was to change dramatically with the prophet Muhammad and the religion he founded, Islam.

Muhammad (sometimes spelled Mohammed or Mahomet) was of the Hashemite family (in Arabic, Beni Hashim) of the powerful Koreish (or Quraish) tribe, which controlled the pagan temple in Mecca. According to Islamic belief, it was near Mecca, at Mt. Hira, that the archangel Gabriel first appeared to Muhammad in A.D. 610, revealing wisdom from God. This and subsequent revelations form the Koran (or Quran), the holy scriptures of Islam, a book roughly the length of the New Testament.

Muhammad, whose name means "highly praised," became a courageous and determined preacher of monotheism, the belief in one God, a belief that threatened the commercial prosperity of other members of his tribe. Their attempts to have him killed failed, and in a short time Muhammad brought an end to the polytheistic idolatry of the area, replacing it with Islam (literally meaning "surrender" or "submission" to the one true God, Allah).

Muhammad's preaching achieved something that had eluded Ishmael's descendants from the beginning—unity, thereby enabling them to become a great nation that could spread out and influence other nations.

From these lowly beginnings in the desert of the Arabian Peninsula, Islam has spread throughout the world. Today 57 countries are in the Islamic Conference, comprising more than a quarter of all the nations on earth.

Although 22 of them are Arab nations, many of which are populated with descendants of Ishmael, another 35 nations also are either exclusively or significantly Islamic. These range geographically from West Africa across the center of the world to Indonesia, a wide belt of nations that identify with each other as followers of Islam.

In addition, millions more Muslims, followers of Islam, live in North America and Western Europe. The religion continues to expand rapidly due to a high birthrate and aggressive proselytizing.

Today Islam (pronounced Is-LAM, with the emphasis on the second syllable) has around 1.3 billion followers. They all worship Allah (similar emphasis on the second syllable), whom they

consider to be the one true God. They worship in mosques, with Friday as their chosen day of worship, though it is also permissible for adherents to work on that day.

Their one-sentence creed, called the shahadah ("testimony") is only eight words in Arabic—La illaha ila Allah, wa Muhammadun rasul Allah—meaning "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet." A solemn and sincere recitation of these words is the sole requirement for being a Muslim. The word Muslim (or Moslem) means "one who submits (to Allah)."

Muslims date their years from the hijrah (sometimes spelled hejira or hegira), Muhammad's flight from Mecca to Medina in A.D. 622. As the Muslim year is set according to the lunar calendar, there are 354 or 355 days in each year, which means that their year is about 11 days shorter than a year in the Western world, which is based on the Gregorian solar calendar. This means that Islamic festivals fall on different days each year according to the Gregorian calendar and gradually work their way back through the Gregorian year.

Muhammad died on June 8, A.D. 632, leaving no male heir and no designated successor. The result was chaos and confusion throughout the Islamic Empire, which after only a decade had already grown to one third the size of the present 48 continental United States.

Only one child by his beloved first wife Khadija had survived him, the beautiful Fatima. She grew to adulthood, married and bore children who also survived. It is through Fatima that all Muhammad's present descendants, called sharifs and sayyids, trace their ancestry. Fatima's husband, Ali ibn Abi Talib, first cousin and adopted son to Muhammad, was also his first convert after Khadija. Ali and Fatima had two young sons at the time of Muhammad's death.

As the nearest blood relative, many thought that Ali should be Muhammad's successor as their leader. After a great deal of argument, he was rejected in favor of a wealthy Meccan cloth merchant who had been an early convert and Muhammad's companion on his famous camel-back flight 10 years earlier. His name was Abu Bakr. He was also the father of Muhammad's favorite wife, Ayesha, and had been appointed to take the place of the prophet leading public prayers at the time of Muhammad's last illness.

The revelations had been to Muhammad, so Abu Bakr was not fully succeeding Muhammad. However, he was given authority over the secular political and administrative functions of the empire, with the title "Khalifah rasul Allah" meaning "Successor to the Messenger of God." In English the title is usually shortened to "caliph" and is given to the head of state in Muslim-governed countries. The office of Islamic Caliphate remained an Islamic institution right down to the creation of the Turkish Republic in 1924, when it was abolished by the secular government of Kemal Ataturk.

Although the transition following the death of Muhammad was sudden and unexpected and caused some bad feeling among the followers of Ali, Fatima's husband, the tribes remained united under Abu Bakr.

Rapid expansion of the Islamic Empire

Before he died Abu Bakr appointed Omar ibn al-Khattab as his successor. Caliph Omar (or Umar) was the first caliph to assume the illustrious title Amir al-Muminin, meaning "Commander

of the Faithful." It was during his 10-year reign that the first great wave of Islamic territorial expansion occurred as the children of Ishmael pushed outward in all directions from their ancient desert homeland.

Caliph Omar was an able commander of his troops and proved a formidable foe to the two great superpowers of his day, the Byzantine and Persian Empires. The former was the Eastern Roman Empire, which had developed out of the older Roman Empire after Constantine, in the fourth century, established a new capital in Byzantium (renaming it Constantinople, after himself)—now Istanbul, Turkey. It controlled Asia Minor, the Aegean Peninsula, much of North Africa and the Near East.

To the northeast of the Arabian Peninsula lay the Persian, or Sassanid, Empire. The Persian and Byzantine Empires were constantly fighting each other, weakening them and making them vulnerable to the new, vigorous, zealous and youthful Islamic Empire coming out of Arabia. The Sassanid Empire fell, but the Byzantine remained as a continually threatened and shrinking empire, finally falling to Muslim Turks in 1453.

To cries of Allahu Akbar ("God is Great!"), the Islamic call to arms, the camel- and horse-mounted Arab warriors were formidable opponents, defeating all the forces that were sent against them. Not since the days of Alexander the Great had there been such a force, conquering all before it so quickly. A century of conquest lay before them. Syria and the Holy Land were taken in 635-6; the area of Iraq, the following year; Egypt and Persia, four years later.

Jerusalem was their greatest prize, captured in 638. Called Al-Kuds in Arabic, meaning "the Holy," Jerusalem remains the third-holiest city of Islam, after Mecca and Medina. Muslims believe that Muhammad ascended to heaven on his winged steed Burak from the rock that is visible inside the Dome of the Rock, built in the late seventh century and one of the most architecturally magnificent buildings on earth.

Muslims also believe this is where Abraham came to sacrifice his son—the son, however, being Ishmael rather than Isaac as the Bible attests (Genesis 22:1-14). Built on the great platform of the Temple Mount constructed centuries earlier by Herod the Great, the Dome of the Rock and the surrounding area is today the most bitterly contested piece of real estate on earth.

Within a century after the death of Muhammad, the Arab Empire stretched from the Middle East across North Africa to Spain in the west and eastward across Central Asia to India. One of their advances even reached the gates of Paris before being halted by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours near Poitiers in 732, exactly 100 years after Muhammad's death.

Rapid Muslim expansion now halted until the 12th century, when another great expansion of Islam took place under the Sufis (Muslim mystics) who spread Islam throughout India, Central Asia, Turkey and sub-Saharan Africa. Muslim traders helped spread the religion even further, to Indonesia, the Malay Peninsula and China.

"Islam's essential egalitarianism within the community of the faithful and its official discrimination against the followers of other religions won rapid converts," notes the Encyclopaedia Britannica (15th Edition, Vol. 9, p. 912, "Islam"). Although Jews and Christians, as "people of the Book" were tolerated, they had to pay a special tax called jizyah. However, "pagans ... were required to either accept Islam or die" (ibid.).

Following the assassination of the Caliph Omar in November 644 while leading prayers in the mosque of Medina, a body of electors once again bypassed Ali when choosing a successor. The caliphate was bestowed on Othman ibn Affan, who had been an early convert to Islam and a close companion of the prophet.

During his period of rule the Koran was completed in its present form. Previously, most of its contents had simply been memorized in the heads of Muhammad's followers (Muhammad, himself illiterate, had never written them down). These were now collected by a team of men authorized to put the sacred writings together, under the leadership of the Islamic scholar Zayd ibn Thabit.

Muslims believe the Koran is the literal word of God (Kalimat Allah), not the words of Muhammad. The first words of the Koran are Bism'illah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim, meaning "In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate."

Islam splits over succession

Othman ruled 12 years (644-656) before being assassinated in Medina. His assassination heralded open religious and political conflicts within the Islamic community that continue to this day.

After Othman's death, leadership of the community finally fell to Ali, Fatima's aging husband, who had been living in retirement as a scholar. To his followers, Ali was the first and only lawful caliph. Most Muslims accepted him as the fourth caliph, but many were bitterly opposed to his rule.

The empire was to suffer continual political and religious strife, uprisings and rebellions. Five years later Ali, too, was assassinated. Before any of his sons could be appointed as successor, Othman's nephew, head of the Umayyad (or Omayyad) branch of the Koreish tribe, assumed control, bringing the dispute between the factions to a head.

Ali's followers believed that all caliphs must be descended from Ali as Muhammad's closest blood relative. This group was called the "party of Ali" (in Arabic, the Shiat Ali, or Shiites). The majority believed that anybody could be appointed caliph, regardless of lineage. This group was called the Sunni Muslims, sunna being the "path" or the "way" of the Prophet. In contrast to the Shiites, the Sunnis have generally accepted the rule of the caliphs.

Violence followed in 680 when Ali's son Hussein, a grandson of Muhammad, was killed along with 72 of his relatives and companions at Karbala in what is now Iraq. The Shiites now had a martyr. They grew in numbers and resolve and were increasingly embittered at the dominance of the Sunni Muslims. This animosity continues to the present day.

The majority Sunnis make up about 85 percent of all Muslims, and the Shiites (or Shia) constitute the remainder. Although they agree on the fundamentals of Islam, political, theological and philosophical differences have further widened the gap between the two. Complicating things even further has been the tendency among the Shiite Muslims to break up into various sects.

Today, the Shiites are the dominant force in Iran and the biggest single religious community in

Lebanon and Iraq. Remembering the fanaticism of the Iranian Revolution that overthrew the shah in 1979, many people think Shiites are inclined toward terrorism. However, most anti-Western terrorists come from the Wahhabi sect of Sunni Islam, which originated in Saudi Arabia in the 18th century.

One of the appeals of Islam is the emphasis on Ummah or community. "Though there have been many Islamic sects and movements, all followers are bound by a common faith and a sense of belonging to a single community" (ibid., p. 912). This sense of community has only been strengthened in the last 200 years during the period of Western supremacy. Achieving Arab and Islamic unity is very much a desire of Muslims in today's world.

Ishmael becomes the prophesied "great nation"

After Ali's death the Umayyads turned the caliphate into a hereditary office, ruling from Damascus for almost a century until 750. During this time most of the Iberian Peninsula (Spain and Portugal) was conquered along with what was left of North Africa. To the east, Islamic armies swept over Central Asia toward India and China. Before the end of their period of rule, the Muslims built an empire that was larger than Rome's, converting millions to Islam.

The Umayyads were replaced by the Abbasid dynasty, whose 37 caliphs ruled from Baghdad for five centuries (750-1258). At this time, while much of Europe was still in the Dark Ages (isolated in no small part by hostile Muslims along its borders), the Islamic world was a great civilization, preserving the literature and learning of the ancient world, leading the world in knowledge and understanding of mathematics, chemistry, physics, astronomy, geography and medicine.

As had been divinely promised to Abraham and Hagar concerning their son so many centuries earlier, Ishmael truly did become a "great nation" (Genesis 17:20; 21:18)—one of the greatest empires the world has ever known.

Like all civilizations, however, the Abbasid dynasty came to an end after falling into a slow decay and decline. During this period, as central authority waned, the unity of Islam was shattered, a problem that impedes Muslims to this day. The deathblow for the empire came when the Mongol hordes descended on Baghdad in 1258, killing the last caliph, slaughtering the city's inhabitants and ending the empire.

The Crusades: Battle for the Holy Land

During the reigns of the Abbasid caliphs, a major clash occurred between Islam and Catholic Europe. With the expansion of Islam into the Iberian Peninsula and the attempt to conquer France, there had already been conflict between the two, but the wresting of Jerusalem from the forces of Islam on July 15, 1099, was the beginning of a long and protracted period of rivalry between the two religious forces.

The European Crusaders pillaged, raped, murdered and enslaved the peoples of Jerusalem in a frenzy of carnage that both Jews and Muslims remember to this day. The sacred Dome of the Rock was taken over and turned into a church, with the Christian cross replacing the Islamic

crescent. Muslims were incensed and vowed to retake the city from the infidels (meaning "unbelievers," originally a Latin word used by Catholics to label Muslims).

Not until Oct. 2, 1187, were Islamic forces able to take back control of Jerusalem, under the leadership of Saladin (Salah ad-Din, meaning "Righteousness of the Faith"), the sultan of Egypt and Syria. Saladin proclaimed jihad (holy war) to retake Palestine from the enemies of Islam.

The golden cross at the top of the Dome of the Rock was replaced by the Muslim crescent, but Saladin did not seek revenge on his opponents. Instead, he treated both enemy soldiers and the civilian population with mercy and kindness—a stark contrast to the Europeans who had slaughtered tens of thousands when they took the city.

There were to be more Crusades for another century, briefly retaking Jerusalem from 1229 to 1239 and 1243 to 1244, but the forces of the cross eventually had to leave the Holy Land to Muslims. Not until 1917, during World War I, were Western Christians again able to retake Jerusalem, and then they kept control of the city for only three decades.

The rise of the Ottoman Empire

The next great power in the region was that of the Ottoman Turks, who seized control of Constantinople in 1453, finally destroying the collapsing Byzantine Empire founded by Rome more than a millennium earlier. The Turks, an Islamic but non-Arab people, took control of Jerusalem in 1517 and were to dominate the Middle East for the following four centuries.

The Ottomans expanded rapidly into southeastern Europe and on to the gates of Vienna before being pushed back toward the end of the 17th century. A period of decline followed in the 19th century with nations throughout the Balkans and North Africa breaking away from Ottoman rule.

The Arabs resented Turkish control and waited patiently for an opportunity to regain their independence and the former days of glory.

Ishmael's sons would be heard from again.

The Jews: From the Dispersion to the Modern Israeli State

By the time the prophet Muhammad was preaching the tenets of the new Islamic religion, the Jews had not had a state for some five centuries. They had rebelled against Roman rule in A.D. 66, a rebellion that took the Romans four years to crush. Thereafter, the Jerusalem temple lay in ruins.

A later rebellion from 132 to 135 (the Bar-Kokhba revolt) led to the utter destruction of Jerusalem. The Romans built a new town on its ruins, renaming it Aelia Capitolina. No Jew was allowed to set foot there on pain of death. The Jewish nation-state was no more. It was not to exist again until the middle of the 20th century.

Following defeat in the two Jewish revolts, many of the surviving Jews fled Judea for other parts of the Roman Empire and beyond. From 638 to 1917 Jerusalem was under Islamic rule except for a short period during the Crusades.

Scattered throughout the nations, the Jewish people yearned to return to their homeland. Persecuted by governments and the Roman church, denied equal rights, frequently expelled from the new nations in which they had settled, the Jewish people's suffering continued down through the centuries.

Toward the end of the 19th century Jews began to return to their traditional homeland as the Zionist movement was born. Under the rule of the declining Ottoman Turks, the returning Jews joined other Jews who had remained in the area for centuries. They prospered and grew in number.

In 1917, after the defeat of the Ottoman Turks, the area came under the control of the British. In the same year, the British government announced the Balfour Declaration, named for the British foreign secretary Arthur Balfour, which promised Zionists a national homeland in Palestine. Meanwhile, encouraging Arab revolt against the Ottoman Turks who had sided with Germany in World War I, the British were making promises to the Arabs of independence, offering them their own homelands—two promises that would prove violently contradictory.

During the three decades of British rule, the Jewish population in the area continued to grow—and to be increasingly seen as a threat by the native Arab population. Clashes between the two ethnic groups became more and more frequent. Jewish resistance against British rule and unmanageable civil strife led to a British withdrawal and the division of Palestine by the United Nations. The 1947 UN-approved Resolution 181 called for partitioning the British-ruled Palestine Mandate into a Jewish state and an Arab state and for Jerusalem to be an international UN-administered city. The resolution was accepted by the Jews in Palestine, but rejected by the Arabs there and by all Arab states.

The Jewish nation of Israel was declared the evening of May 14-15, 1948, with a population of half a million. It was immediately attacked by armies from five Arab nations—Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Egypt. Israel triumphed, but decades of violence were to follow, with

additional wars in 1956, 1967, 1973 and 1982. Arab resentment at Israel's existence remains unresolved, the Jewish state still insecure in a troubled, hostile region.

The majority of the Jewish people still reside outside the land of Israel—many living in the United States, Europe and Russia.

The Creation of the Modern Middle East

For hundreds of years the Arabs did not have a government of their own. From the conquest of the Arab lands by the Ottoman Turks in the early 16th century, they were not an independent people. Until World War I most of the Arab world lay within the Ottoman Empire. Other parts had become colonial territories of the European powers during the 19th century as the Ottoman Empire began to shrink.

The Arabs yearned for a free and independent Arabic-speaking nation. In the 20th century they were to become independent—yet not one nation but more than 20. One great frustration for the Arab world today is that there are 22 Arab countries and little immediate prospect of Arab unity.

While subjects of the Ottoman sultan as the 20th century dawned, the Arab world was at peace. Few would have guessed then how fundamentally this region was to change in the next few decades. In the year 1900 the Middle East was indeed, as described in the introduction, a "political backwater."

The catalyst that rearranged the regional map was World War I. The assassination of the Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo on June 28, 1914, was the event that triggered the war. Within weeks all the major powers of Europe were involved. Problems in the Balkans had been building up as the Ottoman Empire declined and retreated from its territories there. Nationalist sentiment among the various ethnic groups was stirring up feelings against foreign imperial rule, directed against the Austro-Hungarian Empire as well as the Turks.

At the onset of war, it was not clear which side the Ottomans would be on. Finally they opted to support Germany and Austria against the alliance of Britain, France and Russia. This proved to be a fatal error in judgment. Within a few years it led to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the end of Turkish domination of the Arab world after centuries of rule.

A century later it is still difficult to comprehend how the assassination of a fairly obscure European archduke could lead to such tumultuous change and to a century of seemingly never-ending violence, but that shot heard 'round the world is still reverberating.

Nationalist and ethnic aspirations lead to change

Before the assassination, ethnic aspirations were surfacing throughout Europe and the Middle East. In the Victorian era imperialism had been the vogue. The idea that one nation, usually considered superior, could rule over others less able, was perfectly acceptable in a Europe dominated by multiethnic empires.

Many of these empires were quite benign, allowing different ethnic groups within their borders a great deal of freedom, including the freedom to carry out business and to prosper. But the desire for national homelands was building up partly as a result of increased educational opportunities that encouraged the reading of national literature, thereby fostering a sense of national identity.

This rise in ethnic consciousness was not limited to Europe. The Middle East was another area where people wanted to fulfill their national aspirations.

The trend for each ethnic group to seek independence was one that would play a large role in the 20th century, fulfilling the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 24. When asked by His disciples what would be the sign of His coming and of the end of the age, one of the problems He foretold was an increase in ethnic tension. "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom," He prophesied (verse 7). The Greek word translated "nation" is *ethnos*—from which the English word *ethnic* is derived.

With the development of democratic institutions in a number of countries, ethnic groups had representation in capitals and were able to press their case for more autonomy. Many, though, wanted total independence. This tension was a leading cause of World War I and a major consideration at the peace conference in Paris that followed.

The Paris conference led to the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, which led to the creation of new countries throughout Europe and the Middle East. The old empires were gone—new, smaller nations replaced them, further complicating international relations. The "war to end war" had been replaced by the "Peace to end Peace," as British officer Archibald Wavell put it.

Brewing Arab revolt

On the eve of World War I the British already constituted a major power in the Middle East. Originally they had become involved to protect their lifeline to India, the most prized possession of the British Empire. Benjamin Disraeli, a British prime minister of Jewish descent, had arranged the financing of the Suez Canal, considered a vital artery of the empire.

The British controlled Egypt, the location of the canal, but did not annex it as a colony. They also ruled Aden, at the southern tip of Arabia, and held other strategic territories around the Persian Gulf.

Thus when World War I broke out, the British were in a perfect position to sponsor an Arab revolt against the Turks, allies of their enemy Germany. This Arab revolt began in the Hejaz, the coastal region of Arabia along the Red Sea where Mecca and Medina sit, on June 10, 1916, two years into the First World War. The revolt was led by the grand sharif of Mecca and leader of the Hashemite clan, Hussein ibn Ali (1852-1931), a descendant of Muhammad through the prophet's grandson Hasan. Hussein was an ancestor of the present Jordanian monarch, also a Hashemite.

Ironically, in this revolt the Arabs sided with Christian British forces against the Muslim Turks, but the desire for an independent Arab nation was paramount. Two of the sharif's sons led the Arab forces, financed by the British and assisted in the field by the famous British soldier T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia). The Arabs understood that victory would mean an Arab nation.

This understanding came about as a result of correspondence between the British high commissioner in Egypt, Sir Henry McMahon, and Sharif Hussein between July 14, 1915, and March 30, 1916. In a series of 10 confidential letters between the two, Sharif Hussein offered to help the British by revolting against the Turks, in exchange for a promise of independence for the Arabs after victory. The British agreed to this, with the exclusion of some areas, including

those under British control.

The uprising was successful. In October 1917 Allied forces under British Gen. Allenby invaded Palestine, capturing Jerusalem on Dec. 9. For the first time since the Crusaders were defeated in 1244 the city was once again in Christian hands. Now, after 400 years of peace under the Ottomans, began a century of conflict centering on the City of Peace.

Earlier the same year the British had taken Baghdad. The following year Damascus fell. Three days after falling to the forces of the Arab revolt, Gen. Allenby and Prince Faisal, the son of Sharif Hussein, entered the city. Faisal, leading 1,000 horsemen, was lauded by the populace, relieved at the end of Ottoman rule and elated at the prospect of an independent Arab kingdom.

Following the defeat of the Axis powers, the empires of Germany, Austria and the Ottomans all collapsed. The Russian Empire—allied to Britain, France and, later, the United States—had already fallen to communism.

The world was never to be the same again. World War I marked the end of the old order.

Contradictory promises set the stage for conflict

Anxious to win the war, the British had given contradictory promises to the Arabs and Jews and also to their allies, the French and Russians.

In November 1917, with the fall of Russia to the Bolsheviks, the revolutionaries suddenly found themselves in possession of secret papers from the former czarist regime and the interim government. They made public a secret agreement made in May 1916 called the Sykes-Picot agreement, named for Sir Mark Sykes and Georges Picot, the chief British and French negotiators. This agreement showed that the British and French had plans to carve up the Ottoman Empire, dividing the spoils among themselves, without giving any territory to the Arabs.

In the same month, just five days before the Bolsheviks took power in Russia, the British had issued the famous Balfour Declaration, named after their foreign secretary, Arthur James Balfour. This declaration pledged British support for a national Jewish homeland in Palestine. These conflicting promises were to cause endless problems for the British in the years to come—and even greater problems for the Arabs and Jews.

Arabs had fought with the British against the Turks, contributing to the Allied victory over the Central European powers. In return, they expected full control of all Arab lands, other than those already under European colonial rule such as Egypt, Aden and Algeria. They certainly expected Arabia, Iraq, Syria and Palestine to be directly and exclusively controlled by Arabs.

Palestine, the modern name for the ancient biblical territories of Israel and Judah, often referred to as the Holy Land, had been under Islamic control since the seventh century, except for a brief period during the Crusades in the 11th century. Jews could live in Palestine, but any attempt to create a Jewish homeland would be resisted.

At the peace conference in Paris that led to the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, Arab delegates (and T.E. Lawrence) were betrayed as the victorious allies divided the Ottoman

Empire between British and French spheres of influence. The newly formed League of Nations formally gave Britain a mandate to rule over Palestine, Transjordan and Iraq. The French received a similar mandate to rule over Syria and Lebanon. Neither the Jews nor the Arabs received what they had been promised—not then, at least.

Britain inherits a dilemma

Palestine was the biggest problem. For a while the British allowed unrestricted Jewish immigration, but this led to Arab outcries. Fearful of a Jewish takeover, the Arabs demanded that the British end Jewish immigration. This they did—but on the eve of World War II, in which 6 million Jews would be put to death in the Nazi Holocaust. The escape route to Palestine had been cut off just when it was needed most.

In the three decades that the British controlled Palestine, the political map of the region continued to change. The Egyptians regained their sovereignty in 1922 and Iraq in 1932, though Britain continued to have considerable influence in both. Lebanon received independence from France in 1941. Syria followed five years later in 1946, the same year in which the British created an independent Palestinian- Arab state when it gave independence to Transjordan (shortened to Jordan).

Following the end of World War II in 1945, an exhausted Britain began her withdrawal from empire. Pakistan and India were given independence in 1947. A withdrawal from Palestine was to follow less than a year later.

The British could no longer keep peace between the Arabs and Jews. Jewish terrorists had blown up the King David Hotel, British military headquarters in Jerusalem, with the loss of almost 100 British soldiers. As with India, there was no longer any support at home for Britain to risk the lives of its men to preserve peace between hostile forces. The British notified the recently formed United Nations, successor to the pre-war League of Nations, that they would leave Palestine, giving the UN six months' notice.

The birth of Israel

The United Nations voted to divide Palestine between the Arabs and the Jews, with Jerusalem to become an international city. The Israelis accepted the plan; the Arabs rejected it. As the British left, Jewish leaders proclaimed the birth of the independent Jewish nation of Israel the evening of May 14-15, 1948. Within hours, armies from five surrounding Arab nations attacked Israel, determined to destroy the fledgling state with its population of a mere half-million.

The war lasted until early the following year, with Israel gaining territory in addition to the land granted by the UN resolution. Most of the Arabs in those areas left their lands and have been refugees ever since, consigned to makeshift settlements in the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan and Egypt. Those Arabs who stayed in Israel were granted citizenship in the new country—and, ironically, today enjoy considerably more personal freedoms than their fellow Arabs in Arab-ruled countries.

More wars followed. In 1956, Israel sided with the British and French against Egypt in an

attempt to take back the Suez Canal, seized by Egypt's revolutionary government. American intervention forced the three nations out, a big boost to Arab nationalism. Within a few years the French lost Algeria and became irrelevant in the region. The British lost almost all their empire within a decade of the Suez Canal crisis and withdrew completely from the region by 1971.

Replacing them were the Americans and the Soviets, the two Cold War antagonists using proxy states in the Middle East to thwart the other's interests and ambitions.

Old empires swept away

But Arab nationalism was unstoppable. The desire for Arab unity was still on the minds of people throughout the Middle East.

And the Arabs were not alone in breaking away from European colonial rule. New nations around the world were being born with the collapse of the European empires after World War II. World War I had seen the collapse of those European empires that ruled over large parts of Europe. Now those empires that had colonies around the world were following suit. Never before had the map of the world changed so dramatically.

To illustrate just how fundamental a change took place, realize that immediately after the 1919 Treaty of Versailles there were no independent Arab nations. Apart from Persia (Iran) and Afghanistan, both non-Arab countries, there were no independent Islamic nations anywhere on earth.

The overthrow of the Ottoman sultan had led to the establishment of the secular Turkish Republic—that is, while its people remained mostly Islamic, the government officially became secular and moved in a Western direction. Although Egypt was independent from 1922, its king was not an Arab and the British still dominated the country behind the scenes. All other Islamic regions of the world were under European control. Oddly enough, the biggest Islamic power at this time was Great Britain by virtue of its ruling the Indian sub-continent, including what are now Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

Today there are 57 Islamic nations, most of them ruled by Muslims. This includes 22 Arab countries, which hold the majority of the world's known reserves of oil—the lifeblood of the world's economy. Is there any wonder that the Middle East and Islam have suddenly come to the forefront of world affairs?

A Rising Tide of Arab Nationalism

One of the most significant developments in the region following the Treaty of Versailles ending World War I was rising Arab nationalism. Frustrated at the betrayal by the European powers, Iraqis rebelled against their British rulers. The British soon regretted their involvement in Iraq, which cost them a great deal of money for little or no return. At a time when they were already financially weakened after fighting World War I for more than four years, they now found themselves forced to try to keep the peace in a hostile region.

The establishment of the independent Jewish homeland was also of great significance. There is no doubt that the history of the Middle East following World War II would have been completely different had Israel not been created. It was difficult enough for Arabs to accept European domination of parts of the Arab world, but now they were faced with what they considered a colony of infidel Westerners who intended to live permanently on Arab land.

Initially Arabs didn't blame the West for Israel's existence. In the early days of the Jewish state, the communist countries of Eastern Europe played a vital role in ensuring the people had arms with which to fight the Arab armies. Because many Israelis lived a communal existence on collectivist farms called kibbutzim, the Soviet-bloc countries thought that Israel would be a foothold for them in the Middle East, a region still under the domination of the European imperial powers at the time.

Later, American Jews would be instrumental in securing American backing for what is also the only Western-style democracy in the region. The Soviets meanwhile found another possible foothold in the area.

Frustrated at their defeat in the 1948 war to destroy Israel and angry at the corruption of their Westernized ruler, King Farouk, Egyptian army officers overthrew the monarchy in 1952, establishing a revolutionary republic in Egypt that inspired others throughout the region. The dream of Arab unity seemed about to be realized.

The radical new leadership of Gamal Abdel Nasser inspired Egyptians and all Arabs to throw out Western influence. Nasser nationalized the British- and French-owned Suez Canal, leading to a British-French-Israeli military mission to recover the Canal and overthrow the radical Arab government that threatened Western and Israeli interests. But the Eisenhower administration, fearful of increased Soviet influence in the region, forced the allies to withdraw. The Soviets got in anyway, supporting Egypt and other Arab nations against Israel for the next 25 years. Washington and Moscow were now heavily involved in the region.

After Egypt, it was Iraq's turn to overthrow its pro-Western monarchy. It should be noted that the kings and other hereditary rulers of the Arab world are usually educated in the Western world, mostly Britain and the United States, so they tend to be pro-Western. More importantly, they are also often Westernized, which irks their more religious subjects.

In 1932 the British had left Iraq with an established governmental system, a constitutional monarchy with an elected assembly, along British lines. Neither survived very long after the British left. The military, important under the Ottomans, took over in 1958 in a bloody coup in

which the Hashemite King Faisal and most members of the royal family were killed. Constitutional government has not been successful in the Arab world and has had little success elsewhere among Muslims.

Eventually Iraq came under the domination of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. Similarly, King Idris of Libya was overthrown in 1969 and replaced by the radical anti-Western leader, Colonel Muammar Gadhafi. As monarchies were overthrown, the successor republics became dictatorships. Syria has even become a dynastic republic with the son of the previous president taking over after his death. This will likely be copied in other Arab countries. It was certainly the intent in Iraq before the 2003 Gulf War that led to the downfall of Saddam Hussein.

In 1958 Egypt, Syria, Yemen and the United Arab States formed the United Arab Republic, an attempt at Arab unity that did not last, continuing only until 1961. But the desire for unity remained.

One reason behind this persistent goal was the wish to be able to more effectively oppose Israel militarily. The Jewish state achieved yet another military victory in the 1967 Six-Day War. Provoked by Arab armies, Israel fought a rapid war that led to her gaining control of the West Bank (taken by Jordan in the 1948 war), the Golan Heights (formerly owned by Syria) and the Gaza Strip (seized by Egypt in the 1948 war). Additionally, for the first time since the diaspora, the Jews had control of Jerusalem.

Further victory followed in the longer October War of 1973, often called the Yom Kippur War as it started with a multinational Arab attack on the Day of Atonement, the Jews' holiest day of the year. Between these wars Palestinian terrorism began, and after the 1973 war the Arab world first used the oil weapon to put pressure on the West, quadrupling the price of oil and destabilizing the world economy.

All these defeats only further convinced the Arabs of the need for unity, which continued to elude them. Today most of the countries in the region are led either by conservative Muslim monarchies or radical and despotic nationalists. Though in some ways these forms of governments are opposites, both maintain an iron grip on power over their people.

In this cauldron of nationalism, resentment toward the West, hatred of Israel and frustration among citizens with their own governments and leaders, an ancient force has reemerged to bring terrorism and grave concern to the heart of the West—Islamic fundamentalism.

Fundamentalist Islam Resurges

Arabs call the Crusades al-Salibiyah. The term is highly emotional to them, reminding them of European atrocities committed during the 200-year-long campaign to bring the Holy Land under Catholic control.

To the peoples of the Arab world, those weren't the only crusades. In their minds, two more crusades have followed.

The next crusade was the colonial period when the Arab world came under the control of the British, French and other European powers. This frustrated Arab dreams of unity and brought a sense of inferiority as they were incapable of overthrowing the Europeans for such a long time.

The current crusade is the one that, in the eyes of fundamentalists, most threatens their way of life. It is what is often called American imperialism. Unlike the British and French, Americans have made no attempt to annex an Arab territory as a colony of the United States. Americans themselves were originally under colonial rule and fought a revolutionary war to be rid of it and replace it with the modern American republic, so Americans are not inclined to colonize as did the Europeans of the 19th century.

However, inadvertently, American culture threatens the traditional way of life of all the Islamic peoples. This is a major cause of resentment if not outright hatred toward the United States.

Partly this is the result of technological advancement. Radio and television have brought Western culture into peoples' homes all over the world. American movies are universal; wherever you go in the world they seem to be available. The message they send is not a good one. They depict an immoral and very violent country, far from the reality of many American families—but foreign audiences don't know that. They also depict liberated and scantily clad women and know-it-all children who show contempt for their parents—both highly offensive to Islamic values.

The pervasiveness of Western culture has only worsened in recent years with the introduction of satellite television. Now more people can watch Western movies and television shows, resulting in increased anti-Western feeling.

Additionally, people throughout the Arab world can now see nightly news footage of Palestinian suffering, for which they blame the United States. The logic is simple—Israel kills Palestinians, America supports Israel, therefore blame America.

Because America is already perceived as a violent country, it is considered responsible for the violence. Exacerbating feelings further has been American military action against Muslims, seen as an anti-Islamic stance on the part of the United States.

The fact that the United States and its allies supported Muslims against the Serbs and Croats in the Balkan wars of the 1990s is overlooked. From the perspective of many in the Muslim world, the American liberation of Afghans from the oppressive Taliban regime in Afghanistan in 2001-2002 and the Iraq war to remove Saddam Hussein from power in 2003 were simply attacks on fellow Muslims. It should be remembered that many countries do not allow freedom of the press

or the airwaves, and news there is usually controlled and heavily slanted. This is true throughout the Arab and Muslim worlds.

Roots of Islamic extremism

Such factors have contributed to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. It's not a new phenomenon. As with other religions, fundamentalists come and go. This has been the case with Islam as it has been with nominal Christianity.

In the 18th century, Ibn Abdul Wahhab (1703-1792) was born in what is now Riyadh in Saudi Arabia. His followers, who form a Sunni sect, are known as Wahhabis. They are the most extreme of all the branches of Islam—violent, intolerant and fanatical. Their rise to prominence in Arabia was not the result of the European Crusades, but rather the decadence of the Ottoman Sultans. Ibn Abdul Wahhab established a state in the Arabian Peninsula that was modeled after the Ummah of the seventh century, an Islamic community that would live by the sharia, Islamic law.

Wahhabism is still the dominant religion of Saudi Arabia, and it has many followers in the Persian Gulf states. It is from this area that the terrorists came who staged the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center in New York. It has been said that not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Wahhabis. Although this is an overstatement, it is true that most of the mosques in Western countries are financed by the Saudis, with the imams teaching their adherents the Wahhabi interpretation of the Koran. As early as 1801, the followers of Wahhab were killing all who opposed them—they fell upon the Shiite city of Karbala that year and killed 2,000 innocent civilians.

Fundamentalism, however, was not confined to Arabia. Later in the same century the British fought a man claiming to be the Mahdi in Sudan, another fundamentalist who wanted to unite all Arabs in a holy war against the infidels invading from the West. The British defeated him and continued to dominate the area until after World War II.

Fundamentalists strike back

Islamic fundamentalism was to affect the West again in 1979. This time the United States was the target as America's most powerful ally in the region was overthrown by fundamentalist masses. The shah of Iran had been pro-Western and, with the help of the United States, had built up his forces to become the strongest military power in the Persian Gulf, the oil-rich area of vital economic and strategic interest to all the Western world.

The shah was overthrown by followers of the extremist Shiite Ayatollah Khomeini. Militant students took over the American embassy in Tehran and held dozens of American embassy employees hostage for 444 days. The West feared that Islamic extremism would spread to other countries in the region.

That was also the year in which the Soviets invaded Afghanistan. Forces there had overthrown their king in 1973 and eventually a procommunist government took control. When this, too, was overthrown, Moscow intervened. Their intervention and a costly, protracted, demoralizing war

led directly to the collapse of the Soviet Union a little over a decade later.

The United States, concerned about Soviet advances around the world, helped the Afghans rebel against Soviet domination. They began supplying arms through Muslim Pakistan to the Afghan mujahadin, the guerrilla forces who were led by Osama bin Laden. Eventually the Soviets were defeated, their country collapsed and Afghanistan came under the control of Sunni fundamentalists called the Taliban ("students," referring to those who were taught in Islamic seminaries, or madrasas). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, vast lands in Central Asia broke away from Russia and became independent Islamic republics, thereby further increasing the number of Islamic nations around the world.

Islamic fundamentalists were quickly becoming a major force throughout the Islamic world. They especially appealed to poor people frustrated and angered by leaders who often lived a lavish lifestyle while their people suffered in poverty and oppression. Similarly, in Western nations, Islamic fundamentalists proselytize among the poor and in prisons where they have gained many recruits. Throughout the Arab world people grew tired of their dictatorial regimes that had replaced the corrupt kings. The new presidents had turned out to be no different.

Fundamentalists soon learned that power cannot always be achieved through the democratic process. In Algeria they won the election in 1992, replacing the Arab nationalist government that had led Algeria to independence from France 30 years earlier—following an eight-year rebellion. After 30 years, the economic conditions of the people had only worsened with many, ironically, having to leave for France just to survive.

The fundamentalists seemed better organized and were certainly more honest. But the military stepped in to stop fundamentalist rule. Since then, Algeria has been plagued by frequent terrorist attacks by the forces of fundamentalism, and more than 100,000 Algerians have been killed. French support for the military action only increased resentment and distrust of the West—all the Western talk of democracy seemed to count for little when it mattered.

Shifting tide against the United States

The 1990s saw rising bitterness directed at the United States, now the dominant Western force and the world's only remaining superpower.

The U.S.-led Persian Gulf War against Iraq in 1991 received a great deal of support from other Arab nations. Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, had sent his forces into neighboring Kuwait, annexing the small oil-producing nation. His justification for this invasion went back to the days of the Ottoman Empire when what is now Kuwait was part of an administrative zone of the empire that included a large part of Iraq.

The United States and its allies defeated Iraq, but fears of Saddam Hussein remained because Iraq was known to possess weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and biological weapons, and was aggressively pursuing development of nuclear weapons. By the time this fear came to a head with the 2003 Iraq War, the United States found that many allies of the first Gulf War were no longer supportive. In the interim, the world had changed.

The great turning point was Sept. 11, 2001. As with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in the previous century, this was to change everything. The world has not been the

same since.

Immediately following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., when terrorists flew hijacked airliners into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the world was generally sympathetic toward America. But within a year after the United States responded with its war on terror, demonstrating its awesome military power in Afghanistan and looking ahead to possible conflicts with what President Bush called the "Axis of Evil," in the eyes of many America's role had changed from victim to villain.

Suppressed resentment against the world's dominant superpower and fear of isolation and possible terrorism over being too closely allied to the United States contributed to international rejection of America's role as the world's policeman. Increasingly others, even including some Americans, began blaming the United States for Sept. 11, claiming it was a justified response to American foreign policy.

In 2003, in the eyes of many Muslims and their leaders, America was setting a precedent by invading Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein. If one president could be removed, all the other leaders in the region felt they likewise could be removed by U.S. military force. Additionally, public anger at the suffering of the Palestinians had risen with access to satellite television—and especially al-Jazeera, the first Arabic-language satellite station broadcasting from Qatar in the Persian Gulf.

Islamic fundamentalism gains ground

Well before Sept. 11 the threat to the United States from Islamic terrorism was becoming apparent. An article in the November-December 1998 issue of *Foreign Affairs* quotes from a declaration against the West issued by Osama bin Laden and other militants (see "Anger Mounts Following Gulf War").

Their demands were for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Saudi Arabia—the land of Mecca and Medina, the two holiest cities of Islam. They also called for an end to the bombing of Iraq and the UN sanctions imposed against that country following the Gulf War. And, thirdly, they condemned American support for Israel against the Palestinians. (After victory in the Iraq War, the United States addressed all three grievances, announcing it would withdraw its troops from Saudi Arabia, lifting sanctions against Iraq and pursuing a new peace plan for Israel and the Palestinians.)

Following Sept. 11 America suffered further setbacks as Islamic fundamentalists made additional gains in a number of countries. Pakistan's leader, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, a supporter of Washington's war on terror, saw his country elect an Islamic government, although the general retained overall control of the country.

Surprisingly, almost 80 years after the overthrow of the sultan and the declaration of an Islamic republic, Turkey also elected an Islamic party majority in the November 2002 election. Other countries throughout the region likewise have experienced gains by fundamentalists.

Egypt's President Anwar Sadat was assassinated in 1982 by Islamic fundamentalists, who 15 years later massacred foreign tourists visiting some of Egypt's ancient monuments in an effort to undermine the national economy by destroying the tourism industry.

In Indonesia, the world's most populous Islamic country, fundamentalists have been killing Christians, and in late 2002 a bombing on the Hindu island of Bali killed almost 200 Western tourists, half of them Australians. In India and the Indian-administered section of Kashmir, Muslim fundamentalists have attacked Hindus and Christians, deliberately trying to provoke conflict between Pakistan and India, two of the world's recent nuclear powers.

In Africa, also, Islamic fundamentalism has left its mark. In Sudan, the Muslims of the north actively persecute the Christians of the south, even taking thousands of them into slavery. In Nigeria's northern Muslim states, sharia law has been introduced, and the most popular name given to newborn boys since Sept. 11, 2001, has been Osama in honor of Osama bin Laden.

One factor in this growth of Islamic fundamentalism is the high birthrate in Islamic countries. In most economically backward countries half the people are young people, as couples tend to have six to eight children. As economic policies in these nations often restrict business activity rather than encourage it, many young people cannot find jobs.

Without a means to support a family, the young men cannot marry. The promise of instantly available young virgins upon death as a martyr in a jihad, or holy war, is tempting, so they believe they have nothing to lose in sacrificing themselves to advance Islamic aims. As an additional incentive, some Islamic governments have given thousands of dollars to the surviving family, a princely sum in the slums of refugee camps.

Dilemma for the West

However, poverty is not the main cause of the problem. Almost all the Sept. 11 suicide bombers came from affluent backgrounds, and Osama bin Laden came from one of the wealthiest families in Saudi Arabia. Many other factors have contributed to the rise of Islamic fundamentalism and subsequent terrorism, including the Israeli-Palestinian problem and the domination of American culture.

Further American intervention in the region is likely to only feed the flames of fundamentalism further in the long run. Not one country in the Arab world can be said to be politically stable. All are at risk from fundamentalists. America really is caught in a no-win situation. The U.S. military may win the wars, but America is unlikely to effectively win the peace.

A further complication for the United States and other countries, particularly those of Western Europe, is the presence of Islamic fundamentalists within their own borders, largely the result of changes to immigration laws since World War II. Interestingly, while most Western nations allow immigration from Muslim countries and allow Muslims to become citizens, no Islamic nation allows people from Christian countries to permanently enter and become citizens unless they convert to Islam. The followers of Islam are aware that their religion and Western secular liberalism are incompatible.

Further conflict between the Islamic world and the West is inevitable—and foretold in Bible prophecy, as we'll see in the next chapter.

Anger Mounts Following Gulf War

On Feb. 23, 1998, the London-based Arabic-language newspaper Al-Quds al-Arabi published a piece titled "Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad Against the Jews and the Crusaders." Osama bin Laden and other leaders of militant Islamic groups in Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh were among the signers.

The declaration, a translation of which appeared in an article by Bernard Lewis in the November-December 1998 issue of *Foreign Affairs*, began by quoting several militant passages from the Koran and sayings of Muhammad, then continued:

"Since God laid down the Arabian peninsula, created its desert, and surrounded it with its seas, no calamity has ever befallen it like these Crusader hosts that have spread in it like locusts, crowding its soil, eating its fruits, and destroying its verdure [foliage]; and this at a time when the nations contend against the Muslims like diners jostling around a bowl of food."

The statement continues, condemning the United States for three main reasons:

"First—For more than seven years the United States is occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of its territories, Arabia, plundering its riches, overwhelming its rulers, humiliating its people, threatening its neighbors, and using its bases in the peninsula as a spearhead to fight against the neighboring Islamic peoples ...

"Second—Despite the immense destruction inflicted on the Iraqi people at the hands of the Crusader-Jewish alliance and in spite of the appalling number of dead, exceeding a million, the Americans nevertheless, in spite of all this, are trying once more to repeat this dreadful slaughter ...

"Third—While the purposes of the Americans in these wars are religious and economic, they also serve the petty state of the Jews, to divert attention from their occupation of Jerusalem and their killing of Muslims in it."

The signatories conclude that these "crimes" amount to "a clear declaration of war by the Americans against God, his Prophet, and the Muslims." The declaration reminds readers that throughout the centuries, the ulema—authorities on theology and Islamic law—have ruled unanimously that when Muslim lands are attacked by enemies, every Muslim's personal duty is jihad, a religious conflict that no Muslim can ignore.

Sensitivities over Arabia go back almost 1,400 years to the very beginnings of Islam. Commenting on the declaration, Professor Lewis, professor emeritus of Near Eastern studies at Princeton University and a noted authority on the Middle East, writes: "The classical Arabic historians tell us that in the year 20 after the hijra (Muhammad's move from Mecca to Medina), corresponding to 641 of the Christian calendar, the Caliph Umar decreed that Jews and Christians should be removed from Arabia to fulfill an injunction the Prophet uttered on his deathbed: 'Let there not be two religions in Arabia.' The people in question were the Jews of the oasis of Khaybar in the north and the Christians of Najran in the south."

He continues: "... The expulsion of religious minorities is extremely rare in Islamic history—unlike

medieval Christendom, where evictions of Jews and ... Muslims were normal and frequent ... But the decree was final and irreversible, and from then until now the holy land of the Hijaz [the region of Mecca and Medina and sometimes applied to all of Saudi Arabia] has been forbidden territory for non-Muslims ... For a non-Muslim to even set foot on the sacred soil is a major offense ..."

"Where their holy land is involved, many Muslims tend to define the struggle—and sometimes also the enemy—in religious terms, seeing the American troops sent to free Kuwait and save Saudi Arabia from Saddam Hussein as infidel invaders and occupiers. This perception is heightened by America's unquestioned primacy among the powers of the infidel world."

Professor Lewis's piece, written three years before the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, concludes with these words: "... Some Muslims are ready to approve, and a few of them to apply, the declaration's extreme interpretation of their religion. Terrorism requires only a few. Obviously, the West must defend itself by whatever means will be effective. But in devising strategies to fight the terrorists, it would surely be useful to understand the forces that drive them."

Religious affairs writer and historian Karen Armstrong also helps us understand Islamic fundamentalism in her book *Islam*. She notes that, as the 20th century ended, "some Muslims ... have made sacred violence a cardinal Islamic duty. These fundamentalists often call Western colonialism and post-colonial Western imperialism *al-Salibiyyah*: the Crusade."

This is a chilling term for Muslims, calling to mind the violent clashes between the forces of medieval Christendom and Islam almost 1,000 years ago. European armies went on a series of crusades to free the Christian holy places from the forces of Islam, frequently committing horrific atrocities during the period. "The colonial crusade has been less violent but its impact has been more devastating than the medieval holy wars," she notes. Western cultural values have greatly impacted all the countries of the world and are greatly resented by many people.

Karen Armstrong continues: "All over the world, as we have seen, people in all the major faiths have reeled under the impact of western modernity, and have produced the embattled and frequently intolerant religiosity that we call fundamentalism" (2000, p. 180, emphasis added).

Fundamentalist movements are not confined to Islam. Nor are religious clashes confined to Christianity and Islam. Predominantly Hindu India has witnessed conflict between fundamentalist Hindus and minority Muslims.

However, conflict between Christians and Muslims has been a constant theme of history for 14 centuries. This conflict is not confined to the Western world. In recent years Indonesia has witnessed appalling violence as Muslims went on the rampage beheading Christians. The two religions have been fighting a civil war in the African nation of Sudan for more than three decades. The war in Chechnya between Russians and native Chechens is a war between Christian and Muslim. And, of course, the Balkans have been a major flash point between the two religions for generations.

Although Islamic nations have their often-serious internal divisions, typically between Islamic fundamentalists and the more moderate national leaders, no Muslim countries allow Christian missionaries to operate freely or Christians to immigrate and receive citizenship. This has ensured that Islamic nations remain essentially Muslim, with some tolerance for minority

religions that predate Islam. In contrast, Western nations have allowed significant immigration from Muslim countries since World War II, and their now-sizable Muslim minorities are complicating Western governments' attempts to deal with this growing conflict.

Not Enemies Forever

In spite of the best efforts of the players in the current Middle East peace process, today the Arab and Jewish nations still have difficulty coexisting peacefully. Yet they have not always been enemies. Indeed, for centuries Jews thrived in an Arab civilization.

Shortly after the death of Muhammad in A.D. 632, Arabs began conquering vast tracts of the known world. Soon they possessed North Africa, Arabia, Palestine, Persia, Sicily, southern Italy and much of Turkey and Spain. For the next few centuries, Arab civilization was considerably more advanced than its European counterpart.

Bertrand Russell described the way the Jews flourished under the Arabs in his book *History of Western Philosophy*. After describing the persecution of Jews in Christian Europe, and the corresponding lack of Jewish cultural contributions, Russell continued: "In Mohammedan countries, on the contrary, Jews at most times were not in any way ill treated. Especially in Moorish Spain, they contributed to learning... [Then, when] the Christians reconquered Spain, it was largely the Jews who transmitted to them the learning of the Moors. Learned Jews, who knew Hebrew, Greek and Arabic, and were acquainted with the philosophy of Aristotle, imparted their knowledge to less learned schoolmen" (1969, p. 324).

Europe's rediscovery, by Arabs and Jews, of many Greek texts led eventually to the Renaissance and the rise of European culture. Today Europeans, Arabs and Jews could gain much from cooperation. Sadly, crusades, persecutions and jihads have been all too common in their history.

Nevertheless, in the coming reign of the Messiah, the Christ, the descendants of all three groups will learn to flourish in cooperation and peace.

"Why Do People Hate Us So Much?"

The horrific Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, accompanied by the hijackings and subsequent crashing of four domestic passenger jets, were universally condemned by almost all governments, including many that have been traditional foes of the United States.

Amid all the carnage and the confusion that Americans felt, one question frequently asked was: "Why do people hate us so much?" Pictures of people rejoicing in the streets of other nations stood out in stark contrast to news reports of expressions of sympathy and support from around the world. Obviously hatred of the United States has grown intense and deep in some parts of the world. Quite rightly, people want to know why.

The simplistic answer to that question is that the United States backs Israel. Mounting frustration with the situation in the Middle East has increased anger against America. Many in the area feel that if the United States puts pressure on Israel it would make concessions to the Palestinians.

Israel's existence is certainly one contributing factor. Another is the presence of American and British troops on Muslim soil (see "Anger Mounts Following Gulf War"). But these explanations overlook the fact that there is much hatred and resentment directed toward the United States throughout the world, not just in the Middle East.

No doubt many factors contribute to this increased anti-American feeling, not the least of which is jealousy over America's great wealth. But one scripture helps us to understand why the problem has worsened in recent decades: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people" (Proverbs 14:34, NIV).

Not so long ago America was looked up to by the rest of the world. After the failure of their kings and emperors to avoid the carnage of World War I, Europeans looked to President Woodrow Wilson to show them a new and better way. But lack of support at home meant that America was not able to stay involved. It was different after World War II. This time, Americans were committed to helping the rest of the world, and the United States took over the responsibility of leading the free nations.

Even in the Middle East, combatants looked to the United States to take the lead. It was President Carter who brought Egypt and Israel together. Successive presidents have been involved in the area and have always been able to talk with both sides. But in the aftermath of the Sept. 11 attacks, Americans saw Palestinians dancing in the streets and celebrating America's agony.

Clearly, respect and appreciation for America are not as great as they were before. The Bible helps us understand this change in America's fortunes.

The Old Testament book of Deuteronomy, chapter 28, promises blessings for obedience to God's laws and curses—serious negative consequences—for disobedience. It may seem illogical to see this as an explanation of the terrorist attacks on the United States, but the fact is that

America is not as respected as it used to be, and many sound reasons exist for this decline in respect.

Islamic fundamentalists, who are behind many such attacks, fear America's cultural influence on their societies. Of course, hatred and terrorism are utterly evil and inexcusable responses, no matter what the basis for such thinking is. Indeed, America is hated for many right principles that should not be altered. Jesus Christ was hated and He was a perfect human being. Nevertheless, we should consider that some negative feelings toward the United States have been engendered by views and behavior that are immoral and nationally degrading.

American television shows and movies constantly undermine the traditional family, both in the United States and around the world. The characters are frequently shown scantily dressed, using foul language, showing no respect to their elders and constantly obsessing about sex. Other shows portray an image of an extremely violent society. Western countries, sadly, have grown so accustomed to such images and behavior that they no longer think anything of it—but more religious countries feel increasingly threatened by these degenerate influences. This has only worsened in the last decade with satellite television and the Internet now widely available.

News of perverse sexual scandals at the very top of American society and government have lessened respect for America's political institutions. Information on these is more widespread as a result of advances in communications during the last few years.

Additionally, the United States accounts for some 80 percent of the world's pornography, freely available in many countries. In others, illegal adult movie theaters show X-rated American videos. Though clearly there's a double standard involved, many people watching them have only contempt for the United States—and even more so those religious people who are appalled at America's perverse yet lucrative exports.

Deuteronomy 28 shows that obedience to God's laws results in a nation being "set on high above all nations of the earth" (verse 1), as the United States was in the years that followed its humble beginnings right up until after World War II. The chapter promises specific blessings for obedience, including God's support against hostile powers (verse 7). America's history certainly shows the nation was blessed when its behavior and laws were based primarily on God's commandments.

Beginning in verse 15 we see the negative consequences of disobedience. Verse 16 says, "Cursed shall you be in the city." Those living in many U.S. cities no longer find them safe and secure.

Many will read this and feel that the responsibility for diminished security lies elsewhere. Yet the book of Joshua, chapter 7, contains a story of one man, Achan, who committed a sin that affected the whole nation's security. The biblical account clearly shows that Achan himself had committed the sin of taking spoil from recently conquered Jericho, against God's specific instructions to the people of Israel. Yet God's judgment was that "Israel has sinned" (Joshua 7:11). Joshua had to find and punish the transgressor before Israel could expect another victory.

The account shows the importance of everyone conducting himself in a way that is pleasing to God if a nation is to reap God's blessings.

War and Peace in the Middle East

Jerusalem remains the most contested city on earth, having fallen to invading forces more than 20 times throughout its recorded history. The land to which God sent Abraham some 4,000 years ago lies at the very crossroads of three continents. It is also holy to three religions.

More than 2,500 years ago God revealed to the prophet Daniel that the land of His people would be fought over throughout the centuries (as described in chapter 3 of this booklet). Interestingly, we see a long time gap in Daniel's prophecy that accurately foretold what would happen in the centuries ahead. To understand this, we need to turn again to Daniel 11.

As earlier explained, the first 35 verses of Daniel 11 are an accurate, detailed account of what would befall the people of Judah caught up in a conflict between the Ptolemaic dynasty of Egypt to the south and the Seleucids of Syria to the north. The rulers of these kingdoms were descended from generals of Alexander the Great, who also was foretold in the book of Daniel.

(In an interesting historical footnote, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus recounts a meeting between Alexander and the Jewish high priest in Jerusalem, who pointed out that Alexander's coming had been prophesied by Daniel more than two centuries before he emerged on the scene! See *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 11, chap. 8, sec. 5.)

The four verses that follow in Daniel, verses 36-39, appear to jump forward in time. As explained earlier, verses 32-35 appear to concern the faithful Maccabees, who would not abandon God's laws for pagan Greek ways. Yet these same verses appear to be dual, as the group referred to in verse 35 continues to the "time of the end"—meaning that God's faithful people in New Testament times, His Church, are included.

Verse 36 continues the story line— but at what point? Since verse 40 clearly advances the story to the "time of the end," it may be that verses 36-39 apply to the whole history of the kingdom of the North from the time of the Maccabees and the beginnings of the New Testament Church continuing up to the time of the end (just as verse 35 appears to extend from ancient times all the way to the end time).

And who was the king of the North during this period? In 65 B.C., Seleucid Syria was swallowed up by the Roman Empire. Thus that empire then became the kingdom of the North. Verses 36-38 appear to describe the actions of the Roman emperors and their successors, leading all the way up to the final leader of the end time, as we will see. While the duality of the prophecy serves to advance the time frame, Antiochus Epiphanes himself being a type of this end-time ruler, we might wonder why there are such major jumps to the future.

State of Israel had to be established to fulfill prophecy

Why the time gap in Daniel's prophecy between the ancient world and the world of today—a period of at least 2,000 years—with only sparse and cursory details of events in between? The answer is simple: For almost 2,000 years there was no Jewish nation in the Middle East. The restoration of the Jewish state in 1948 has made the kings of the North and South relevant

again to impacting the Jewish people in the Holy Land.

End-time prophecy could not be fulfilled without the restoration of the Jews to their homeland. Although their nation is called Israel, remember that the 10 tribes of the ancient northern kingdom known as Israel were taken into captivity by Assyria more than a century before the kingdom of Judah (comprising the Israelite tribes of Judah and Benjamin, with a considerable portion of Levi) was invaded and its people taken to Babylon.

Many of the Jews returned from their captivity, but the 10 tribes seemingly disappeared. The Bible shows that in time all the tribes of Israel will return to the Promised Land, but at this point only the tribe of Judah—or at least a portion of it—has been restored to its historic home.

In the Old Testament prophetic book of Zechariah we read that Jerusalem and Judah (Jews constituting the modern state of Israel) are at the center of world conflict immediately before Christ's return. But this prophesied event could not have taken place without the physical restoration of Judah (now named Israel) to some extent in the Holy Land before the end of the age.

In Zechariah 14:3-5 we see this prophecy about Christ's second coming: "Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through My mountain valley ..." Clearly, this prophecy is still for the future.

The preceding verses show that the reason the people need to flee is because Jerusalem will once again be a scene of great turmoil: "For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; the city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city" (verse 2).

Previously Zechariah had recorded these words from God: "Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it" (Zechariah 12:2-3).

Judah (the Israelis, most of whom are Jews) and Jerusalem are destined to be at the very center of end-time events. The nations that come against her will be so ideologically and emotionally driven they will not be able to think straight (the "drunkenness" Zechariah refers to). Already, some nations and peoples are obsessed with destroying the Jewish homeland of Israel. Another prophet tells of the fall of end-time Israel (descendants of the northern lost 10 tribes) and Judah (the Jews) together, apparently in the same month, an event that never happened in ancient history. We read of this in Hosea 5.

Condemning Israel and Judah for their repeated idolatry, God says: "The pride of Israel testifies to his face; therefore Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity [sin]; Judah also stumbles with them ... They have dealt treacherously with the LORD ... Now a New Moon shall devour them and their heritage" (verses 5, 7). A New Moon "devouring" them would seem to mean that they both will fall within a month, a 30-day period. (To understand where the other 10 tribes of Israel are today, request or download our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible*

Prophecy.)

The struggle continues

We can now understand more clearly why the struggle between the kings of the North and South resumes again "at the time of the end" (Daniel 11:40).

The verse continues to describe how "the king of the South shall attack him [the king of the North]; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships [all symbols of military action]; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them and pass through."

Clearly, at the time of the end another round of great turmoil will engulf the Middle East, only this time it will be far worse than anything ever seen before.

And again, the fulfillment of this prophecy would not have been possible until after the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the division of those Arab territories that were a part of it into the various nations of the Middle East today.

From chapter 3 of this booklet we saw that the expression "king of the North" applied anciently to the Seleucid dynasty of Syria, while the "king of the South" referred to the Ptolemaic dynasty in Egypt. But who might these terms refer to in our time or the time of the end? It's doubtful that they could once again apply to Syria and Egypt, as they are now brother Arab and Islamic nations. Also, while relatively strong by regional standards, neither currently has the military might to fulfill this prophecy.

As already noted, Rome swallowed up Syria and became the kingdom of the North thereafter. But did not Rome fall in ancient times?

Part of the key to understanding this passage is to realize that the center of the prophecy is the Holy Land and Jerusalem, the historic land given to the children of Israel. The "kings" referred to are powerful leaders who will come from regions to the north and south and vie for control of the area, trampling all over Judah in the process.

A century ago no one could have understood many of the prophecies relating to this part of the world because the Ottoman Empire ruled over the places now occupied by the chief adversaries in the Mideast conflict. This fact helps us understand God's words to Daniel at the end of his prophetic book: "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (Daniel 12:9). It would have been impossible for Daniel, living in the sixth century B.C., to have understood the astounding changes that would lead up to today's complex Middle East situation.

Just as the modern states of Israel, Egypt, Iraq and Syria did not exist a century ago, so at this time the final kings of the North and South have not emerged—yet. But the Bible does help us understand what to expect.

We read in the prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation that another global superpower will arise at the end of this age. We find further details of this end-time power in Revelation 17. Just as Daniel saw various beasts that represented the dominant powers to come, so the apostle

John saw a vision of another beast that would dominate the world at the very time of the end (verse 3).

The 10 horns referred to here, as an angel explained to John, represent 10 rulers who receive power "for one hour" —symbolic of a short time—with a single ruler who is also called "the beast" (Revelation 17:12-13). Notice the time setting of these events: "These will make war with the Lamb [the returning Jesus Christ], and the Lamb will overcome them ..." (verse 14). This prophecy, then, is for the future, and leads right into the return of Jesus Christ to earth.

But these are not the only significant end-time players. A religious leader symbolized as having "two horns like a lamb" but who speaks "like a dragon" (Revelation 13:11) will play a prominent role in this end-time union of nations. Jesus Christ is the true Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36; Revelation 5:8-9; 19:7-9), so this religious leader apparently will claim to be Christian. But he is really of Satan, "the dragon who ... deceives the whole world" (Revelation 12:9).

The "beast" referred to in Revelation 17 is a continuation of the four beasts of Daniel 7. As we saw earlier, Daniel, while in captivity in Babylon, recorded a vision of "four great beasts" (verse 3), gentile empires that would dominate the Middle East and have a major impact on the people of God. The empires were, in chronological order, the Babylonian Empire, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greek Empire of Alexander the Great and the Roman Empire.

Attempts to revive the Roman Empire are to succeed dramatically at the time of the end. At that time a successor empire is prophesied to restore the European unity that Rome first achieved more than 2,000 years ago. This empire is to lead right into Christ's return and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth (verses 9-14).

Since the fourth beast described in Daniel 7 exists at the time of Jesus Christ's return, and the same is true of the beast John saw in Revelation 17, both prophecies speak of an end-time resurrection of the Roman Empire. This is the other key to understanding the prophecy. The kingdoms of North and South concern successive powers. Rome took over Syria. And Rome did indeed fall. But the Roman Empire has been revived in numerous forms over the centuries. And one final revival remains.

This final resurrection of the Roman Empire, like the original empire, will be centered in Europe. It appears that it can be seen today in its embryonic form in the European Union. That is not to say that all current EU nations will be part of the final configuration, but those that choose to participate will combine to form a powerful military force that will involve itself in the Middle East.

This end-time king of the North spoken of in Daniel 11, then, appears to be the final ruler of this end-time, European-centered superpower, the same one called "the beast" in Revelation 17.

The final king of the South

What about the king of the South? To understand who that might be, we must first have some understanding of the history and thinking of the people in this region.

In Islamic thinking, the world is divided into two spheres, dar al-Islam, meaning "the land of Islam," and dar al-harb, meaning "the land of the unbeliever" or "the land of struggle." The Koran teaches that Allah "sent for His apostle [Muhammad] with guidance and the true faith, so

that he may exalt it above all religions, much as the idolators may dislike it" (Surah 61:9, Dawood translation). A fundamental aspect of Islamic teaching is that Islam must eventually become the dominant religion of the entire world.

Remember also that the dream of the Arab peoples is for Arab unity. The warring tribes of Arabia were first united by Muhammad through a new religion, Islam. The Ummah, the community of Islam, has been a constant dream through the centuries. For 750 years now the sons of Ishmael have not been united. Only in the last 50 years have they even been independent of foreign control. The dream is still there, unfulfilled.

For a time, after the 1952 revolution in Egypt, President Nasser was the inspiration for Arab unity, and many thought he would bring it about. More recently Iraq's Saddam Hussein thought the same way, desiring to unite the Arab world against the United States and Israel.

Going back further in time, Sudan's Muhammad Ahmed Ibn el Sayed (1844-1885) proclaimed himself the Islamic messiah, the Mahdi ("divinely guided one") who would unite Muslims and defeat the infidels. He failed in his mission, but he had greater success at uniting Arabs than the secular leaders have had. We should also note that many Muslims believe that another Mahdi is prophesied to appear in a tumultuous time to restore the Islamic faith and ensure its final victory over all other religions.

In more recent times Osama bin Laden became the spiritual successor of the Sudanese Mahdi and found considerable success in uniting Muslims against the West. Wherever you go in the Islamic world, Bin Laden is the peoples' hero, giving them hope of a final triumph.

As Muhammad's followers brought about the defeat of the two great superpowers of his day, Byzantium and Persia, so Osama bin Laden and his followers have desired to bring down the two superpowers of our era. One, the Soviet Union, dissolved in 1991—its collapse due in large part to the Afghan rebels, led by Bin Laden, who defeated the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Sept. 11 showed how vulnerable the second superpower, the United States, is to terrorism. Repeated warnings from Washington have made it clear that the country remains susceptible to terrorist attacks potentially even more devastating than the first.

This end-time king of the South will rise up to defy the West, striking out against the king of the North. Whoever the end-time king of the South might be—whether a popular figure similar to Osama bin Laden, a political leader as were Gamal Abdel Nasser and Saddam Hussein, or a religious figure such as the Ayatollah Khomeini or the prophesied Mahdi to come—someone will engage in this final conflict against the West—possibly in yet another attempt to bring about long-sought Arab and Islamic unity. He will unwittingly set in motion a cascade of events that will lead to unimaginable carnage before Jesus Christ intervenes to put a stop to it.

The climactic Mideast war unfolds

Returning to Daniel 11:40, we see that the forces of these two end-time leaders, the kings of the North and South, will clash: "At the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over" (King James Version).

The word "push" is translated from the Hebrew word *nagach*, which can mean either "to push" or "to attack." It is used of a bull or ram attacking with its horns. Figuratively, this means "to war against." The form this "push" or "attack" may take isn't spelled out.

What is evident, however, is that this end-time leader from the south will attack the north in such a way as to warrant a major military invasion of the Middle East. Considering the ways Islamic extremists have attacked the Western powers in recent years, something like a series of major terror attacks against European targets could be the "push" referred to here. From this point on the king of the South is no longer specifically mentioned in Scripture. What happens to him isn't spelled out.

The same chapter shows that the king of the North, the European-centered Beast power, will be the victor, as he invades the Holy Land and overthrows "many countries" (verse 41). Among them are Egypt and the Libyans and Ethiopians (understand that these biblical names for peoples and places may not be precisely identical with today's national borders, although the regions are certainly the same.)

First and second woes

However, "news from the east and the north shall trouble him," and "he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many" (verse 44). These actions by the end-time king of the North appear to be connected with the fifth trumpet or "first woe" of Revelation 9:1-11, as both the forces bringing the first woe and the end-time Beast power are described as ascending out of the bottomless pit (verses 1-2; Revelation 11:7; 17:8)

At the time the book of Revelation was written, the eastern border of the Roman Empire was the Euphrates River, which begins in Turkey and bisects Syria and Iraq before emptying into the Persian Gulf. The countries referred to in the last few verses of Daniel 11 are all far to the west of this river. Yet in the end-time events prophesied in the book of Revelation this river is a significant geographic marker.

Notice Revelation 9:13-16: "Then the sixth angel sounded: And I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind. Now the number of the army of the horsemen was two hundred million; I heard the number of them."

Here we have the sixth trumpet (and second woe) identified as a massive 200-million-man army "released to kill a third of mankind." Clearly we are talking about major clashes between the Western world (in the form of the forces of the king of the North) and a massive army from regions along or beyond the Euphrates River.

Threatened by a major foreign military presence that has invaded North Africa and modern-day Israel, this military force combines to fight against it.

What nations come together to form these vast armies? Two possibilities seem likely in today's geopolitical climate—or a combination of the two.

The presence of non-Islamic forces (infidels) on Islamic ground has been a source of contention in the region since the time of the Crusades almost 1,000 years ago. The presence in the Middle East of forces of the revived Roman Empire—the prophesied Beast power, a spiritual successor to the Crusaders—will no doubt inflame Islamic feelings once again.

It is possible, therefore, that this massive army is a multinational Islamic force formed from some or all of the Islamic countries along or to the north and east of the Euphrates. This would include nations like Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and even participants from India (with the second-largest Muslim population in the world, after Indonesia, though most of its citizens are Hindus).

Further to the north and east of the Holy Land are the relatively new Islamic nations that came into existence after the fall of the Soviet Union—Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. The world's Muslim population totals some 1.3 billion, most of whom are in this general geographic area.

Another possibility for these forces includes Russia and China, two major world powers that often share common interests, along with their allies and other nations from the Far East. A threat to the Persian Gulf oil supplies, real or imagined, could provoke action by these nations. China, with its population of 1.3 billion, could certainly field a massive military force, and Russia's weapons technology still makes it a formidable military power.

Additionally, it is possible that all these forces will come together briefly, fearful of the increased military might and presence of the king of the North. Indeed, important defense and economic ties already exist between Russia and China and some Muslim nations of Central Asia and the Middle East.

Setting the stage for Armageddon

Later, as part of the chain of events that follow the sounding of the seventh trumpet in Revelation 11:15, we find the Euphrates River mentioned again: "Then the sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared" (Revelation 16:12).

Who these leaders and forces are isn't explicitly spelled out either; we know only that they come from east of the Euphrates. Like the earlier 200-million-man army, it appears this force is primarily from either the Muslim world or from China and/or Russia and their allies. Or again, it could be a combination of some or all these nations. In fact, it could well be the same general power bloc as that in Revelation 9, though, this being a different episode, it doesn't have to be.

Contributing to this conflict, "demons, performing signs,... go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty ... And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon" (verses 14-16).

In the end it doesn't seem to matter specifically which countries are involved in this growing world war at which point in time, for ultimately Revelation 16:14 tells us that the kings "of the whole world" will be gathered to the Middle East for a final battle. So it seems likely that all of the aforementioned Eastern powers will be engaged at some point.

Indeed, however it plays out, virtually all remaining military forces apparently will be drawn into this final maelstrom of destruction to some degree, just as happened in the two great world wars of the 20th century. Yet ironically, this is all part of God's plan and absolutely necessary for peace to finally be established in this war-torn region.

Christ's intervention to save mankind

All this maneuvering, destruction and devastation—which takes the lives of at least a third of the human race (Revelation 9:15, 18)—is the prelude to Jesus Christ's second coming. He has to return to save mankind from this final cataclysmic conflict that otherwise would leave no human survivors. As He said of the time immediately preceding His return to earth, "unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved ..." (Matthew 24:22).

But at His return, the peoples of the world will not automatically accept Him. As we saw earlier, the 10 kings allied with the Beast will fight against Him (Revelation 17:14).

Revelation 16:16 tells us that armies will be gathered "to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon." Armageddon is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Har Megiddon, meaning hill or mountain of Megiddo, an ancient town about 55 miles north of Jerusalem and 15 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea. It overlooks the Valley of Jezreel or Esdraelon, a large open plain.

Yet the final battle will not be here. Instead it appears that this will be the final staging area for the armies that will fight against Jesus Christ. The battle itself will take place in the Valley of Jehoshaphat near Jerusalem, as prophesied in Joel 3: "For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat ... Assemble and come, all you nations ... For there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations" (Joel 3:1-2, 11-12). Jehoshaphat even means "Judgment of the Eternal."

Revelation 19:11-16 describes what happens next: "Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns ..." This is a description of the returning Jesus Christ, who will now execute God's judgment on a rebellious, sin-filled world and on those who resist Him by force.

"He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses ... Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations ... And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS."

Several verses describe what will happen to the assembled forces that fight Jesus at His return (verses 17-18, 21; Zechariah 14:12). But like all human resistance to God's plan and purpose, it will prove futile.

Peace at last

After so much death and destruction, and centuries of war and unrest in the Middle East,

imagine what a difference the second coming of Jesus Christ will make.

Jews, Christians and Muslims not only have a common spiritual ancestor in Abraham; adherents of all three religions expect, in different ways, a Messiah.

Only after the true Messiah comes can all three begin to live in true harmony. Devoid of religious differences and finally understanding and appreciating the blood ties between them, they will be able to work together under the returned Jesus Christ to resolve their differences.

Haggai 2:6-7 prophesies of this time: "Once more ... I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations ..." The "Desire of All Nations" is the promised Messiah, the hope of all three faiths.

Described as "the Prince of Peace" in Isaiah 9:6, Jesus Christ will establish His government on earth with Jerusalem as its capital. "Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain [prophetic symbol of a government] of the LORD'S house shall be established on the top of the mountains [over all other governments of the world] ... and peoples shall flow to it. Many nations shall come and say, 'Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.' For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem" (Micah 4:1-2).

All the children of Abraham—Arab, Jew and Israelite alike—along with all the inhabitants of the entire earth, will then have the opportunity to learn God's truth and receive His gift of salvation. No longer will they be at war, but they will be allies, cooperating together in a spirit of peace and brotherhood, all acknowledging the true God and living according to His ways, all receiving His blessings (Isaiah 19:20-25). To better understand this time and how it will finally come about, request or download our free booklet *The Gospel of the Kingdom* at www.gnmagazine.org.

Satan the devil, the instigator of so much war and suffering and the unseen influence behind the scenes, will be locked away so he can no longer deceive and oppress the nations (Revelation 12:9; 20:1-3). To discover more about this evil being and his influence, request or download our free booklet *Is There Really a Devil?*

Under Christ's righteous rule, peace, not war, will break out in this long- troubled land. "He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. But everyone shall sit under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken" (Micah 4:3-4).

Terror-ravaged Jerusalem will be fearful no longer. God decrees: "I will return to Zion, and dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of Hosts, the Holy Mountain ... Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing" (Zechariah 8:3-5).

Zechariah 14:8-9 adds to the beautiful picture of the wonderful, glorious future ahead: "And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem ... And the LORD shall be King over all the earth."

Finally, beyond the darkness and gloom, after thousands of years of war and travail, at long last mankind will see peace in Jerusalem and throughout the land that God gave to Abraham 4,000 years ago—a peace that will extend across the entire Middle East and ultimately fill the whole world.

What Is the "Abomination of Desolation"?

In His most detailed prophecy of the end time, Jesus said, "... When you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place ..., then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matthew 24:15-16). What was He talking about?

The longest and most precise prophecy of the Bible, Daniel 11, recorded in advance what would occur in the empires and nations that would vie for control of the Holy Land for centuries to come. It describes, in astounding detail, rulers and other peoples who lived long after Daniel's prophecy and several centuries before Christ (as spelled out in chapter 3 of this booklet).

For much of the prophecy these kingdoms were Syria to the north, ruled by descendants of Seleucus, one of the generals of Alexander the Great, and Egypt to the south, ruled by descendants of another of Alexander's generals, Ptolemy.

An evil ruler arises

Eventually the prophecy describes a Seleucid ruler named Antiochus IV, also known as Antiochus Epiphanes. Daniel 11:21 states, "And in his [Seleucus IV's] place shall arise a vile person, to whom they will not give the honor of royalty." Most Syrian officials, tired of the excesses of the Seleucid rulers, backed the usurper Heliodorus, who had poisoned the previous king.

"But," the prophecy explains of Antiochus, "he shall come in peaceably, and seize the kingdom by intrigue" (verse 21). By a show of what some historians have called "Roman manners" and a great deal of flattery, he enlisted the aid of neighboring King Eumenes II of Pergamum and officials at home in forcing out Heliodorus and obtaining the throne in 175 B.C. The next verse explains that all those who opposed Antiochus would be swept away and broken—and they were.

At this time Syria ruled over the Holy Land. Included in those "swept away" is one referred to as "the prince of the covenant" (verse 22). This is apparently a reference to a Hellenistic Jew who changed his name to the Greek form Jason, appointed by Antiochus as replacement high priest over the Jewish worship system. He was dropped from that position by Antiochus only three years later in favor of another Hellenizing (that is, Greek-culture-promoting) apostate named Menelaus.

As verses 23-24 show, elements of the Jewish leadership made a "league," a treaty or similar agreement, with Antiochus, and at first he entered "peaceably" into the Holy Land with only a small force.

What did this league, or covenant, entail? The apocryphal book of 1 Maccabees, although not Scripture, provides us with history of the period. "In those days went there out of Israel wicked men, who persuaded many, saying, Let us go and make a covenant with the heathen that are round about us ..." (1 Maccabees 1:11, KJV).

Continuing in a paraphrased version of the account: "... For our refusal to associate with them has brought us nothing but trouble.' This proposal appealed to many people, and some of them became so enthusiastic about it that they went to the king and received from him permission to follow Gentile customs. They built in Jerusalem a stadium like those in the Greek cities. They had surgery performed to hide their circumcision, abandoned the holy covenant, started associating with Gentiles, and did all sorts of other evil things" (verses 11-15, Today's English Version). Still, even the apostatizing factions did not wholly abandon the Jewish worship system—at least not yet.

In any event, Antiochus soon betrayed the Jewish leaders by taking from the rich and giving to the poor, yet only as a temporary ploy to gain support among the Jewish masses (Daniel 11:24).

Antiochus vents his fury

Then notice what was to happen in 168 B.C. after the king defeated Egypt: "While returning to his land with great riches, his heart shall be moved against the holy covenant; so he shall do damage and return to his own land" (verse 28).

As 1 Maccabees records, he set himself against the Jews, massacred many of them and plundered the temple at Jerusalem before returning to Syria (1 Maccabees 1:20-28).

Antiochus then embarked on a second venture into Egypt, unsuccessful this time because a Roman fleet forced him to give up his fight and return the island of Cyprus to Egypt (Daniel 11:30). "... Therefore he shall be grieved, and return in rage against the holy covenant, and do damage. So he shall return and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant" (verse 30). Antiochus vented his fury on the Jews, yet he accorded special favor to those among them who rejected their religion.

As 1 Maccabees explains: "When the soldiers entered Jerusalem, their commander spoke to the people, offering them terms of peace and completely deceiving them. Then he suddenly launched a fierce attack on the city, dealing it a major blow and killing many of the people. He plundered the city, set it on fire, and tore down its buildings and walls. He and his army took the women and children as prisoners and seized the cattle. Then Antiochus and his forces built high walls and strong towers in the area north of the Temple, turning it into a fort ..." (1:29-33, TEV).

Antiochus rejects God's laws

Then came the worst. Daniel's prophecy warned of Antiochus: "And forces shall be mustered by him, and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices, and place there the abomination of desolation" (Daniel 11:31).

The book of 1 Maccabees gives us details: "Antiochus now issued a decree that all nations in his empire should abandon their own customs and become one people. All the Gentiles and even many of the Israelites submitted to this decree. They adopted the official pagan religion, offered sacrifices to idols, and no longer observed the Sabbath.

"The king also sent messengers with a decree to Jerusalem and all the towns of Judea, ordering the people to follow customs that were foreign to the country. He ordered them not to offer burnt offerings, grain offerings, or wine offerings in the Temple, and commanded them to treat Sabbaths and festivals as ordinary work days.

"They were even ordered to defile the Temple and the holy things in it. They were commanded to build pagan altars, temples, and shrines, and to sacrifice pigs and other unclean animals there. They were forbidden to circumcise their sons and were required to make themselves ... unclean in every way they could, so that they would forget the Law which the Lord had given through Moses and would disobey all its commands. The penalty for disobeying the king's decree was death.

"The king not only issued the same decree throughout his whole empire, but he also appointed officials to supervise the people and commanded each town in Judea to offer pagan sacrifices. Many of the Jews were ready to forsake the Law and to obey these officials. They defiled the land with their evil, and their conduct forced all true Israelites to hide wherever they could" (1 Maccabees 1:41-53, TEV).

The temple defiled

Then it happened: "On the fifteenth day of the month Kislev in the year 145" (verse 54, TEV), which corresponds to 168/167 B.C., "they set up the abomination of desolation upon the altar" of the temple (verse 54, KJV). This appears to have been a pagan altar, probably with an image representing the Greek chief god Zeus, as 2 Maccabees 6:2 tells us that Antiochus defiled the Jewish temple "by dedicating it to the Olympian god Zeus" (TEV). After all, to the Greek mind the God of the Hebrews simply equated to the chief god in the Greeks' pantheon.

We are further told: "Pagan sacrifices were offered in front of houses and in the streets. Any books of the Law which were found were torn up and burned, and anyone who was caught with a copy of the sacred books or who obeyed the Law was put to death by order of the king. Month after month these wicked people used their power against the Israelites caught in the towns. On the twenty-fifth of the month, these same evil people offered sacrifices on the pagan altar erected on top of the altar in the Temple" (1 Maccabees 1:55-59, TEV). Indeed, pigs, declared unclean in God's law (Deuteronomy 14:8), were offered over His own altar.

The account in 1 Maccabees 1:60 continues: "Mothers who had allowed their babies to be circumcised were put to death in accordance with the king's decree. Their babies were hung around their necks, and their families and those who had circumcised them were put to death" (TEV). Yet, as horrible as this was, some still resisted. In fact, 1 Maccabees 1:62-63 reports: "But many in Israel stood firm and were resolved in their hearts not to eat unclean food. They chose to die rather than to be defiled by food or to profane the holy covenant; and they did die. Very great wrath came upon Israel" (New Revised Standard Version).

Yet many in the resistance lived. The account continues with the rise of the Hasmonean priestly family of Mattathias, including his son and successor Judas Maccabeus, who would not compromise with paganism. In the end, the efforts of these patriots and their followers were in large measure responsible for eventually pushing the Syrians out.

Later prophetic fulfillment

Now, with all of that as history, consider Christ's warning about the abomination of desolation. When He gave it, hadn't this part of Daniel's prophecy been fulfilled almost 200 years earlier, as we've seen? Certainly. So Daniel's prophecy, according to Jesus, must have a dual fulfillment.

Jesus revealed to us the time for this prophecy's ultimate fulfillment in Matthew 24 when He explained what would immediately follow it: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved [alive]; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened" (verses 21-22).

This recalls another part of Daniel's prophecy, which says that in the end time "there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered ... And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake ..." (Daniel 12:1-2).

So this awful period of tribulation occurs at the end of this present age, just before Christ's return when He will resurrect His faithful followers (1 Thessalonians 4:15-16). Indeed, Daniel was told that "from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up," 1,290 days—a little more than 3 1/2 years—would elapse until, apparently, the resurrection of Daniel and the rest of the saints would occur (Daniel 12:11, 13).

Lessons from the first fulfillment

We can learn a great deal about this end-time prophecy from the original abomination of desolation Daniel foretold. Antiochus Epiphanes was a forerunner of the end-time king of the North, the world dictator the book of Revelation refers to as the "beast." No doubt this end-time ruler will employ the same deceitful and underhanded methods that marked the reign of Antiochus and many of his successors, such as Hitler.

Furthermore, it appears from what we've seen and other scriptural indications that the end-time ruler, to accomplish his ends, will feign overtures of peace to the Jews of the modern nation of Israel. This might help explain why the end-time "king of the South," evidently an Islamic leader, will act against the final Beast power (Daniel 11:40)

What other parallels do we see? Part of the "abomination" of Antiochus involved the cessation of the daily temple sacrifices (verse 31). Yet Daniel's prophecy makes it clear that sacrifices will again be ended in conjunction with the abomination of desolation to come (Daniel 12:9-13). For this prophecy to be fulfilled, it appears that sacrifices will again be instituted and an altar rebuilt before the return of Jesus the Messiah.

In another parallel, Antiochus defiled the ancient holy temple when he erected an idol of the pagan god Zeus and sacrificed swine there. The end-time abomination may also involve an idolatrous image at a new temple. What we know for certain is that within the "temple of God" there will be an actual person who claims to be God in the flesh.

The apostle Paul, in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, foretold this "son of perdition." Notice verses 3-4:

"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day [of Christ's return] will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" .

Christ will destroy this religious figure at His second coming (verses 5-8), but not before many have been deceived with "power, signs, and lying wonders" (verses 9-12).

Also, just as the original abomination of desolation marked the beginning of a period of unparalleled horror and misery, so will the final one begin the time of the greatest horror ever, the coming Great Tribulation.

We can be thankful that God promises to send His Son back to earth to save mankind from self-annihilation in this coming horrible time of mass deceit and destruction. We can also thank God for the wonderful example of those who stood fast—who would not compromise with God's way—and the awesome hope of the return of Christ, of resurrection to eternal life and of the establishment of His glorious Kingdom on earth.

Indeed, as world events march ever closer to the fulfillment of these prophecies, let us draw closer to God in faith, trusting Him to see us through even the worst of times, knowing that we aren't left without foreknowledge to help us better understand end-time events.

Prophecy of an Arab Confederation

Psalm 83 contains an intriguing prophecy of many Middle Eastern nations that appears to be as yet unfulfilled and to possibly tie in with end-time events. If so, it foretells a confederation of Arab nations that are determined to eliminate Israel.

"They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones. They have said, 'Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more.' For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You: The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab and the Hagrites; Gebal, Ammon and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assyria also has joined with them" (verses 3-8).

These biblical names are significant when we understand the areas and peoples to which this prophecy refers. Edom includes the Palestinians and some of the Turks. The Ishmaelites, descendants of Ishmael, are many of the Arab peoples throughout the Middle East and North Africa. Moab is the area of central Jordan. The Hagrites appears to refer to other descendants of Hagar, mother of Ishmael.

Gebal, meaning "mountain" or "boundary," is commonly equated with the Phoenician city of Byblos, modern Jubayl in Lebanon. Ammon refers to northern Jordan around Amman, the capital (which gets its name from Ammon). Amalek appears to refer to a branch of Edomite Palestinians. Philistia is the area around what is today known as the Gaza Strip. Anciently Tyre was a major city-state in southern Lebanon along the Mediterranean coast. Assyria ethnically appears to refer to inhabitants of Central Europe who migrated there many centuries ago, while geographically Assyria is in what is today northern Iraq. The children of Lot refers to Moab and Ammon—again, regions of modern-day Jordan.

Arab unity has long been elusive, but slowly a common purpose is bringing the different peoples of the Arab world together. This common purpose is the desire to destroy the nation of Israel and its chief backer, the United States of America, along with the West's liberal culture, long perceived as a threat to the Muslim way of life.

What Should You Do?

The biblical record of prophecy is long and astoundingly accurate. No human seer could have accurately predicted the remarkable rise and fall of kingdoms, leaders and peoples that we find in the Bible.

"For I am God," He declares, "and there is no other; I am God and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand . . .'" (Isaiah 46:9-10). God alone has the power to foretell the future—and then bring it to pass.

But why does God reveal the future? Why does He tell us what is coming?

One crucial reason is so we can see the need to change. God reveals the future so each of us, individually, can personally repent—change our way of living and begin living as He tells us to—and avoid suffering God's judgment on the world as these prophetic events come to pass. He tells us what is coming to motivate us to make the changes we need to make in our lives, both personally and nationally.

God's pleadings with ancient Israel and Judah are revealing. He sent His prophet Ezekiel with a heartfelt appeal: "Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die ...?'" (Ezekiel 33:11).

God doesn't want to punish anyone. But, like any loving parent, He knows that sometimes we need a painful lesson in discipline to prevent even greater pain and suffering further down the line.

He has also given us laws, summarized in the Ten Commandments, that bring great blessings when we obey them—because they teach us a way of life that shows love for Him and for our fellow man (Matthew 22:37-40). These laws also have consequences when we ignore or disobey them. When we break them, they inevitably bring painful results and, in turn, break us. Sadly, few are willing to humbly submit to God and allow themselves to learn this lesson.

Throughout His Word, God reveals the events and conditions that will engulf the world at the time of the end. In Mark 13 Jesus warns His followers three times that they need to be alert to the trends that will precede His return and to not be caught spiritually unprepared: "Take heed," He says, "keep on the alert; for you do not know when the appointed time is" (verse 33, New American Standard Bible; compare verses 35, 37). One of the reasons we have prepared and freely distributed this booklet is so people can recognize these events as they begin to unfold. Near the end of the book of Daniel is the warning that the period preceding Christ's return will be "a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then" (Daniel 12:1, New International Version). The whole world will be overtaken by one unprecedented disaster after another after another.

Notice Jesus Christ's own description of the time leading up to His return: "It will be a time of great distress, such as there has never been before since the beginning of the world, and will

never be again. If that time of troubles were not cut short, no living thing could survive; but for the sake of God's chosen it will be cut short" (Matthew 24:21-22, Revised English Bible). This time will be so perilous, He warns, that mankind will be in danger of extinction. Considering the remarkably accurate prophecies of the Bible, this should surely get our attention.

God's prophecies are sure. He foretold the decline and fall of many nations for their sins—including many of the leading nations and peoples of our day. What about you? Will you be among them?

Notice also in Christ's warning the good news that, "for the sake of God's chosen," total annihilation won't come. These are the few who truly believe God and have the faith, courage and willingness to act on that belief. They are truly willing to repent—to change their lives, to surrender to God, to give up everything, if necessary, to humbly submit to and follow a God who has promised them everything in return.

In that most remarkable book of Bible prophecy He assures them, "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Revelation 21:7). What a loving promise from the Creator of all things!

The same book closes with a glimpse of the incredible future God has in store for all who are willing to make that choice—a future that includes living forever with Him and His Son, Jesus Christ, as part of His immortal family in the Kingdom of God. He wants you to have a part in that awesome future!

We should also not forget God's promise to protect His people during this time of mounting global turmoil and catastrophes. In Revelation 3:10 He assures us, "Because you have kept My command to persevere, I also will keep you from the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth." God means what He says. And who are those whom He considers His people? Revelation 12:14-17 identifies them as those who faithfully "keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

If you believe God really exists and foretells the future in His Word—facts clearly proven in this booklet to those willing to accept them—are you willing to shape your life according to that revealed Word? Are you, as Jesus Christ said in Luke 4:4, willing to "live ... by every word of God"? If you want to learn the meaning of true repentance, receiving God's Spirit and how to keep the commandments of God.

Tensions continue to build in the Middle East, and it's only a matter of time before these long-prophesied events explode to shock the entire world. But you can find assurance and hope in this dangerous and troubling time—if you are willing to not only believe, but take action on that belief.

As Isaiah 55:6-7 advises: "Seek the LORD while He may be found, call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon."