

A complex collage image. At the top center is a large, golden dome of a mosque or religious building. To the left, a missile is shown in flight against a background of faint, repeating Hebrew text. To the right, there is a bright, fiery explosion. In the foreground, a tank is positioned, with soldiers wearing gas masks and military gear. The overall scene suggests a theme of conflict and war in the Middle East.

The Middle East in Prophecy

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by Richard F. Ames

Jerusalem is the most important city in the world. Scripture shows that the region surrounding it—the Middle East—will eventually explode into world war. Do you know what the Bible teaches about the end-time climax of world events in that region? You may be surprised!

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The Middle East has been in constant turmoil for decades. Many who are following world news wonder what will happen next, and what the final outcome will be. Yet very few realize that Bible prophecy explains *in advance* the earth-shaking events that will lead to greater disasters in the region—and ultimately to World War III!

The Bible outlines end-time events leading up to Jesus Christ's return. What happens in the Middle East, as His return draws near, will affect your life and the lives of everyone on earth. Understanding those events will help you to take action for your family's welfare. You *can* escape the prophesied disasters and judgments (Luke 21:36) upon a warring and God-defying world.

The Middle East seems to bring the world a constant stream of bad news. Bible prophecy shows that this bad news will continue until Jesus Christ's return. But once the world survives "Armageddon" in the Middle East, a time of *good news* will follow. Jerusalem will then live up to its name: "City of Peace." A Millennium of peace and prosperity is coming, under the rulership of the Messiah. As King of kings, Jesus Christ will rule the earth from Jerusalem with justice and righteousness, and all nations on earth will learn a new way of life—the way to peace.

But first, the Middle East must pass through the difficult times ahead.

Throughout history, human nature has looked to war as the final arbiter of disputes. The Apostle Paul made a profound state-

ment: “The way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes” (Romans 3:17–18). More than one million were killed in the Iran-Iraq War from 1980 to 1988. Thousands upon thousands more died in the Persian Gulf War and Operation Desert Storm in 1990–91. In that conflict, Iraqi troops set fire to more than 600 oil wells in Kuwait. The black smoke evoked images of Armageddon. This widespread pollution was called at the time the “world’s worst man-made environmental disaster” (*Time Almanac 2000*, p. 605). A decade later, Iran and Iraq remain focal points for religious, political and military unrest, polarizing world opinion and shaping geopolitical alliances.

Will there be more wars in the Middle East? Regrettably, the answer is “yes.” Your Bible reveals that there will be even more regional wars there, leading to what is commonly called “Armageddon.” Jerusalem will be a focal point of conflict.

Arabs and Israelis have been at war since the modern state of Israel was established. Peace has often been proclaimed in the region, but has never been realized. More than 25 years after Egyptian President Anwar Sadat gave hope to the world, flying to Israel to offer a dramatic overture of peace, the process he hoped to encourage has stalled, if not stopped. At present, there is little human prospect for lasting peace among Middle East nations.

The Bible reveals that this millennia-old conflict *will* come to a peaceful resolution in the not-too-distant future. But before this resolution is reached, much blood will be shed, and mankind will go through a time of war and suffering on a scale previously unknown in human history.

Understanding Bible prophecy about the Middle East can bring us hope and comfort even as the current crisis escalates. The Bible is full of information that can help us see the current Middle East conflict in the light of God’s plan for end-time world events. It explains many details unknown to the world’s politicians and policymakers. As we will see, it reveals what the ancient rivalry between Abraham’s grandsons Jacob and Esau means for the Middle East conflict today. Scripture also debunks many popular but false teachings regarding Russia’s role in end-time prophecy. It gives an overview of the “key players” in end-time prophecy—

including the “beast,” the false prophet and the King of the North—and the final phase of World War III, which we will read about later in this booklet.

Bible prophecy has revealed in advance many key facts and details that can help us prepare for the dangerous and challenging times ahead, as we strive to obey Jesus Christ’s command that we “watch and pray” as end-time events grow closer (Mark 13:33). And it reveals the vital role of Jerusalem—a city with a remarkable past and an even more remarkable future—at the center of many end-time events and prophecies.

Jerusalem—Holy City for Three Religions

Jerusalem (called *al-Quds* in Arabic) is sacred to the three major monotheistic religions: Christianity, Judaism and Islam. As a result, it has been a focus of conflict for centuries.

Conquered by the Romans before Christ’s birth, it was in the hands of Byzantine rulers when it fell to a Muslim army led by Caliph Umar in 638. In 1071, the Seljuk Turks took control of Jerusalem, and by cutting pilgrim routes from the West gave impetus to the First Crusade. This crusade brought Jerusalem under Western control in the “Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem,” which held the city from 1099 to 1187, when Saladin reconquered Jerusalem for Islam. Later crusades brought Jerusalem briefly under Western control from 1229 to 1239, and from 1243 to 1244, when it was sacked by the Tatars. In 1247, the city fell to the Egyptian Mamluks, under whose control it remained until 1517, when Ottoman sultan Selim I conquered the city.

Jerusalem remained under Ottoman control for almost exactly four centuries. In 1917, during World War I, General Allenby and the British army defeated the Ottoman Turks and entered the city. In November of that year, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration, which declared Britain’s intent to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine, with the understanding that “nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine.”

In 1947, the United Nations partitioned Jerusalem and the city was divided between Arab and Jewish control. In May 1948, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion declared Israel an independent state. Israel successfully defended itself against the attack of the Arab League. During the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel captured *all* of Jerusalem, putting it fully under Jewish rule for the first time since the Roman destruction in 70AD.

The future of the world greatly depends on the future of this city. To Jews, Jerusalem was the city of the great prophets and the capital of the Kingdom of Israel and Judah under King David and his son King Solomon. The first and second temples were the center of worship until the destruction of the city by the Romans in 70AD. Jerusalem is also the third most holy city of Islam, after the cities of Mecca and Medina. Completed in 691AD, the Mosque of Omar—also called the “Dome of the Rock”—today dominates the Temple Mount. The Arabic term for the holy place is “al-Haram as-Sharif” which means “The Noble Sanctuary.” Muslims believe that Muhammad ascended to Heaven from that site. Christians revere the city as the place where their Savior taught in the temple—and was later crucified. Christians believe that Jesus will return to establish His Kingdom with Jerusalem as world capital.

The Temple Mount is a focus for Muslims and Jews, who have been at odds in the Middle East for more than 1,300 years, ever since an Arabian trader named Muhammad, 800 miles southeast of Jerusalem, established the religion of Islam. Islam’s Dome of the Rock now stands where Solomon’s temple once stood. Jews are not allowed to pray on the Mount itself, so they come to the Western Wall—or “Wailing Wall”—at the base of the Mount to pray. Jews yearn to have a religious presence on the Temple Mount itself.

Hopes for peace were high on September 13, 1993, when Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed a “Declaration of Principles” in Washington, D.C. Observers were so encouraged by this development that the 1994 Nobel Peace Prize was jointly awarded to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Israeli Foreign Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

ARAB-ISRAELI WARS

May 14, 1948

The Jewish National Council declares the establishment of Israel. War breaks out between the new state and surrounding Arab nations. When the war ends in 1949, Jordan controls the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and Egypt controls the Gaza Strip. Israel is established as a nation, but without access to the holy places in Old Jerusalem! David Ben-Gurion becomes Israel's first Prime Minister.

July 1956

In the wake of Egypt's nationalizing the Suez Canal Zone, Israel invades Egypt and takes control of the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula. Israel later withdraws after the United Nations establishes a security force in these areas.

June 1967

In what came to be called the "Six-Day War," Israel fights the combined forces of Egypt, Syria and Jordan. Israel takes over the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Israel now has access to its historic holy places, including the Western Wall at the Temple Mount.

October 6, 1973

Known as the "Yom Kippur War" because it began on the Day of Atonement, this war saw Israel repel invasions by Egypt and Syria. Israel, Egypt and Jordan later agree on a United Nations cease-fire.

June 6, 1982

Israeli forces invade Lebanon, and encircle Beirut by June 14. In February 1985, Israeli forces withdraw unilaterally from Lebanon, but maintain a "security zone" in southern Lebanon, which they hold until military units are withdrawn in May 2000.

In May 1994, Israel and the Palestinians signed an interim agreement leading to increased Palestinian self-government in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The peace process was shattered, though, in November 1995, when an Israeli extremist assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Just a week before his death, Rabin had told journalists that he intended to go forward with negotiations with Syria.

Rabin's death cast a pall over the peace process. Still, Israelis and Palestinians sought to negotiate peace. Signed in October 1998, the Wye River Memorandum provided steps to implement the 1995 interim agreement, looking to a May 1999 target date for a final resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But no resolution could be found. The July 2000 Camp David summit, called by United States President Bill Clinton, failed to formulate a final peace agreement—underscoring the bitter truth that *both* Israel and the Palestinians consider Jerusalem their exclusive capital, and do not want the other to have unfettered control of this historic city.

In September 2000, when he was still opposition leader, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount, inciting Palestinian protesters. In the weeks that followed, violence escalated—hundreds of Palestinians and dozens of Israelis were killed or wounded. It was the worst violence the region had seen in four years. U.S. efforts to reconcile Israel and the Palestinians proved unsuccessful. When Sharon, a key figure in many of Israel's military operations over the years, became Prime Minister, many Arabs vowed to intensify their opposition to the state of Israel. The religious conflict that was sparked in Jerusalem reignited the *intifada* (Arabic for “uprising”), broadening the violence throughout the region.

More than 200,000 Israelis live in about 150 settlements throughout the West Bank and Gaza. Also scattered throughout the region are Palestinian communities in Hebron, Jericho, Nablus and Bethlehem. Conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians are escalating; *Agence-France Press* reported in August 2003 that the *intifada* had claimed the lives of 2,549 Palestinians and 772 Israelis since September 2000. Since 2001, suicide bombers have regularly attacked Israelis, who have responded in turn with military force in the West Bank.

The West's perception of Middle East violence, and its relationship to world terrorism, was changed forever on September 11, 2001, when terrorists destroyed the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, and damaged the Pentagon in Washington, DC. *Business Week* magazine called the attack an "act of war" (Sept. 24, 2001). The *Economist* magazine titled its cover after the attacks: "The Day the World Changed" (Sept. 15–21, 2001). Then on September 20, 2001, President George W. Bush, before a joint session of Congress, declared war on international terrorism. A U.S.-led coalition joined with Afghanistan militia in destroying and expelling al-Qaeda forces. But throughout 2002, terrorists continued their international attacks in various countries, including an attack on Bali, Indonesia in October 2002, which killed many Australians as well as Indonesians. The *Economist* magazine responded by declaring on its cover that we are now in "A World of Terror."

Most Muslims do not consider themselves terrorists, nor do they support the terror carried out by al-Qaeda. There are approximately 1.2 billion Muslims around the world, between one-quarter and one-third of whom live in the Middle East. Yet while the vast majority of Muslims consider themselves peace-loving people, their religion has been used as a rallying point by a small number of extremists who wish to destabilize nations in order to achieve their goals.

Instability appears to be a fact of life in the 21st century. The U.S. now seeks to lead an alliance to counter potential terror threats sponsored by what President George W. Bush has called an "axis of evil" that includes two Middle East nations—Iran and Iraq. Pakistan and India, like Israel, are known to have nuclear weapons. Other countries, such as North Korea, are widely suspected of nuclear capability. In today's unstable environment, many of the world's experts consider nuclear war a distinct possibility—even a probability. If total war breaks out in the Middle East, might future missiles deliver nuclear, biological and chemical destruction to Israel and surrounding nations? Will the Holy Land become the focal point for another World War?

What Lies Ahead?

Many observers think that it is foolish, or even impossible, to predict the future. God, however, has in the Bible given us prophecies that can help us understand what will happen in and around Jerusalem in the end-times. What does the Bible say will eventually happen? “Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst. 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” (Zechariah 14:1–2).

“All the nations” will fight in this conflict, during that period of time known as the Day of the Lord—the year just before Jesus Christ’s prophesied return. But what major prophetic events will lead up to this battle in Jerusalem? “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; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened” (Matthew 24:21–22).

The book of Revelation, or the Apocalypse, reveals the dramatic end-time events leading up to the glorious return of Jesus Christ. Revelation 6 describes the events leading up to the Day of the Lord. All of humanity will see dramatic and frightening activity in the heavens. Revelation 6:12–14 describes these “heavenly signs” as the “sixth seal.” Jesus said: “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Matthew 24:29). These heavenly signs precede the Day of the Lord (Joel 2:30–31), the year of God’s judgment on the nations. Then, after these events, the Messiah—Jesus Christ—will rule all nations on earth (Revelation 11:15).

What role will Jerusalem play in that coming kingdom? Will it be the future capital of the world? Perhaps in your lifetime? Scripture gives us a wonderful and encouraging forecast: “The word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem. Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the

mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it" (Isaiah 2:1–2).

Mountains are a biblical symbol for a kingdom or government. Isaiah stated plainly that the Lord's Kingdom would be established in Jerusalem and that "all nations shall flow to it." This will not be government in the hands of selfish human beings. Humanity does not know the way to lasting peace, because it has rejected the rulership and the sovereignty of God over the affairs of man.

God's government on earth will be administered from Jerusalem, the future capital of the world, as Zechariah confirms with a beautiful description of life there in the future. Notice in the book of Zechariah. "Thus says the LORD: '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.' Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Old men and old women shall again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each one with his staff in his hand because of great age. The streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets'" (Zechariah 8:3–5).

Today, however, the streets of Jerusalem are filled with bitter enemies, who share a rich heritage and history—but also share a history of conflict.

Bitter Family Rivalry

To understand the present Middle East conflict, we need to understand the history of those in conflict—the Jews and the Arabs. Historians often note the "family" relationship between these two peoples; some call them "cousins" because both trace their roots to the great patriarch Abraham.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam all honor Abraham as one of their patriarchs. Calling him "Religion's Superstar," a *Time* magazine feature article asked: "Abraham changed history by espousing just one God, and is sacred to Muslims, Jews and Christians. Can this crossover biblical hero help heal the world?" (Sept. 30, 2002, p. 5).

The answer is: not in this age! But in tomorrow's world, Abraham as "heir of the world" (Romans 4:13) under Jesus Christ,

and as one of the saints in God's kingdom, will help teach the way to peace when all nations will come to Jerusalem (see Isaiah 2:2–4).

In the 19th century BC, the Creator God began to work with Abraham (then called "Abram"). God tested his faith many times, even promising him a son in his old age—a promise that seemed to be delayed. Abram's wife Sarai, unable to bear children, encouraged Abram to have a child through her Egyptian handmaid, Hagar. Eighty-six years old when the child was born, Abram gave the name Ishmael to the son whom Hagar bore (Genesis 16:15–16). The majority of Arabs today trace their ancestry back to Ishmael and Abraham.

When Abram was 99 years old, God made a covenant with Abram that he would be "a father of many nations." God then changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude." God promised that Abraham and Sarai, whose name was changed to Sarah, would have a son named Isaac. God said to Abraham: "I will establish my covenant with him [Isaac] for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him" (Genesis 17:19). One of Isaac's grandsons, Judah, would be the progenitor of the Jews, who now occupy the modern land called Israel.

After Isaac was born, Sarah insisted that Abraham send Hagar and Ishmael away. Sarah 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 21:10). Abraham was very upset at this request, but God told Abraham: "Do not let it be displeasing in your sight because of the lad or because of your bondwoman. Whatever Sarah has said to you, listen to her voice; for in Isaac your seed shall be called. Yet I will also make a nation of the son of the bondwoman, because he is your seed" (Genesis 21:12–13).

The envy and rivalry between these two peoples continues to this day. Another dimension that helps explain today's ongoing conflict is the rivalry between Jacob and Esau, the twin sons of Isaac. Esau was the firstborn, and the heir of the family birthright. But in time of hunger, Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of soup. Later, Jacob disguised himself as Esau and deceived his

aging father Isaac into giving him the birthright blessing (see Genesis 25; 27). What was Esau's reaction? "So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing with which his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand; then I will kill my brother Jacob'" (Genesis 27:41).

This bitter rivalry would continue throughout history. Esau is also called Edom (see Genesis 36). The Edomites intermarried with the Ishmaelites, beginning with Esau himself (see Genesis 28:9). The descendants of these peoples continued to be in conflict with Israel. The leading tribe of Edom, the Amalekites, continually harassed Israel (see Exodus 17). God said that He would have "war with Amalek from generation to generation" (Exodus 17:16).

One of the Psalms also confirms both historically and prophetically that Edom, Ishmael and Amalek are joined in a confederacy against Israel. "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; they have helped the children of Lot. Selah" (Psalm 83:4–8).

What nations have continuously committed themselves to destroy the name of Israel?

In July of 1968, Palestinian leaders signed the "Palestinian National Charter," which called for the destruction of the State of Israel. In 1993, shortly before signing the "Declaration of Principles" with Israel, PLO chairman Yasser Arafat signed an agreement renouncing this demand and agreeing to change the charter, but it remains an item of hot dispute to this day. As Psalm 83 indicates, Assyria (identified as modern-day Germany) will be joined by an end-time "confederacy" of Arab nations. Look on your Bible map for the ancient location of Moab, Ammon and Edom, mentioned in Psalm 83—nations that are also prominently mentioned in Daniel's end-time prophecy. These are the Muslim peoples of the Middle East!

Understanding this bitter family rivalry, beginning with Jacob and Esau, gives us a better understanding of their descendants' present-day wars and conflicts, particularly in the Middle East.

Daniel's Famous Prophecy

Scripture strongly indicates that a great historic power will intervene in the Middle East. Historically, the Roman Empire in Jesus' day enforced a *Pax Romana*—"Roman Peace"—in the Holy Land.

The prophet Daniel reveals that there will also be an end-time Roman Empire, which will play a crucial role in end-time conflicts in the Middle East. Daniel 2 records that King Nebuchadnezzar was going to execute all the wise men of Babylon if they did not tell him his dream, as well as its interpretation. The Creator God used the prophet Daniel to reveal the rise and fall of great empires, even down to our modern times. Here is what Daniel told the king: "But 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). Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar that God had made him a king of kings, and described the image envisioned by the king. A great statue had a head of gold. Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar: "You are this head of gold" (v. 38). The remaining elements of the great image symbolized the great empires to follow after the Babylonian empire.

Who were these empires? All reputable Bible scholars agree on their identity and their prophetic fulfillment. Daniel continued to describe what would eventually happen to this great image. The head of gold represented the Babylonian Empire from 625 to 539BC. Next came the Medo-Persian Empire, from 558 to 330BC, represented by the chest and arms of silver. The belly and thighs of bronze represented the Greco-Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great from 333 to 31BC. The two legs of iron represent the Roman Empire from 31BC to 476AD. Finally, the ten toes on two feet of iron mixed with ceramic clay represent a future revival of the Roman Empire.

How do we know that the feet of the image will continue into our modern times? Daniel describes a great stone that smashes the



Head of Gold

Babylonian Empire
625-539 BC

Chest and Arms of Silver

Medo-Persian Empire
558-330 BC

Belly and Thighs of Bronze

Greco-Macedonian Empire
333-31 BC

Legs of Iron

Roman Empire
31 BC-476 AD

Toes of Iron with Clay

Roman Empire
(future empire)

image on its feet. He also describes the stone's meaning: "And in the days of these kings [symbolized by the ten toes] 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" (Daniel 2:44). The Kingdom of God that will "consume all these kingdoms" is yet future!

The end-time power that will eventually dominate the Middle East, will be a revived Roman Empire, also symbolized in the prophecies of Revelation and Daniel as a *beast*. This great power will be political, military, and economic. The current European Union is headed toward completing all three dimensions of that power. It could have the potential of being a force for good. But history teaches us that great empires and political alliances can also revert to dictatorial power for the purpose of global expansion and domination without regard for the welfare of conquered nation-states. The Creator God will use such an empire in the future, just as He has in the past. God used Assyria to punish the rebellious kingdom of Israel. In the opening verses of Isaiah 10, God indicts Israel for all her sins, then states: "Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hand is My indignation. I will send him against an ungodly nation, and against the people of My wrath I will give him charge, to seize the spoil, to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Yet he does not mean so, nor does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off not a few nations" (Isaiah 10:5–7).

God will use the end-time descendants of Assyria—the nation of Germany—once again in punishing the modern descendants of the ancient House of Israel, the American and British-descended peoples. Germany right now, is the leading nation of the European Union. Be sure to watch developments in Europe. To learn more about Germany's role in end-time prophecy, please write for our free reprint article, *A Fourth Reich?*

In Daniel 11, we find two antagonists: the king of the North and the king of the South. In ancient times, Syria was considered to be the king of the North. But the Roman Empire conquered Syria, which became a province of Rome in 64BC. Bible prophecy

shows that by the time of the end, the king of the North will be identified with the revived Roman Empire. Then: “At the time of the end the king of the South shall attack him; and the king of the North shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them, and pass through. He shall also enter the Glorious Land, [or the Holy Land] and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon. He shall stretch out his hand against the countries, and the land of Egypt shall not escape” (Daniel 11:40–42).

Notice that the king of the North enters into the “Glorious Land”—the location of the modern state of Israel. The fact that Ammon (which Bible scholars identify as modern-day Jordan) escapes out of his hand, along with Edom and Moab, leads many to believe that Jordan will be allied with the European power. Psalm 83 identifies those peoples who will be confederate with Assyria against Israel. That alliance includes Moab, Ammon and Edom.

Daniel 11:43 gives us an indication of those nations allied with the king of the South. These are the peoples of north Africa. Verse 40 states that the king of the South attacks the king of the North. What will provoke this attack? Will it be the passion of Islamic fundamentalists? Will it be a sudden interruption of oil flow to Europe? You need to watch world events in Europe and the Middle East.

Who will invade the Middle East? Look for a revived Roman Empire—a political entity now in its formative stages with the European Union as its nucleus. There will be a forced peace upon modern Israel in the Middle East. But, as we will see later, the “Beast power” that occupies the Middle East will be overthrown by the returning Commander of Heaven’s armies, Jesus Christ. The King of kings and Lord of lords, revealed in Revelation 19, will see that the beast and the false prophet are cast into a lake of fire. Jerusalem will be occupied by Earth’s new King, Jesus Christ. The name of the city will even be called “The Lord is There” (Ezekiel 48:35). Peace will finally come to the Middle East and to the City of Peace, Jerusalem.

Will Russia Control the Middle East?

Some teachers of biblical prophecy wrongly believe that Russia will take over the Middle East before Christ's second coming. Where does that mistaken idea come from? It comes mainly from a misunderstanding of Ezekiel 38, which begins: "Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him" (vv. 1–2). Most biblical scholars identify these peoples as those from northern Russia. Wilhelm Gesenius, a 19th century Hebrew scholar and others note that the city of Moscow is derived from the Hebrew name Meshech. Ezekiel continues: "Thus says the Lord GOD: 'Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the *far north* and all its troops; many people are with you'" (vv. 3–6).

Notice that the house of Togarmah is from the far north, that is, north of the Holy Land. When you look at a map, Russia is in the far north. Who will join Russia? Persia is mentioned. Most scholars agree that Persia is modern-day Iran. The Hebrew word for Ethiopia is *Cush*, the eastern branch of which is identified with India. The Hebrew word for Libya is *Put* (Put was the third son of Ham, according to Genesis 10:6), whose eastern branch, like Cush, is also identified with India. Magog is identified with the Mongols and Gomer with Indochina. Togarmah is most likely identified with Siberia.

We can generally agree on the identity of these peoples mentioned in Ezekiel 38. And Bible prophecy shows that these armies certainly will *eventually* enter the Middle East. But the question is: *When?* After Jesus' second coming, He will work to bring world peace and reeducate the nations (cf. Isaiah 2; Micah 4). But that will take time. All nations will *not* automatically accept the rule of Jesus Christ when He returns. Even Egypt will apparently refuse the Lord's command to keep the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem

(cf. Zechariah 14:18–19). The Russo-Chinese alliance, mentioned in Ezekiel 38, will attack *after* the Millennium begins—*after* the second coming of Christ, and after peace is established in the Holy Land. Notice what God says of the invading armies: “You will say, ‘I will go up against a land of **unwalled** villages; I will go to a **peaceful** people, who **dwell safely**, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates’; to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land” (Ezekiel 38:11–12).

Does Israel today “dwell safely” in unwalled villages, that is, without military protection? Of course not! Ezekiel is speaking of a time yet future, when Christ establishes peace in the Holy Land. Notice: “Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “On that day when My people Israel **dwell safely**, will you not know it?’” (v. 14).

God will destroy this eastern alliance and its armies when they attack restored Israel (cf. Ezekiel 39). There will be so many dead bodies that it will take months to bury them. “For **seven months** the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land” (Ezekiel 39:12). Almighty God has all the power in the universe to fulfill His will. It is folly for nations to fight against Him and His purpose. But the nations will learn who is in charge. As God states: “Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD” (Ezekiel 38:23).

Who Will Control Jerusalem?

Since 1967, Israel has fought wars and negotiated peace treaties with several Arab states. But Israel has never been able to negotiate a permanent peace agreement with the Palestinians. In July 2000, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak did what no Israeli negotiator had done before—he proposed that Israel would grant administrative self-governance to Palestinians in East Jerusalem. But Barak wanted Israel to retain security control over East

Jerusalem, and the Palestinians rejected his proposal. Negotiations broke down, leading to the current conflict. What caused the impasse in negotiations? The one issue that appears unsolvable: “Who will control Jerusalem?”

In 1980, Israel declared Jerusalem as its “united and eternal capital.” The Palestinians also desire Jerusalem as their capital. Before his death in 2002, Faisal Husseini, a representative of the Palestinian Authority in Jerusalem, stated the Palestinian position that Israel “must withdraw from all of east Jerusalem to the pre-’67 borders... all settlements and Israeli neighborhoods in east Jerusalem must be dismantled... Israel must compensate the Palestinians for the damages it has inflicted including the changes in the character of the city and the lives of its citizens” (*The Jerusalem Post*, Nov. 19, 1999).

Israel has held to its position that Jerusalem must remain the undivided capital of Israel. As Israeli spokesman Gadi Baltiansky stated in 1999: “There will be no negotiations over Jerusalem, and if the Palestinians think otherwise—too bad. This is a red line that Prime Minister Barak will never cross” (*ibid.*). Even Barak’s proposal for “sharing sovereignty” did not include any concession that Jerusalem was not a united city under the control of Israeli security. In the years since, facing the intifada, Barak’s successors have expressed no eagerness to revisit his proposal, which Israelis considered generous but which Palestinians considered unacceptable.

The U.S. has come down on the side of Israel in this dispute, and has found itself the target of international anger as a result. On September 30, 2002, President Bush signed congressional legislation that required his administration to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. What was the reaction? Cairo’s leading newspaper reported: “The new US legislation requiring all official American documents to identify the occupied city of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has triggered angry reactions throughout the Islamic world. Thousands of demonstrators marched through Gaza, threatening to intensify suicide bombings inside Israel, while popular and religious leaders called on Arab and Islamic parliaments to adopt a strong stance against this latest outrage, calling, among other things, for a boycott of American goods” (*Al-Ahram*, Oct. 16, 2002).

The gap between views over the sovereignty of Jerusalem is wide and deep! What does the international community think about this conflict? What is the solution? In 1980, when Israel declared Jerusalem to be Israel's "united and eternal capital," the Vatican strongly objected to that declaration. Pope John Paul II wrote in 1984, in his apostolic letter *Redemptoris Anno*, that he sought for Jerusalem to have a "special internationally guaranteed status." Even as early as 1975, United States Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had made a similar proposal, that Jerusalem become an international city with the control of holy places and the religious administration being given to the pope.

Pope John Paul II spoke to the new Jordanian ambassador to the Vatican on May 28, 1998. *Reuters* reported his comments: "The long history of the city of Jerusalem, filled with tribulations, will reach a new threshold in the year 2000, with the dawn of the third millennium of Christianity... It is my fervent hope that this may lead to a formal recognition, with international guarantees, of the unique and sacred identity of the Holy City."

Will non-Israelis control Jerusalem? The Apostle John said that they will! "Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood, saying, 'Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to *the Gentiles*. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months'" (Revelation 11:1–2).

Gentiles will control the "holy city"—Jerusalem—for 42 months. The book of Revelation describes a period of three and one-half years leading up to the return of Christ. Two prophets of God will witness with great power during that same period of three and one-half years, or 1,260 days (Revelation 11:3–15). These two witnesses will contend with the forces of a revived Roman Empire, which will dominate the Middle East at that time.

Temple Sacrifices Restored?

Many religious teachers understand *part* of Bible prophecy. They expect that the Jewish orthodox authority in Israel will once

again establish temple sacrifices. Groups such as the Third Temple Institute in Jerusalem are making preparations today to train priests and assemble the items required for the reestablishment of sacrifices. Will the Jewish priesthood once again offer animal sacrifices? Some Jewish groups are going to great lengths trying to make this happen.

A few religious groups and individuals have gone overboard in their desire to see prophecy fulfilled. The Israeli authorities placed their security on special alert during the months of December 1999 and January 2000 because several religious groups, referred to as “apocalyptic,” allegedly plotted to “help prophecy along” by their own efforts, and threatened to blow up the Dome of the Rock in order to make possible the construction of a third temple.

But true Christians recognize that *God is in charge*. He does not need our help to bring these prophecies to pass! Besides, true Christians do not go around causing violence and blowing up buildings. Even some Jewish extremists have threatened violence around the Temple Mount to get their way. Any such violence on the Temple Mount could cause an Arab uprising, or even a *jihad* (holy war) that would have international repercussions.

The Dome of the Rock, a mosque holy to Muslims, stands on the Temple Mount, where there is no Jewish temple. Yet many Jews, and some Christians, are expecting some kind of divine intervention that would make possible the building of a third temple on the Temple Mount.

What will happen? Prophecy indicates that the sacrifices will be reinstated. The Roman armies destroyed Jerusalem and the second temple in 70AD. The Jews have not offered temple sacrifices since that time. Now, one of the more important questions needs to be asked: Is a temple necessary for the revival of sacrifices?

The Babylonian Empire of the sixth century BC conquered the kingdom of Judah. The Babylonians transported thousands of captive Jews to Babylon. The armies of King Nebuchadnezzar also destroyed the first temple at Jerusalem in 586BC. Eventually, under the Persian Empire, King Cyrus sponsored a group of exiles to return to Jerusalem. When the returning Jews eventually laid the foundation of the second temple, there was both rejoicing and

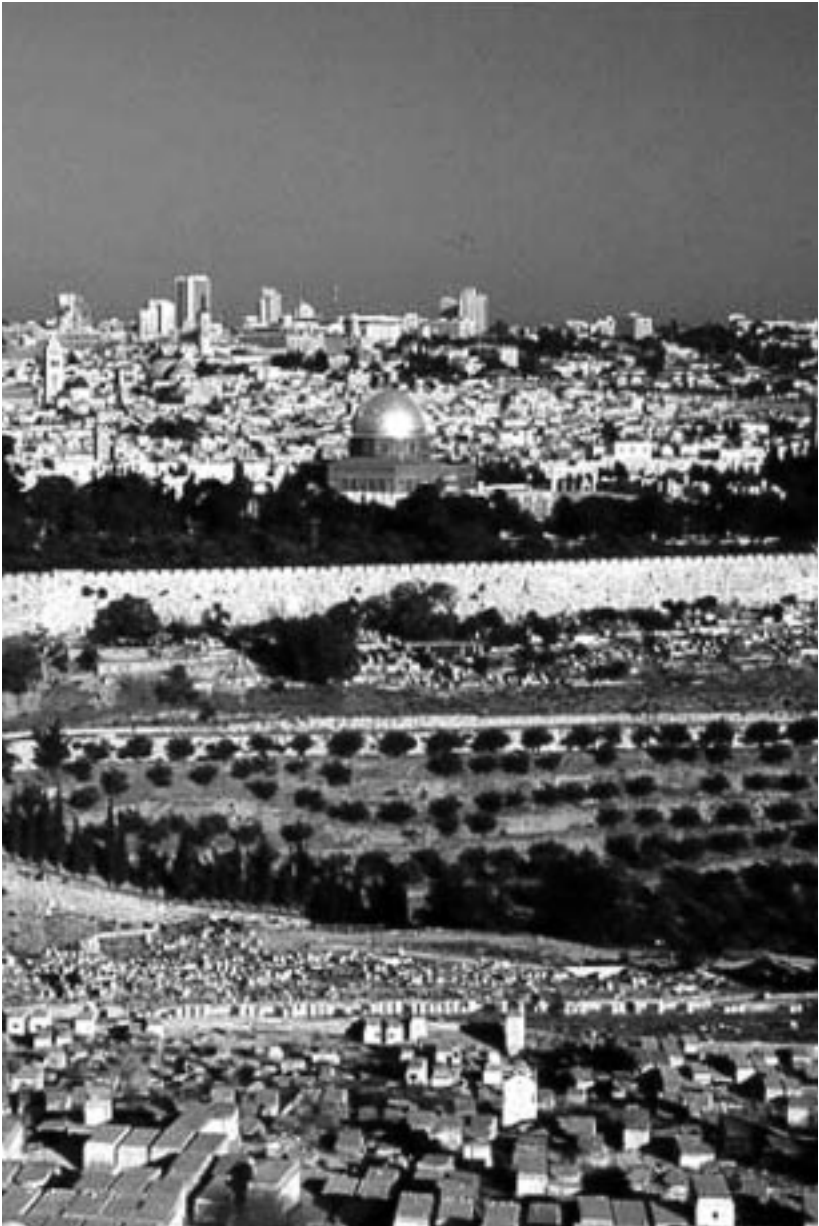
sadness. Joy because they now had a center of worship, and sadness because this second temple was very simple by comparison to the former glorious temple built by King Solomon. But notice the attitude of the Jews. They actually began sacrificing before the foundation of the temple was laid. “From the first day of the seventh month they began to offer burnt offerings to the LORD, although the *foundation of the temple* of the LORD *had not been laid*” (Ezra 3:6). The Jews had observed the Feast of Tabernacles in their unfinished temple, with daily sacrifices.

Notice another important point. Where do the exiles return? Ezra refers to the location of the holy place as the house of God, when the temple had not yet been built: “Now in the second month of the second year of their coming to *the house of God* at Jerusalem” (v. 8). This took place around 536BC. But there was no building as yet. The third chapter of Ezra goes on to describe the laying of the foundation of the temple. Sacrifices must be presented in a holy place. But in this case, the sacrifices were made daily *without a physical building called a temple*.

The holiest place under the control of the Jewish religious authorities today, is the Western Wall, or the Wailing Wall. It is the western retaining wall of the Temple Mount. Jews are not allowed to publicly worship on the Temple Mount; only Muslims have that privilege at the moment. So, it remains to be seen where the Jews will begin sacrificing. It will probably take a national crisis to precipitate that event.

Jesus spoke of a time when enemy armies would invade the Holy Land and surround the city of Jerusalem. “But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near” (Luke 21:20). Remember this is in the context of Jesus’ Olivet Prophecy, also described in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. A powerful alliance of nations will invade the Middle East and dominate the region, as foretold by the prophet Daniel (cf. Daniel 11:41).

There will be international guarantees, protecting Jerusalem, enforced by a superpower. But these guarantees will also enforce the pseudo-Christianity of a revived Roman Empire. There will be a revived *Pax Romana* (“Roman Peace”), imposed by what the Bible calls the end-time “beast” (see Revelation 13).



View of the Temple Mount and Old City of Jerusalem, with modern Jerusalem in the background ©2002 ArtToday.

The capture of Jerusalem by the “beast” superpower signals the time of the great “tribulation” and “the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled” (Luke 21:22).

Although the word “Jerusalem” means “city of peace,” Jerusalem has experienced bloody fighting and wars over the millennia. But soon, this great city will truly be the city of peace for all peoples. That is good news you can look forward to!

We need to be aware of these major events foretold in Scripture. The prophesied “great tribulation” is primarily the time of trouble for the U.S. and the British-descended peoples, who are descended from the ancient patriarch Joseph. When he was near death, Jacob blessed two of his grandsons—Joseph’s sons Ephraim and Manasseh—and said: “The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; let my name [Jacob, i.e. Israel] be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (Genesis 48:16).

The end-time prophecies relating to Jacob, or Israel, generally refer to the descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh who were given Jacob’s name. Scripture gives an end-time warning about a great “tribulation.” Upon whom does this tribulation fall? “Alas! For that day is great, so that none is like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it” (Jeremiah 30:7). To learn more about the “time of Jacob’s trouble” and what it means for the American and other British-descended nations, please write for your free copy of our booklet *The United States and Great Britain in Prophecy*.

Watch for the Abomination of Desolation

The prophesied “great tribulation” will be a time unique in all of human history—a time such “that none is like it.” What does the Bible tell us to do? Jesus tells us: “Watch therefore, and pray always that you may be counted worthy to *escape all these things* that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man” (Luke 21:36).

What should you watch for in the Middle East? When Jesus was on the Mount of Olives, He gave an outline of end-time prophecy, with parallel accounts recorded in Matthew 24, Luke 21

and Mark 13. Jesus' disciples had asked him about the sign of His coming and the end of the world, or the end of the age. He spoke about religious deception, wars, famines, pestilences and earthquakes. These trends reveal, in sequence, the meaning of the four horsemen of Revelation 6, who, toward the end of this age, intensify their dangerous ride. Jesus declares: "All these are the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:8).

Religious persecution and martyrdom will follow. "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many" (Matthew 24:9–11).

But the Truth will still be preached! "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Matthew 24:14). As Jesus Christ opens doors for the gospel to expand in coverage and power, you will know that the end is drawing near. Do not be asleep to world conditions and the prophetic trends intensifying before your very eyes!

Jesus gave us a key sign to watch for, which will signify the beginning of the great tribulation and trouble in the Holy Land. He warned: "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place' (whoever reads, let him understand) 'then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains'" (Matthew 24:15–16).

What is this abomination of desolation?

Centuries before Christ, an angel gave the prophet Daniel a vision concerning end-time events. When Daniel asked the meaning of the message, the angel told him: "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (Daniel 12:9). More than 2,500 years later, we can now understand these prophecies. Notice another important detail. "And from the time that the daily sacrifice is taken away, and the abomination of desolation is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days" (Daniel 12:11). At the time of the end, shortly before the return of Christ, God reveals that the daily sac-

rifice will be stopped or “taken away.” This obviously implies that the sacrifices must be started, before they can be stopped! But what exactly is this “abomination of desolation”?

Historically, the Greek ruler Antiochus Epiphanes issued a decree in 167BC that prohibited further Jewish sacrifices in the temple at Jerusalem. “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).

In addition to stopping the daily sacrifices in the temple, Antiochus erected a statue of Jupiter Olympus in the Holy of Holies, and sacrificed a pig upon the altar, desecrating it with the pig’s blood. This abomination, also described in Daniel 8, was also the prophetic forerunner (or “ante-type”) of an end-time event—the end-time sacrifices being cut off 1,290 days before Christ’s return. Jesus warns us to be alert to an *end-time* abomination of desolation. Just as Antiochus Epiphanes profaned the temple in 167BC and prohibited the sacrifices, so in the future another profane authority will prohibit sacrifices. In fact, the Apostle Paul warns of a great false prophet that will stand in the holy place: “Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day 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” (2 Thessalonians 2:3–4).

A great false prophet will work amazing miracles and deceive millions of people. He will cultivate worship toward himself, and claim that he is divine. Scripture describes a symbolic creature that appears like a lamb (the symbol for Christ) but speaks as a dragon (the symbol of Satan the Devil). This is the great religious power that will guide an end-time revival of the Roman Empire. “Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and spoke like a dragon. And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight

of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived” (Revelation 13:11–14).

This Antichrist will even call down fire from heaven! These deceiving miracles will excite millions—but will also lead many away from the true Jesus Christ of the Bible. You must not let yourself become deceived. The prophet Isaiah explained a test by which we can recognize God’s true servants: “To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20). True servants of Christ will speak according to the Word of God, the Bible! You need to know your Bible, and study your Bible. Prove and test all things, as it tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:21!

The end-time religio-political power dominating Jerusalem will cause the sacrifices to cease. Remember that the Jews have not offered animal sacrifices since 70AD, when the Romans destroyed the temple in Jerusalem. In order for the end-time sacrifices to be stopped eventually, they need to begin! When animal sacrifices begin once again in Jerusalem, you will know that the prophecies Jesus spoke about are heading for a climax!

Three Prophetic Milestones

When the abomination of desolation prophesied by Jesus is set up, three prophetic milestones will follow over a period of three and one-half years: the Great Tribulation, the Heavenly Signs and the Day of the Lord. This prophetic framework helps us understand end-time developments in the Middle East, and how they affect the world.

Notice that Jesus Himself gives the sequence of events. He warns us about the abomination of desolation in Matthew 24:15, then explains the *first* prophetic milestone in verses 21 and 22: “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; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened.” This

is a time unique in all history. It is the time of Jacob's trouble (Jeremiah 30:7), the time of God's punishment on the Western nations—including the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. (For more information about this informative topic, please write for our free booklet *The United States and Great Britain in Prophecy*. The Great Tribulation is the time Daniel announces: "And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time" (Daniel 12:1).

This is a time of war, persecution, and martyrdom. It is the time when the four horsemen of Revelation 6 intensify their ride. They are given power over "a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth" (Revelation 6:8). The fifth seal of Revelation describes the martyrdom of Christians (Revelation 6:9–11).

We then see a *second* prophetic milestone. The sixth seal reveals frightening, dramatic activity in the sky, or what Scripture calls "the heavenly signs." The Apostle John wrote: "I looked when He opened the sixth seal, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became like blood. And the stars of heaven fell to the earth, as a fig tree drops its late figs when it is shaken by a mighty wind. Then the sky receded as a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of its place" (Revelation 6:12–14).

Jesus also confirms this sequence of tribulation followed by great signs in the heavens: "Immediately *after* the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (Matthew 24:29).

How will human beings react to these heavenly signs? "And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?'" (Revelation 6:15–17).

The heavenly signs announce the time of God's judgment on the nations, "the great day of His wrath." This is the seventh seal,

the period of time also called the Day of the Lord—a *third* prophetic milestone. In vision, the Apostle John refers to it in Revelation 1:10 as “the Lord’s Day.” John is referring *not* to a day of the week, but to the time period leading up to the return of Christ as mentioned in more than 30 prophecies! The prophet Isaiah describes it this way, “For it is the *day* of the LORD’S vengeance, the *year* of recompense for the cause of Zion” (Isaiah 34:8).

The prophet Joel also confirms that the heavenly signs *precede* the Day of the Lord. “And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, *before* the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD” (Joel 2:30–31).

The seventh seal, or the Day of the Lord, consists of seven trumpet plagues: “When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets” (Revelation 8:1–2). The first six trumpets sound during the year preceding Christ’s second coming. The seventh trumpet announces the good news of Christ’s return to rule all nations on planet earth: “Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!’” (Revelation 11:15). While this is good news to genuine Christians, the nations will be angry (verse 18) and will actually gather their military force to fight against the returning King (Revelation 19:19). As we will see, that final battle will be fought in the Middle East, near Jerusalem.

The good news is that the returning Jesus Christ will conquer all the rebellious armies and nations of planet Earth. The returning King of kings will set up His Kingdom in Jerusalem and enforce lasting world peace (cf. Zechariah 14:1–3). Jesus Christ will come back to Jerusalem. He will rule over all the kingdoms, nations, and governments of this earth. “And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be; ‘The LORD is one,’ and His name one” (v. 9). The Messiah *will* be King over all the earth, and will govern from Jerusalem. He will establish *true religion* over all the earth, replacing the *false* religion that dominated the revived Roman Empire.

Who Rides the Beast?

We have seen that the Middle East will be the location of a modern-day fulfillment of Daniel's prophecy concerning the "abomination of desolation." When that end-time abomination comes, what religious system will dominate it? The book of Revelation refers to the great false end-time religion as Mystery Babylon. In Revelation 17, the Apostle John sees in vision the judgment of a great harlot, which symbolizes a great false church or religious system. "Come, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth were made drunk with the wine of her fornication" (Revelation 17:1–2). This woman rides a "beast" that has seven heads and ten horns (v. 3). That "beast," as we have seen earlier, is the political and military power that will invade the Middle East.

John continues, describing this great harlot: "And on her forehead a name was written: MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH" (Revelation 17:5). It will be that system dominating the great tribulation period. The leader of that system, the false prophet, will even call down fire from heaven as we read in Revelation 13:13. Do not let yourself be deceived by such "miraculous" displays. Revelation 13:11 tells us that this religious figure symbolically looks like a lamb (the symbol of Christ) but speaks as a dragon! He will stand in Jerusalem's holy place and even claim that he is God!

In Revelation 17, we saw that the harlot rides the "beast." But who is this "beast"? The answer will tell us who will invade the Middle East. "The beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those who are with Him are called, chosen, and faithful" (Revelation 17:11–14).

The Church of God has for years pointed out that the end-time “Beast power” of Revelation, will be a final revival of the ancient Roman Empire. That empire continued from about 31BC to 476AD. There were six revivals, including the Imperial Restoration under Justinian in 544AD and another revival led by Charlemagne in 800AD. (For more information about this prophesied “Beast power,” please write for our free booklet *The Beast of Revelation: Myth, Metaphor or Soon-Coming Reality?*)

Other commentators have also identified the beast of Revelation as the Roman Empire. We just read in Revelation 17:11 of the final end-time revival of “the beast that was, and is not”—the final beast that goes into “perdition” or destruction. The *New Catholic Edition* of the Holy Bible makes this comment concerning the beast of verse 11: “The beast spoken of here seems to be the Roman Empire, as in chapter 13.”

The book of Revelation, Jesus’ Olivet prophecy and the book of Daniel, together reveal a coming revival of the Roman Empire influenced and ridden by a woman. The woman is symbolic of a church. The “beast power” eventually turns on the woman: “And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth” (Revelation 17:16–18). Again, the *Douay-Rheims* translation comments on the ultimate destruction of the woman by the beast: “ten other kingdoms are allies of the beast and battle against the Church. But their dominion is short, typified as an hour.” While the *Douay-Rheims* identifies the beast with the Roman Empire and the woman with the Church, it does not admit that the great city mentioned in verse 18 is Rome itself. However, many Bible commentaries plainly agree that the great city of Revelation 17:18 is, in fact, Rome!

The King of the North Invades the Middle East

The armies of Benito Mussolini—a 20th century “king of the North”—invaded North Africa during World War II. In contrast,



Revelation 17 describes a woman—understood to represent a false religious system—who “rides” a “beast” representing an end-time revival of the Roman Empire. ©TW Illustration—Courtesy of Bruce Long.

the end-time king of the North will be *provoked* by the king of the South. We have already seen war in the Middle East over the issue of oil. Will there be another Arab oil embargo like that of 1974?

When fuel costs began to rise in the summer and fall of 2000, European protests of skyrocketing petroleum prices and shortages were even more vigorous than in the U.S. In 2000, imports accounted for 53 percent of U.S. oil consumed. Roughly 24 percent—almost half of all oil imported—came from the Middle East. Europe is even more dependent on Middle East oil, importing approximately 90 percent of its oil—well over half from the Middle East (*Newsweek*, Nov. 11, 2002, p. 30).

Whatever the provocation, the king of the North will invade the Middle East.

Luke's account of the Olivet prophecy follows the same general sequence as the account in Matthew that we reviewed earlier. But he adds one important detail, Jesus' warning sign concerning the end-time fate of Jerusalem: "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near" (Luke 21:20). Whose armies are these? Who will eventually invade the Middle East and control Jerusalem—its most significant city?

As we saw earlier, the king of the North—the "beast power" or revived end-time Roman Empire—will enter the Glorious Land (Daniel 11:41). Jesus said that when you see armies encompassing or surrounding Jerusalem, you will know that the city is about to be captured. In 70AD, Titus and the Roman armies destroyed the city and the temple. The Roman siege of the city caused famine and disease within it. The Jewish historian Josephus wrote that "no fewer than six hundred thousand were thrown out at the gates, though still the number of the rest could not be discovered" (*Wars of the Jews*, Bk. 5, chap. 13, sec. 7). Which army brought disaster upon Jerusalem? The army of Rome did. Will another Roman army repeat history in the 21st century? Bible prophecy says "yes"!

The fact that Jerusalem will be controlled by another superpower is also emphasized in Luke 21. Notice Jesus' powerful statement: "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who

are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled” (Luke 21:21–22).

This clearly is the end-time fulfillment of this prophecy. It continues: “But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (vv. 23–24). Revelation 11 shows that Christ will intervene 42 months after Jerusalem is captured.

Some Bible commentators mistakenly believe that Luke’s prophecy applies *only* to the first century AD, when the Roman commander Titus besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. Jesus’ warning in Luke 21 certainly *did apply* to this first century desolation. But as Bible students recognize, prophecy is often dual. There is type and ante-type. There is a former fulfillment and a later fulfillment of the prophecy. Jesus told His disciples that, following the desolation of Jerusalem, many would see *His return to earth*. “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of heaven will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory” (Luke 21:25–27).

This prophecy was not fulfilled in 70AD by Titus’ destruction of the temple. Jesus was clearly outlining the events preceding His second coming. The context of Jerusalem’s final desolation, as presented here, is the end-time.

The Final Phases of World War III

The king of the North’s armies will occupy northern Africa and the holy land. But developments in the northeast so disturb this king that he takes military action. Daniel 11:44, “But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall



go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many. And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him.”

This action appears to be described in Revelation 9 as the first woe or the fifth trumpet plague (cf. Revelation 8:13; 9:1). The Apostle John describes 21st century warfare in first century imagery: “The shape of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns of something like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like women’s hair, and their teeth were like lions’ teeth. And they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots with many horses running into battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails. Their power was to hurt men five months. And they had as king over them the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, but in Greek he has the name Apollyon” (Revelation 9:7–11).

Notice that this action takes up five months during the year-long Day of the Lord. What follows next? A massive 200 million-man army from the east crosses the Euphrates River. The Euphrates River runs from Turkey through Syria and Iraq to the Persian Gulf. Whether or not Iraq even continues to exist as a nation in its present form, the geographical area of Iraq *will* play a major geographical role in the final war to come: World War III! The second woe, or the sixth trumpet now sounds. “One woe is past. Behold, still two more woes are coming after these things. 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. And thus I saw the horses in the vision: those who sat on them had breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulfur yellow; and the heads of the horses *were* like the heads of lions; and

out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and brimstone. By these three plagues *a third of mankind was killed*—by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth and in their tails; for their tails *are* like serpents, having heads; and with them they do harm” (Revelation 9:12–19).

This phase of World War III will kill one-third of all humanity, over two billion human beings! The “fire, smoke, and brimstone” evokes images of nuclear devastation. Unless Jesus Christ intervenes, “no flesh would be saved,” as He said in Matthew 24:22!

The final and seventh trumpet announces the return of Jesus Christ to rule the earth (Revelation 11:15). The nations are angry, as we saw earlier (Revelation 11:18), and will combine their armies to fight a common foe, the Commander of Heaven’s armies (see Revelation 19:19)! The seventh trumpet or the third woe consists of “the seven last plagues” that complete “the wrath of God” on rebellious nations (see Revelation 15:1, 8; 16:1).

At this point, eastern armies will move westward over the Euphrates River on their way to Megiddo—Armageddon. “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). Satan and his demons influence warring nations to gather their forces against the invader from outer space, the King of kings, Jesus Christ. The Apostle John writes: “And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which 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” (Revelation 16:13–14).

As the final phase of World War III begins, Satan will have influenced the kings and armies “of the whole world” to prepare for the great battle against Christ. Warring, rebellious nations will fight against the Savior of the world! Where will they gather? “And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon” (Revelation 16:16). The name Armageddon comes from the Hebrew *har Magedon*, which means “the hill of

Megiddo.” Megiddo is located in modern Israel about 55 miles north of Jerusalem. The hill or mount of Megiddo overlooks the largest valley in Israel, the Plain of Esdraelon, or the Valley of Jezreel.

The developing European religio-political power will eventually exert controlling influence over the Holy Land. As we have seen, the leader of that union, the “king of the North,” will ultimately dominate Jerusalem and the Middle East. The book of Revelation also predicts a conflict between Asian forces and the European “Beast power,” the king of the North (cf. Daniel 11:44; Revelation 9:13–19). Shockingly, after Christ’s return, these armies will combine as they are “gathered together to make war against Him” (Revelation 19:19). God Almighty says: “For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem” (Zechariah 14:2). 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” (Zechariah 14:3–4). Jesus Christ will intervene! He will stop World War III and bring lasting peace to the world!

Notice that the climactic end-time battle that is popularly referred to as Armageddon is actually called “the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Revelation 16:14). But *where* will that battle be fought? The prophet Joel tells us that this climactic battle will take place near Jerusalem: “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; and I will enter into judgment with them there” (Joel 3:1–2).

The Valley of Jehoshaphat is also called the Kidron Valley (between the Mount of Olives and the Temple Mount). Here, God will judge the nations. The valley widens to the south, and through it the world’s armies will move southward from Megiddo to fight Jesus Christ at Jerusalem. At this great climactic battle of all ages, the Creator God will prevail, defeating puny humans in their attempt to conquer God.

Foolish military leaders will quickly learn how powerless they are against the omnipotent, divine power of God! Notice the horrible punishment wrought on those rebellious, evil armies: “And



View across the Kidron Valley toward the Mount of Olives ©2002 ArtToday.

this shall be the plague with which the LORD will strike all the people who fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh shall dissolve while they stand on their feet, their eyes shall dissolve in their sockets, and their tongues shall dissolve in their mouths” (v. 12).

Jesus will totally conquer the greatest military combine ever assembled. He will return as King of kings and Lord of lords to bring this war-torn planet a thousand years of peace. “And the LORD shall be King over all the earth” (v. 9).

Christ will conquer all the armies opposing Him! He will usher in the Millennium of peace on earth, and teach all nations the way to peace. Then the Arabs and Israelis will be reconciled. “In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria; a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, ‘Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance’” (Isaiah 19:23–25).

After the world’s armies have been defeated, the Creator God will establish Jerusalem as the capital of the world. All nations will submit to the Kingdom of God on earth and finally learn the way to peace. “Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; 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).

The King of kings and the saints will reeducate the nations to the way of love, peace, and prosperity (see Daniel 7:18, 27). Under the rulership of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, the way of sin, suffering, and war will pass away. “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” (Micah 4:3).

Watch the Middle East

Jesus Christ warns us to be spiritually alert and watchful (Luke 21:36). But *for what should we be watching* in the turmoil and conflict of the Middle East?

Watch for continuing conflicts between Israelis and Palestinians in the Holy Land. Palestinians remain strongly supportive of the *intifada*; a September 2002 poll by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre revealed that 81 percent want the *intifada* to continue until Israel gives in to Palestinian demands.

Watch for increasing demand for international intervention and control, not only in Gaza and the West Bank, but in Jerusalem itself. The Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat, has himself lobbied for a United Nations peacekeeping force in Gaza and the West Bank. As the *intifada* continues, watch for more world leaders to join in demanding international control of Jerusalem.

Watch for increasing unity among Arab nations in their stand against Israel. Psalm 83, which we read earlier, lists those peoples who comprise Arabic and Muslim nations in the Middle East. They are supported by European groups in their strong opposition to Israel. “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” (Psalm 83:4–5). Watch for an end-time Arab/Muslim union or confederacy forming against Israel.

Watch for the European Union’s growing economic, political and military unification. As we saw in Daniel’s prophecy, the king of the North will eventually occupy the Holy Land. In November 2000, the European Union chose a German general to head its Rapid Reaction Force, envisioned to project European power to crisis zones over a 2,500-mile area by 2003. “Why should we have to go through NATO?” asked General Jean-Pierre Kelche, France’s Chief of Defense Staff, saying that the force would be operational even without NATO’s agreement. and that “the balance of power needed to be changed” (“EU Force Will Not Need NATO,” *London Daily Telegraph*, March 28, 2001). Will these forces eventually play a significant part in the

Middle East conflict? Watch the development of Europe's own military forces.

Watch for the preparation and eventual implementation of animal sacrifices by the Jews in Jerusalem. Many believe a physical temple will also be built, but history and the book of Ezra confirm that sacrifices can be conducted with just an altar at the holy place.

Watch for the increasing consolidation of religious power in Europe. Visiting Austria in 1983, Pope John Paul II appealed for European unity, stating: "Europeans should overcome the menacing international confrontations of states and alliances, and create a new united Europe from the Atlantic to the Urals" (*The Principality and Power of Europe*, Adrian Hilton, p. 36).

Ultimate Peace

Jerusalem has a glorious prophesied future ahead. It will be the capital of planet earth under the rulership of the Prince of Peace and King of kings, Jesus Christ. That is good news for all the nations—for you, your children and your grandchildren. But we need to remember that peace can only come about in the lives of human beings when their human nature is changed. God will grant the vast majority of all peoples the gift of His Spirit. Then they shall learn how to find the way to peace.

The whole world will learn God's ways. "Many people 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 shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; 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" (Isaiah 2:3–4).

Jerusalem will not only be the governmental capital of the world; it will also be the educational capital of the world. The great Educator and Teacher, the Lord Jesus Christ, will teach true

knowledge based on the Word of God. All nations will learn the eternal principles, laws and values that guarantee peace and prosperity to all.

This is the good news of your future, and the future of the world. At the heart of the Middle East—and of the entire world—Jerusalem will be the center of world government, education, and religion. The Creator God will guarantee future world peace (Micah 4:1–3), “for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (v. 4). We all look forward to the peace and reconciliation that only the Messiah, Jesus Christ, can bring to the Middle East—and to the whole world. In the meantime, Jesus tells us to watch and pray (Mark 13:33). He exhorts us in verse 37: “And what I say to you, I say to all: Watch!”

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