

ISIS, IRAN, ISRAEL

MARK HITCHCOCK



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To Tim LaHaye

Thank you for your friendship and encouragement.

*You are a blessing to me and my family and
the body of Christ.*

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CHAPTER 1

Middle East Meltdown

“Our world is on fire, and man without God will never be able to control the flames. The demons of hell have been let loose. The fires of passion, greed, hate, and lust are sweeping the world. We seem to be plunging madly toward Armageddon... The world has been in flames before, but only in a limited sense. Today our world is a common neighborhood, all of it reachable in mere hours by physical flight and in seconds over the airwaves. This accessibility increases the spread of tension and dissension. Thus when the fires of war and lawlessness break out, they leap the national boundaries and cultural differences to become major conflagrations. The whole world is filled with riots, demonstrations, threats, wars... This is the generation destined to live in the midst of crisis, danger, fear, and death. We are like a people under sentence of death, waiting for the date to be set. We sense that something is about to happen.”¹

Billy Graham, *World Aflame* (1965)

“This is a time of global transformation. We are essentially seeing a new world order evolving and being built. I don’t think we’ve seen such a time since right after World War II.”

Chuck Hagel, U.S. Defense Secretary

The Middle East is in meltdown. The horrifying images on our TV screens have become commonplace. Brutal killers are wreaking havoc, and the atrocities are unspeakable. The vacuum left by the retreat of American leadership in the Middle East has been filled by some pretty bad actors. Desperate political, military, and humanitarian crises have resulted. The disarray and danger is mushrooming and spreading out to the entire world. What’s currently unfolding is nothing short of a region-wide disintegration with Syria, Iraq, Libya, Afghanistan, and Yemen in varying forms of chaos and dysfunction along with a rising Iran with nuclear ambitions, a re-emerging Russia, and the ruthless threat from ISIS. The tiny nation of Israel is at the epicenter of all the upheaval. Israel is the ultimate prize for radical Islam. America remains a coveted target for terror. A bigger mess and greater danger can hardly be imagined. And the danger is proliferating. How much worse will it get?

A summary of just one month of terror graphically captures the growing picture.

Paris. Baghdad. Beirut. Sharm el-Sheikh. Ankara. In striking these cities in the last several weeks, the Islamic State group has made it clear that it's raising the stakes. On Nov. 13, the same day as the Paris attacks, the jihadi terrorist organization carried out an attack that claimed 26 lives in Baghdad. On Nov. 12, bombings in Beirut left 43 dead. A month earlier, 100 Turks were killed after a bombing targeted a rally in Ankara. Meanwhile, the attack on the Russian Metrojet flights on Oct. 31 killed all 244 on board.³

Planes are falling from the sky. ISIS is on the march. Major cities are being struck by terror attacks with vicious threats of more to come. Syria is embroiled in a grinding civil war. Lawless Libya is a fertile breeding ground for jihadists. Terror is spreading like a brush fire.

The ISIS-directed and synchronized slaughter in Paris gripped the world. The West is paralyzed by fear. Iran is uncoiling its tentacles into Iraq and Syria and covertly pursuing nukes even as the controversial, flimsy nuclear deal goes into effect. Russia is busily moving troops, tanks, and airpower into Syria, expanding its influence. Few believe Russia and Iran will ever leave Syria.

At the center of much of the turmoil is Islam. Of course, as everyone should know by now, most Muslims are not terrorists or jihadists. Political pundits remind us of this over and over again. Radical Islam is a small but growing subset of the global Muslim population.

However, there's more to the story. A further subset of radical Islam is apocalyptic Islam, and the armies of the apocalypse are fomenting Armageddon. As Joel Rosenberg notes, "Indeed, for the first time in human history, the top leaders of not just one nation state but two—Iran and the Islamic State—are being driven by Islamic eschatology, or End Times theology."⁴ Two entire nation-states are currently driven by an apocalyptic, genocidal ideology fueled by their view that the end of days is at hand. These nation-states are ISIS and Iran. One is Sunni Muslim (ISIS) and the other is Shiite Muslim (Iran), but both are fired by a common belief that they are harbingers of the end of days. Driven by eschatology and millenarian fervor, they view themselves as laying down the welcome mat for their messiah (the Mahdi). For them, the mission and momentum is unstoppable. The end is here.

Rising out of the wreckage of Iraq and Syria, ISIS has brashly declared the formation of a proto-caliphate. Their fanatical leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced its birth on June 29, 2014. For ISIS this marked a major milestone. "The revival of the caliphate is the launching pad for a global battlefield."⁵ Prophecy is critical to ISIS, which accepts the word of the Prophet and the hadith, or sayings, attributed to him literally and without question. Prophecy provides ISIS with the glue of theological certainty. And according to those prophecies, the Islamic armies will ultimately conquer Jerusalem and Rome.⁶ We must never forget that the final goal is the destruction of Israel and a global caliphate. Israel is in the crosshairs of radical and apocalyptic Islam. Everything else is just

a stepping-stone on the road to Jerusalem. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the head of ISIS, warned Israel:

The Jews thought we forgot Palestine and that they had distracted us from it. Not at all, Jews. We did not forget Palestine for a moment. With the help of Allah, we will not forget it... The pioneers of the jihadist fighters will surround you on a day that you think is distant and we know is close. We are getting closer every day. You will never find comfort in Palestine, Jews. Palestine will not be your land or your home, but it will be a graveyard for you. Allah assembled you in Palestine so that the Muslims kill you, so that you may hide behind stones and trees (a Muslim tradition regarding the killing of Jews).⁷

Israel is the goal, but anyone who stands in the way of the caliphate is a target.

THE TICKING TIME BOMB OF TERROR

The distant threat of terror now seems to have jumped into everyone's life. Years ago, America was shaken to the core by the 9/11 attacks. European nations have been targeted multiple times and appear to still be marked with a bull's-eye. America anxiously waits for the other shoe to drop.

Army psychiatrist Nidal Hasan, inflamed by radical Islam, opened fire at Ft. Hood in Texas on November 5, 2009, killing thirteen people. On April 15, 2013,

three people were murdered and dozens more were wounded and maimed at the Boston Marathon massacre perpetrated by two brothers committed to Islamic radicalism. Then, seemingly out of nowhere on December 2, 2015, ISIS killers slaughtered fourteen people in San Bernardino, California, and wounded twenty-one others—the worst terror attack on U.S. soil since 9/11. The radicalized couple who carried out the attack swore allegiance to ISIS and its leader on Facebook.

In the wake of the steady stream of attacks and threats, everyone wonders where the terror will strike next. New terror threats spring up with all-too-frequent regularity. The cascade of recent events has highlighted a reality most Westerners would rather close their eyes to: We have vulnerabilities—major ones. No one seems safe anymore—anywhere. As the attacks increase, calls for a stronger response will resonate with Americans and Europeans weary of waiting for the next explosion or hail of gunfire. As the pressure ratchets up, the divide will grow. Many voices are calling for boots on the ground in Syria and Iraq to battle ISIS. Time will tell if, and how, ISIS can be slowed or stopped.

IRAN'S INCREASE

Added to the shocking acts of terror by ISIS is Iran's relentless pursuit of nuclear weapons and its ever-expanding tentacles of terror. Iran has publicly, repeatedly declared its intent to obliterate Israel. Iran has signed

the nuclear deal, but at the same time its leader regularly chants “Death to America,” and its supreme leader gleefully threatens that Israel won’t exist in 25 years. Iran and Israel have been locked in a shadow war for decades since the Islamic revolution in 1979. Israel has assassinated numerous key Iranian scientists to slow down Iran’s nuclear pursuits (although Israel never acknowledges this fact). Israel has infected the Iranian nuclear program with numerous computer viruses in further attempts to derail the nuclear train. In recent days Iran has agreed to a nuclear deal with P5 + 1 nations (United States, United Kingdom, Russia, France, China, and Germany) that gives them access to \$150 billion in cash, removal of crippling sanctions, and the right to have a nuclear program.

Few believe Iran will live up to its end of the nuclear deal and that cheating will mean its hot pursuit of nuclear weapons will continue. Fully aware that Israel might launch a preemptive strike on its nuclear production facilities, Iran has gone to great lengths to make its underground nuclear megacomplex as impenetrable as possible.

To add a further line of defense, Iran finances and trains Hezbollah fighters in Lebanon who have amassed thousands of rockets and a formidable terrorist army on Israel’s northern border. Hamas, which runs Gaza on Israel’s border, is another Iranian surrogate. These two Iranian proxies—Hezbollah and Hamas—that live on Israel’s borders are a constant irritant and deterrent against any aggression by Israel against Iran. Nevertheless, when Iran breaks the conditions of the fragile nuclear deal, will

the United States or Israel feel compelled to launch a pre-emptive strike against Iran to end the threat?

THE LOOMING CRISIS

The steady surge in the pace, perplexity, and problems of modern life has given the entire world a sense of looming crisis. ISIS is unleashing its chaos and cruelty in the Middle East and North Africa. Iran is racing toward the nuclear finish line in spite of its acceptance of the nuclear deal.

At the same time, the Russian bear is on the move: first, Crimea, then Ukraine and Syria. Russian troops are now perched on Israel's northern border. Russian dominance has reemerged with a vengeance. What could never have been imagined is right before our eyes. How will Russia continue to exert its influence in the Middle East? Will Iran violate the nuclear deal and unleash nuclear jihad? What's out there beyond the headlights in the darkness?

By any measure, the Middle East today is a powder keg that seems ready to explode at any time. How long can world tensions be kept in check? How long until the lid blows sky-high? How long can the struggle against radical Islamic terror be restrained from descending into a global bloodbath? Modern man's ability to wreak havoc and destruction is almost boundless: biological and chemical agents, dirty bombs, and WMDs are harder and harder to keep out of the hands of fanatical terrorists.

Our world appears to be moving toward a colossal crisis—a decisive showdown in the Middle East. Is it possible the prophets of doom are right? Could the escalating crisis in the Middle East be part of something even bigger? Could it be the prelude—the buildup—for the final events of this age predicted long ago in the pages of the Bible? Or could it be a buildup to the start of the Tribulation? Is the world racing toward the end of days? More than twenty years ago, prophecy scholar Dr. John Walvoord noted that the first key to the Armageddon countdown is that “the Middle East must become the number one crisis in the world.”⁸ There’s no doubt that the Middle East is the number one hot spot in the world. That piece of the prophetic puzzle is now firmly in place.

ACCORDING TO PLANS

Years ago I used to watch the TV program *The A-Team* with my nephew. It was his favorite program. Each episode followed a fairly simple, similar pattern. The members of the A-Team formulated a plan to rescue somebody or even themselves. Often at the end of the episode one of the main characters would say, “Don’t you just love it when a plan comes together?”

In a world gone mad, we must remember that God has a sovereign plan that is coming together. God’s rescue plan has already come into effect with the first coming of Jesus Christ to earth, but the Bible predicts He will come again at the end of history for the final act of rescue. Piece

by piece God's final plan seems to be coming together to pave the way for Christ's return. Israel is back in her ancient homeland as predicted often in biblical prophecy. Nations are moving into their prophesied places as foretold more than 2500 years ago by the prophet Ezekiel. World events and today's headlines bear a remarkable correspondence with the end-time scenario in Scripture.

As shocking and saddening as world events are today, they should not surprise us in light of the Bible's end-times prophecies. The Hebrew prophets of the Old Testament and the New Testament apostles predicted many future events in vivid, often precise detail, including the rise and fall of every major world empire that left its mark on the Middle East. Some of their predictions came true within a few years or within their lifetimes. Now it appears that the stage is being set for many of their astounding unfulfilled prophecies to come to pass at any time.

Jesus Himself, Israel's premier prophet, quoted from the Old Testament prophets—often adding interpretive comments and detailed predictions of His own. The prophecies of Jesus have been fully corroborated by the test of time. Jesus' prediction of the fall of Jerusalem (Luke 21:20-24) was vividly fulfilled in AD 70 when Titus and his Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem and leveled the second Jewish temple. Jesus also accurately predicted the scattering of the Jews into all nations, and the persecution, survival, and global growth of the church.

About six million Jews are settled in the land of Israel

today, almost forty percent of the Jews in the world, and their return is one of the most frequent Old Testament prophecies (Ezekiel 37). Consistent with these prophets, Jesus saw a time when Israel would be reestablished as a nation after their worldwide dispersion (see Matthew 24:15-20). This prophecy has been dramatically fulfilled in recent history with the rebirth of the modern state of Israel in 1948. Since that time Jerusalem, the “city of peace,” has been constantly under duress from its surrounding nations. Time and again Israel has found itself in a dangerous, diplomatic tug-of-war just as the ancient prophets predicted (Zechariah 12:1-3). In His prophetic discourse just a few days before His death, Jesus outlined the blueprint of the final days on earth before His return. Jesus forewarned His followers to watch Jerusalem for signs of the approaching end of the age (Matthew 24). We are wise to study His blueprint.

THE SEARCH FOR ANSWERS

Everywhere we look, people are wondering what on earth is going on. The fear and anxiety is palpable. Even people with little interest in the Bible or end-time scenarios are quietly asking questions—wondering if the world is getting near closing time. Believers, too, have all kinds of questions. They are solemn, searching questions. If we are on the home stretch of the church age, what will happen next? Where is history headed? What are the final events of world history as the end of the age draws near?

Do today's headlines relate to these events? Can we find a certain word about the future?

The Bible is certainly the best place—the only place—to look for sure answers. The hundreds of fulfilled prophecies in Scripture, which span many centuries, can be put to the test by observing their literal, precise fulfillment. Because of its proven track record of 100 percent accuracy 100 percent of the time and the turmoil in today's headlines, both believers and skeptics are re-examining the end-time prophecies in Scripture, especially the ancient prophecy in Ezekiel 38–39 that foretells an end-time invasion of Israel by a coalition of nations from every direction.

This is a book about the Bible and current events, but more particularly, it is about how current events point toward what's coming in the future. As we will see, the Bible doesn't answer every question we have or give us every detail about the future, but it does provide the template for where we're headed. The Bible is a revelation of the past, present, and future—not just of individuals but also of nations and the movements of history. It is the prism through which we can see what's coming and make sense of what's happening today.

In the prophecies of Scripture, I believe it is possible to discover clues that point to where we are in God's prophetic program and the predicted events that may occur very soon. The Bible, and the Bible alone, can answer the pressing questions on the minds of so many people—questions about today, questions about tomorrow. In

this book we will seek to answer many of the compelling questions people are asking in light of increasingly turbulent world events.

Are we on the road to Armageddon?

What can we expect in the days to come?

Where did ISIS come from?

What do ISIS and Islam believe about the end times?

Is the rise of ISIS mentioned in Bible prophecy?

Does ISIS have any biblical significance?

What does the Bible say about the future of the Middle East?

Will the Middle East go up in the flames of a regional war?

What role will Iran play?

What about Russia?

What will happen to America?

How should we respond as the world seems to be on the verge of disaster?

My hope is this book will help answer these pressing questions for you and give you hope for both your own future and the future of this world.