

## Chapter 1

### Jerusalem Invaded

It happened in the early morning of June 5, 1967. Wave upon wave of Israeli bombers swept in from the Mediterranean, flying so low they escaped radar detection. By nightfall the surprise attack had left hundreds of Egyptian war planes lying in ruins.

Israel, threatened with immediate invasion by neighboring nations, had decided to strike first. And they hit hard! By the evening of the second day Israeli fighter jets had crippled the Arab air forces, destroying more than 400 planes while losing just twenty-six of their own. Israeli ground troops won equally stunning victories on all fronts.

Within six days the lightning war was over. The people of Israel, although outnumbered forty to one, vanquished their foes and more than tripled their territory - one of the most brilliant feats in military history. No wonder the Israelis danced in the streets of Jerusalem after that Six-Day War.

From Israel's beginnings in 1948 as an independent nation, its existence has been a series of miracles. Miracles long overdue. For nineteen centuries, the Jewish people had been scattered as aliens throughout the world. Although they enriched their host countries wherever they went, they suffered unrelenting persecution. Then came Hitler's so-called Final Solution - the unspeakable horrors of the Holocaust.

But at last the world community recognized the rights of Jewish people to live safely and freely, governing themselves. With a United Nations mandate as their authority, Jewish colonists fought for independence. They overcame formidable odds to create a new nation in their ancient homeland.

I was there to watch it happen on May 14, 1948. That Friday morning in Jerusalem I stood in front of the King David Hotel. Exactly where I planned to go, I don't remember now. But suddenly a long black limousine pulled up and the door

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opened. “Going to Convention Hall?” a Jewish gentleman asked.

“Why not?” I thought.

Several important-looking people made room for me, so I slid in beside them. We raced through the narrow streets toward the hurriedly-constructed Convention Hall, where they escorted me inside and seated me with the VIPs. Then I watched the history of the world turn a corner as a new democracy was born in Israel.

Since that memorable day four decades ago, the Middle East has occupied center stage in world affairs. Much more is involved than a struggle between Arabs and Israelis. The world’s superpowers have vital interests there which they have pledged to protect at all costs. Many fear that sooner or later World War III will be launched in the Middle East.

A new world war could have happened in 1973. Egypt and Syria rolled their Soviet-built tanks across the border into Israel, vowing revenge for the Six-Day War. They caught their foe completely off guard - it was Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year.

But Israel quickly rallied from its setbacks and took the offensive, aided by a massive airlift of supplies from the United States. Meanwhile, behind closed doors the superpowers were edging frighteningly close to a nuclear showdown. As President Nixon recalled later, “[Soviet leader] Brezhnev demanded that the United States join him in sending ‘peace-keeping’ forces into the Mideast to force a settlement on Israel. We firmly declined and urged diplomatic rather than military action. Brezhnev threatened to intervene unilaterally. When we picked up reports that Soviet forces were embarking on troop transports, we warned Brezhnev that we would not tolerate unilateral intervention and emphasized our determination by putting our conventional and nuclear forces on alert.” 1

Thank God, the Soviets agreed to a diplomatic solution to stop the fighting. Once again Israel’s democracy survived, and world war was postponed.

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Should all this end-time unrest and upheaval in the Middle East surprise us, or had prophets in the Bible predicted it? Is there any word from the Lord for this crisis hour?

In these pages we will examine what Bible prophecy has in store for the Holy Land. We will also trace the fascinating roots of strife between Arabs and Israelis, going back 4,000 years. You see, this conflict involves more than politics. At its heart is a battle between two ancient religions, both finding their roots in the Old Testament patriarch Abraham.

The Israelis believe God gave Palestine to them through Abraham's son Isaac. Arabs led by Muslim fundamentalists, on the other hand, see themselves as the rightful inheritors of the Promised Land through Abraham's other son Ishmael.

Personally, I feel deeply for both the Israelis and the Arabs. For the Israelis, who quote Old Testament promises that God gave the land to them - and for the Arabs, who have lived in Palestine all these years and now find themselves left out.

As I visited the refugee camps of those displaced Palestinians back in 1948, my heart went out to them. This Arab-Israeli conflict has two sides, you know, and I want this book to present a balanced picture of a very delicate situation there.

We Christians are vitally involved in Middle East events. After all, the Lord Jesus lived and died for us there in Palestine. Furthermore, many believe that the return of Jewish people to Palestine and the establishment of Israel have tremendous spiritual significance. They see in this a fulfillment of Bible prophecy setting the stage for an Armageddon showdown.

Back in the 70s, the largest nonfiction seller for the decade was Hal Lindsey's *The Late Great Planet Earth*. Lindsey predicted that within the span of a generation after 1948 - about forty years - Christ would return to this earth secretly and "rapture" His people up to heaven. The unsaved left behind would suffer seven years of tribulation, climaxing in that dreadful battle of Armageddon.

How much of this teaching is Bible truth, and how much is human speculation? Let's examine the prophecies for ourselves.

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Our study will center on the often-overlooked book of Daniel, which forms the Old Testament foundation for the New Testament book of Revelation. Daniel records the life-and-death struggle between two cities, Jerusalem and Babylon - a preview of events soon to happen in our time. Chapter one opens with Babylon's attack upon Jerusalem six centuries before the time of Christ. It's an intriguing story:

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with some of the articles of the house of God, ... and he brought the articles into the treasure house of his god.” Daniel 1:1, 2.\*

Shocking words indeed. The Lord gave His chosen people into the hand of a pagan power! He even permitted heathen invaders to remove sacred things from His sanctuary and carry them off to Babylon's pagan temple.

Why? Hadn't God promised to defend His people and His temple at all costs, under all circumstances? What had gone wrong?

An even more basic question confronts us here, something you may have wondered about: Why did God have a chosen people in the first place? Does He play favorites?

We must go back to the time of father Abraham to discover why God chose Israel. The promise to Abraham is found in Genesis 12:2, 3:

\*Unless otherwise indicated, scripture references in this book are from the New King James Version. Emphasis is supplied by the author.

“I will make you a great nation;... and you shall be a blessing. ... In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So God chose Israel to be a blessing to the whole world, a world lost in sin's darkness. Through His chosen nation God wanted to reveal His love to every heathen nation. He hoped

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they would repent and join with Israel at the banquet of His salvation.

You see, God wasn't playing favorites by having a chosen people. He blessed Abraham for the sake of the Gentiles too. But Abraham's descendants failed to catch the vision. The ancient Israelites squandered divine blessings on themselves, refusing to shine for God as the light of the world.

Worse yet, the Jewish nation came to consider itself Heaven's unique favorite, unconditionally blessed by God. Israel imagined that regardless of how they behaved they would remain the permanent people of God. Thus presuming upon Heaven's mercy, they became careless, even rebellious. Incredibly, they even adopted the idolatry of their neighbors. Immorality abounded in the worship of the sun god Baal, which accommodated a variety of illicit sexual practices. And some Israelite parents actually sacrificed their children on the altars of pagan gods.

God had no choice but to let His people reap the results of their sin. He allowed the heathen nations which they imitated to attack them. In distress the Israelites cried for God to deliver them, and in mercy He saved them again and again. The book of Judges records the sad cycle of apostasy and deliverance, followed by repeated apostasy.

Warning after warning came and went unheeded. God's people even murdered some of His Old Testament messengers. They refused to believe that God would actually employ a heathen power as His instrument to punish them.

But finally judgment day came, and Babylon, the center of pagan worship, invaded Jerusalem in the year 605 B.C. King Nebuchadnezzar eventually sacked and burned the holy city of peace. The glorious temple lay in ruins. Many of the healthy and young who survived the attacks were marched as captives to Babylon, 500 dusty and miserable miles away, near the present site of Baghdad, Iraq.

In every time of trouble God has had a faithful few who remained loyal to Him. The first chapter of Daniel records the exciting story of four young men, probably still teenagers, who

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stood firmly for God in that heathen land. Daniel and his three friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah caught the eye of Nebuchadnezzar and his officials. They found them to be “young men in whom there was no blemish, but good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.” Daniel 1:4.

These handsome young fellows had it made, there in the palaces of Babylon. I can imagine the young ladies of the city had their eyes on them. So did Nebuchadnezzar himself, who “appointed for them a daily provision of the king’s delicacies and of the wine which he drank, and three years of training for them, so that at the end of that time they might serve before the king.” Verse 5.

At first it must have seemed like the end of the world to Daniel and his friends when the invaders tore them away from their families and took them captive. But surprise - along came the good life! A scholarship to the University of Babylon and a great government job waiting for them upon graduation, with wine, women, and song along the way.

“But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank.” Verse 8.

Bless his heart. Amid the allurements of the world, Daniel refused to defile himself. He determined to remain faithful to the God who had saved his life. He would honor his Creator by guarding body and soul from the tantalizing temptations of the world. We need more Daniels today, wouldn’t you say? With drugs, alcohol, and illicit sex degrading and defiling our youth, we need noble teenagers who will “just say No.” “No” to temptation and “Yes” to God’s plan for their lives.

Yes, Daniel and his friends determined to be faithful to their God. But Nebuchadnezzar seemed determined to erase every trace of their Hebrew heritage. He even changed their names, calling them after his pagan gods.

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Just think how tempting it must have been to abandon their faith. After all, their prayers for God to defend Jerusalem had apparently gone unanswered. And now they found themselves in the center of paganism, with the heathen world opening its arms of opportunity to them.

Why not give up and give in? Evidently their fellow captives from Jerusalem did. But Daniel and his friends didn't.

Soon a further test came along. The king's steward had been charged with the responsibility of keeping the Hebrew captives in good health. Imagining that their simple, natural-foods diet would fail to keep them fit, the steward insisted that Daniel and his friends eat and drink what everybody else indulged in.

With wisdom from heaven, Daniel came up with a proposal:

“Please test your servants for ten days, and let them give us vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then let our countenances be examined before you, and the countenances of the young men who eat the portion of the king's delicacies; and as you see fit, so deal with your servants.” Verses 12, 13.

Fair enough, wouldn't you say? The king's steward agreed.

And sure enough, “At the end of ten days their countenance appeared better and fatter in flesh than all the young men who ate the portion of the king's delicacies. Thus the steward took away their portion of delicacies and the wine that they were to drink, and gave them vegetables.” Verses 15,16.

Some Christians today suggest that it doesn't matter what we eat or drink. But Daniel and his friends knew better. And heaven richly blessed their faithfulness:

“As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.” Verse 17.

These visions and dreams which God gave Daniel are the most far-reaching time prophecies in the Bible. Daniel's prophecies have tremendous significance for us now, yet they

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are usually overlooked or misunderstood by twentieth-century Christians. But in these pages we will study them carefully.

Now back to the story of Daniel and his friends. After their three years of college, Nebuchadnezzar summoned them for their graduation exam. “And in all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers who were in all his realm.” Verse 20.

Thrilling story! Daniel and his friends remained loyal and true with everyone around them forfeiting faith. We see here a symbol of God’s people at the end of time who will “keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.” Revelation 14:12.

How about you and me? Will we, like Daniel, purpose in our hearts that we will not permit our bodies and souls to be denied by sin?

But perhaps you already feel defiled and unholy. Recently a young woman (I’ll call her Kathy) contacted me, heartbroken after her live-in boyfriend abandoned her and left town. She felt terribly alone and very guilty. She doubted whether any decent man could want her now. Her life was ruined forever, she feared.

Kathy’s guilt-ridden heart craved peace, and she needed power from God to put her life in order. I shared with her good news from the Old Testament gospel prophet:

“We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him [Jesus Christ] the iniquity of us all.” Isaiah 53:6, NIV.

So we are all guilty, deserving of death. But thank God, Jesus paid it all. On the cross He paid the full price of our sin so that now we can stand clean before God.

Kathy could hardly believe that she could be forgiven so fully and freely. “And there’s more,” I told her: “The Lord not only pardons us and counts us holy - He also gives us strength to live a new life for Him. He has a special plan for each of us individually. And as we continue to follow Him, God considers us perfect in Jesus.”



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Wonderful news! To a woman caught in adultery Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you.” And with the joy of that forgiveness came the power to “go and sin no more.” John 8:11.

Will we also come to Jesus and be saved? And then will we live faithfully in loyalty and obedience?

I urge you to open your heart to God just now.

1. Richard Nixon, “How to Live With the Bomb National Review, Sept. 20, 1985, pp. 28, 29.