

## APOCALYPSE NOW

### *Islam's Armageddon*

**I**t is not only the assassins who are enraptured by this false Paradise—their acts of violence are buoyed by a larger society. What does millenarian populism look like in the modern Muslim world? Unfortunately, it looks a lot like Syria and Iraq.

In 2012, the Pew Research Center sampled opinions across the Middle East, North Africa, and Muslim South Asia; it was not biased toward particularly pious Muslims or activists, but rather included a cross section of the population in Muslim-majority nations. They found that more than half believe they will live to see the appearance of the Mahdi, the prophesied leader who will appear with Jesus in the Last Days to combat *Al-Masīh ad-Dajjāl*, the "False Messiah" or Antichrist. The figures for those expecting to see this glorious day were especially high in Afghanistan at 83 percent, Iraq at 72 percent, and Turkey at 68 percent.<sup>1</sup> (The poll was not conducted in Iran, Saudi Arabia, Syria, or Yemen—all of which presumably exceed the higher percentages.)

As in the West, modernity has not mitigated these beliefs—if anything, it's made them more urgent. Owing to the ubiquity of mass media in the Information Age, specific End Time theories have taken on the authority of religious canon. Television imams mimic the phenomenon of Christian television evangelists, and high literacy rates (like those in Enlightenment Europe) have enabled ordinary Muslims to choose from a broad spectrum of

eschatological interpretations. For every narrow ideology, higher literacy has meant the rise of a majority that is just educated enough to get into serious trouble. There is little real intellectual rigor or discipline.

The template was cut by Egyptian author Said Ayyub, who wrote his book *Al-Dajjal* (The Antichrist) in 1987. Echoed by countless copy-cat books and TV imams, it was to the Islamic world what the *The Late Great Planet Earth* was for Christians—a runaway bestseller that rabidly interpreted traditional prophecies through modern geopolitical realities.

Barbara Stowasser summarized the genre for the Yale Center for International and Area Studies: "This contemporary apocalyptic literature, then, is anti-Western in that it sees the West (often equated with Christianity) as the main breeding ground of immorality."

She adds that in the Islamic apocalyptic context, the Arab-Israeli conflict was drawn into "popular sermons, pulp-fiction narratives, on Websites" to "set the tone for an apocalyptic millenarian mind-frame in their mass audiences and readers." Invariably, "Israel is seen either as an embodiment of the [Antichrist] Dajjal's power, or as his agent and instrument in accomplishing his goals."<sup>2</sup>

Stowasser noticed that the information was passed along in "an Islamist-fundamentalist information loop of oral communication, video and audio cassettes of sermons delivered by Islamist preachers, popular pulp fiction narratives, and the new electronic media including Web sites and Home pages." Writing in 2002, she could not have known how awfully effective this would be in the hands of global jihadists a decade later. The way the Internet would circumvent state censorship to create large bodies of virtually connected brothers in arms was entirely unforeseen by scholars and a total surprise to our spy masters.

The most glaring example was ISIS, whose propaganda relied heavily on Last Days interpretations popularized by Ayyub—something obvious right from their first publication. I'll leave it to you for further reading, beginning with a highly regarded article by Graeme Wood in the *Atlantic Monthly*. The subheading tells us enough for now: "The Islamic State is no mere collection of psychopaths. It is a religious group with carefully considered beliefs, among them that it is a key agent of the coming apocalypse."<sup>3</sup>

ISIS is just one example. All the Sunni Muslim fighters in Syria and Iraq—some affiliated with al-Qaeda and some bizarrely supported directly by the United States—also believe that they are waging the last war. As a Syrian Islamist rebel told Reuters, "If you think all these mujahideen came from across the world to fight Assad, you're mistaken. They are all here as

promised by the Prophet. This is the war he promised—it is the Grand Battle."<sup>4</sup>

This young warrior reflects the thinking of Abu Musab al-Suri, a Syrian Muslim Brotherhood member who joined Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan as part of al-Qaeda's inner circle; he gets credit from numerous sources for "radicalizing" a hitherto moderate bin Laden (who was, of course, originally fighting America's war against the Soviets, with American-supplied weapons).

After 9/11, al-Suri took the opportunity afforded by a lengthy period in hiding to write his 1,600-page book, *A Call to Global Islamic Resistance*. Published on the Internet in 2004, it had an enormous impact on the development of the Syrian Civil War and the global recruitment of jihadists. It is at once a rationale for jihad, an explicit justification for terrorism ("terrorizing the enemies is a religious duty"), and a practical training manual for how to do it.<sup>5</sup> To that end, al-Suri relies on the Quran: "And prepare against them whatever you are able of power and of steeds of war by which you may terrify the enemy of Allah and your enemy and others besides them whom you do not know [but] whom Allah knows. And whatever you spend in the cause of Allah will be fully repaid to you, and you will not be wronged."<sup>6</sup>

French scholar Jean-Pierre Filiu analyzed this material for his award-winning research on Islamic apocalypticism, concluding that al-Suri's work should not be misunderstood: "There is nothing in the least theoretical about this exercise in apocalyptic exegesis... It is meant as a guide for action."<sup>7</sup> That's exactly what we've seen in the Middle East from 1990 until now—it is End Time action, not a conventional war over resources or power.

So why are Sunni fighters fighting Shiite Muslims? It's a house of apocalyptic mirrors. Listen to the young Shiite fighters, and you'll hear the same motivations recited by the Sunnis for killing Shiites. They see one another as prophesied apostates—one of the signs of the end. Each sees that role fulfilled by their brothers, based on differences in offerings made to the same God—not unlike Cain and Abel.

Abbas, an Iraqi Shiite fighter in his mid-twenties, is representative of the young Shiites who joined the war by the tens of thousands. He told Reuters that he knew he was living in the era of the Mahdi's return when the United States invaded Iraq in 2003. "That was the first sign and then everything else followed." It didn't matter that the United States was there to oust Saddam Hussein, a vicious enemy of Shiites, or that the result was a Shiite-dominated government. All that matters is the millenarian significance of it. As of this writing, he is on his fourth tour of duty in Syria—assuming he's still alive.

Messianism among Shiites is not new. *Encyclopaedia Iranica* introduces the topic by stating that "Messianism is one of the most powerful, diverse and enduring expressions of Islam in Iran throughout its long history. Messianic speculations are evident especially in Shi'ite literature ranging from Hadith, theology, and philosophy to occult sciences, and folklore."<sup>8</sup> These speculations have real consequences. "Messianic yearnings also motivated a number of epoch-making popular movements with political ambitions and lasting influence on Iranian cultural identity."

The 1979 Iranian Revolution is the leading example. It is, in essence, a Shiite version of Qutb's rejection of Western contamination, but a more successful application of what the Muslim Brotherhood aspired to do—in Iran, it resulted in a true Islamic state.

We could illustrate Shiite views further by quoting from dozens of established clerics and mainstream politicians in Iran, Iraq, and Lebanon, but one example is sufficient: former Iranian president Ahmed Ahmadinejad. He speaks as a genuine populist voice of the End Time—enraptured masses. All we have to do is read his Paradise-themed speeches to the United Nations General Assembly to understand what at least 17 million Iranian voters believe.

On one occasion, he calls on humanity to tread "the path of the divine prophets and the righteous under the leadership of Imam al-Mahdi, the Ultimate Savior of mankind."<sup>9</sup> At another session, he announced, "I am here to voice the divine and humanitarian message of learned men and women of my country to you and to the whole world; God Almighty has promised us... a man who is a perfect human being and is named Imam Al-Mahdi, a man who will come in the company of Jesus Christ (PBUH) and the righteous... He will lead humanity into achieving its glorious and eternal ideals."<sup>10</sup>

All this by way of explaining Iran's foreign policy, which rests largely upon supplying militias to fight in Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, and ultimately against Israel's existence. Israel's annihilation is the objective celebrated every year on Iran's holiday, Jerusalem Day. According to Mr. Ahmadinejad, the goal of Iranian policy is "the arrival of the Ultimate Savior" who will "mark a new beginning, a rebirth and a resurrection. It will be the beginning of peace, lasting security and genuine life... He will establish a world brimful of prudence and he will prepare the ground for the collective, active and constructive participation of all in the global management."

We can almost see Paradise's verdant gardens when the Iranian president concludes with this evocative image of the Mahdi's nearness—it is so close we can smell it:

Now we can sense the sweet scent and the soulful breeze of the spring, a spring that has just begun and doesn't belong to a specific race, ethnicity, nation or a region... He will be the spring of all the justice-seekers, freedom-lovers and the followers of heavenly prophets. He will be the spring of humanity and the greenery of all ages.

Spring, we should recall, begins with Newroz Day, the Zoroastrian idea that started it all, and which is still celebrated in Iran.

With the collapse of ISIS, Iranian militias now dominate Iraq and Syria, building missile bases that target Israel. ISIS fighters have not vanished, however; they've regrouped, many joining other Sunni militias including al-Qaeda, and others going home to plot another insurrection. They will work to infiltrate and undermine Arab governments and regimes across the region. Could it be that this awful civil war was only the prelude?

If so, it may be because the Muslim warriors are not alone in confusing peace and pacification. If we removed their specific identifying characteristics and listened only to expected outcomes, Israeli and Christian millenarians can be heard espousing ideas remarkably similar to the Muslim warriors.

### *Times of the Gentiles*

In Israel today, 22 percent of the Jewish population believes that the Israeli state is a fulfillment of prophecy and portends the End of Days.<sup>11</sup> This group is what Israelis call the National-Religious block, but outside of Israel, they are more commonly known simply as Religious Zionists. What sets them apart is their contention that it is a religious duty to possess all the biblical lands of Israel and Judea.

Affiliation with this ideology does not exactly equate to religious practice or beliefs, however. Although about 50 percent of the Israeli Jewish population identifies as secular, a sizable sampling of this demographic nonetheless supports the Religious Zionist ideal. The term "Religious Zionist" can therefore be misleading; you can be a Religious Zionist without keeping up strict religious practices.

Confusingly, this statistic mirrors the well-known fact that many devoutly religious Jews do not endorse the political ideology of Religious Zionism at all. The ultra-Orthodox (about 10 percent of Israeli Jews) believe that the restoration of Israel can only be the work of the Messiah, not of ordinary human political efforts. They are extremely religious, but pointedly not Religious Zionists.

Affinity for Israel's biblical identity therefore comes in various shades of intensity across a wide range of more and less religious and secular beliefs and practices.

This ought to be expected given the origins of Zionism with Zvi Hirsch Kalischer and his practicalities-first, let-the-donkey-do-the-work strategy for redeeming the Holy Land. Most early Zionists were not religious at all. Those who actually ascended to Zion in the 1800s and early 1900s tended to be agnostic socialists, like my kibbutzniks.

Religious Zionism took some time to catch on. It was Rabbi Avraham Isaac Kook, who became the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi in Palestine in 1924, who legitimized Zionism as a religious act, recognizing it as part of God's plan to restore and redeem Israel, making the connection between secular Zionism and the Messiah's donkey.<sup>12</sup>

But all Zionism is built on biblical promises of restoration, which even agnostic Zionists were wont to quote for nationalistic purposes; and because the state was brought into being on the basis of Jewish identity, the whole thing is inescapably connected to religion, no matter how nominally it is practiced. Over time, nationalist feelings naturally became conflated with religious ones—hence the large number of secular Israelis who identify with Religious Zionism.

Not even an atheist can escape it completely. Israel is a Jewish state; the religious hierarchy determines who is allowed to live in it and significant matters relating to how one lives, whom one can marry, and where one is buried. The secular half of the country can't easily write themselves out of the religious story. They live within the narrative of redemption just by being Israeli.

They are not alone; they have a considerable number of Gentiles to keep them company. The Christians who helped inspire the Zionist movement naturally met Israel's statehood in 1948 with ecstatic joy—they'd been predicting it for years. The *Moody Monthly*, a representative mouthpiece of evangelicalism, evaluated Israel's statehood in terms of Ezekiel's prophecy of the dry bones, just as Kalischer and Mather predicted: "The valley of dry bones, the arid land, the stony hills, and the swampy marshes are coming to life." *Moody Monthly* summed up Christian sentiments with this headline: "God's clock has struck."<sup>13</sup> Thus, Religious Zionists and Christian dispensationalists regarded Israel's restoration as a sovereign state to be the beginning of a final countdown. They were excited and hopeful, even if the next stage—control of the Temple Mount—was utterly inconceivable.

Among the nations, a similar Messiah's-donkey pattern emerged. Chris-

tians believed that prophecy was being fulfilled by unwitting secular Gentiles, namely the leaders of America and Britain. For the most part, as in Israel, the unwitting played along just fine.

When the biggest donkey of all, the United Nations, voted to establish Israel, much of America found itself caught up in the chronicle of prophetic zeal. Mainstream news media depicted Israel as a David against the Arab Goliath. During the war in 1948, for example, typical headlines included this, from the front page of the *Los Angeles Times*: "Holy Land Will Be Under Attack Tomorrow."<sup>14</sup> It sounds like a passage heading in the Bible—Joshua and the battle of Jericho.

"The armies of four Arab nations were reported closing in tonight... before the British surrender their Holy Land mandate... Jewish defenders... on the Jerusalem–Hebron Road withstood the Arab assault for more than 48 hours..." There is no hint of the complex reality that Arabs lived there already. American news generally portrayed Arabs as aggressors against the Promised Land, as if it had sat unchanged since the days of King David.

The secular media's romantic crush on Israel did not quickly fade, either. A survey of leading newspapers and magazines for the period bears this out. Nearly two decades later, under the heading "The Promised Land," *Time* magazine explains the background of Israel's tense position in the Middle East by telling its well-educated readers the story of Jacob's wrestling with the angel.

Israel "is the fulfillment of a struggle that has pitted the Jews against the world for 2,000 years," says *Time's* writer, noting matter-of-factly that "it was the land of Canaan to which Abraham was given the divine deed."<sup>15</sup> This was the Old Testament as political science. Seeing Jewish Israel through biblical glasses was in America's blood.

The Arabs were not helped in this regard by the bellicose nationalism that came to dominate Egypt, Syria, and Iraq in the 1950s. Nor were they endeared to the American public by receiving arms and support from the Soviet Union, mixing rampant nuclear fears into an existential conflict that already seemed to come from the pages of the Apocalypse. These threats merged in America's popular imagination: godless Soviets allied with Arabs against the Puritans' New Jerusalem and the restored Jewish nation.

There had to be more, however. In 1948, the new State of Israel was missing the key pieces of Judea and Samaria, the core of the two biblical kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Presently they belonged to the Arabs, as did sacred Jerusalem, including the site of the Temple and the City of David. That had to change, and Christians knew exactly what to look for.

At least since the days of Increase Mather, Christian End Time interpreters focused on Luke's Gospel. There, the clearest sign was given when Jesus described the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the Jews from the city: "They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations." That much had happened just as Jesus described it—this was the experience of the Jews over the past 2,000 years, and now with the Holocaust, it appeared to have reached its zenith.

Luke's story continues in the Book of Acts, where the disciples gathered around Jesus, just moments before he ascended to heaven, to ask, "Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said no, they must wait and watch. For what? He had already told them the sign: "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled."

This did not quite happen in 1948. While many prophecies from the Hebrew Bible were arguably fulfilled by the ingathering of the exiled Jewish people, this precise scenario given by Jesus required an end to Gentile hegemony over old Jerusalem and, specifically, the Temple Mount. In 1948, what they got was the land to the west of the city walls, while Muslims held the Temple precinct and the entire Old City under Jordanian rule.

It was a setup for an implausible miracle. The likelihood of the Arabs ever surrendering this sacred ground was non-existent. Jerusalem's Arab rulers had already fought a bitter war to contest Israel's statehood, had the backing of the Soviet Union, and were going from strength to strength.

By 1967, a series of escalations, misleading Soviet intelligence, and a web of mutual defense agreements brought Egypt, Jordan, and Syria to the brink of all-out war with Israel. Egypt's Abdel Gamal Nasser was the main instigator, and his rhetoric played straight into the biblical scenario of Armageddon. Typical is this Nasser gem from 1965: "We aim at the destruction of the State of Israel. The immediate aim: perfection of Arab military might. The national aim: the eradication of Israel."<sup>16</sup>

Radio Baghdad concurred: "Kill the Jews!" Syrian radio's forecast predicted glory: "We will destroy Israel in four days." Egyptian radio joined the chorus: "Our people have been waiting twenty years for this battle... Now they will teach Israel the lesson of death!"<sup>17</sup>

Although Israel was judged to have a qualitative military advantage, this was by no means a guarantee of survival. If war broke out, most experts believed the Israelis could defend themselves, but only at great cost in human life and property. Two and half million Jews were packed into narrow, feebly connected strips of land.

This is a talking point that Israel still deploys as propaganda, but it also happens to be true. On the brink of war, Egypt's state-controlled media emphasized exactly this vulnerability: "Jordanian artillery, coordinated with the forces of Egypt and Syria, is in a position to cut Israel in two... where Israeli territory between the Jordan armistice line and the Mediterranean Sea is only 12 kilometers wide."<sup>18</sup>

With such rhetoric encouraging all the Arab states to join together to push the Jews into the sea, the Israelis understandably felt that another Holocaust was in the making.

### *Jerusalem Syndrome*

Israeli historian Tom Segev considers the domestic background of the 1967 war to be as important as Nasser's threats. Segev is regarded as a revisionist, meaning that his research has led him to conclusions that do not support the traditional—some would say, mythological—way that Israel has told this story. I think both versions are important, valid, and real—in fact, the mythological one has a reality and effect of its own, matching or exceeding the more earthly dynamics that historians like Segev uncover. One is the key to understanding the other.

As for the political background, the true intentions of Nasser, the genuineness of the threat, and any possible ulterior motives the Israelis had are all worthy subjects about which a slew of books may be read. My conclusion is that forces greater than any of the players—not necessarily *the* higher power, but *a* higher power, nonetheless—caused the crisis. Once again, the non-human archetypes, the overarching structures, the narrative force of collective story and corporate behavior, the ideological frameworks and virtual identities: it is those things that combined here to cause a war, which, according to the clear accounts of every actor involved, no one actually wanted.

How did it happen, then? How does a war involving multiple states and two global superpowers get started when no one wants it? The answer lies in the accumulation of details, the specific stories of individuals, and that's where Segev's research sheds light; it shines most brightly through the lenses of ordinary people.

The cumulative testimony of private diaries and correspondence shows to what extent the epoch-making events of 1967 were beyond the control of decision makers. As in a hurricane, the storm will probably form if certain conditions are present: deep, warm water for energy, a lack of interfering

wind shear, and, critically, an atmospheric depression. In 1960s Israel, the heat and depression were unrelenting.

As we read newspaper editorials and private correspondence, national malaise strikes us at every turn. Israel's economy was in terrible shape and disillusioned young people were leaving by the thousands. Segev recounts evidence reflecting "an extremely solemn mood, almost one of bereavement." In a typical example from 1966, the Israeli daily *Haaretz* laments, "There is bitter desperation everywhere." Another editorial in the same paper wondered, "When all hope is lost, what else can one hope for if not a miracle?"<sup>19</sup>

Many readers will be surprised to know that before the early 1960s, discussing the Holocaust was nearly taboo in Israeli society. It was too fresh, the pain too close. Also, many Israelis were embarrassed by their European kin, by the weakness they perceived in them. Sabras, native-born Israelis from the first waves of Zionism, had never lived in Europe and knew nothing but self-sufficient strength. They spoke Hebrew as their mother tongue and grew up as victors in every war they had fought. They had little in common with the wave of European-born Jews that arrived after the Holocaust. It was incomprehensible to them that Jews would have allowed themselves to be led as lambs to the slaughter.

That changed with the capture and public trial of Nazi fugitive Adolph Eichmann in 1961. It was a catharsis and a catalyst for bringing Israelis together. The Holocaust was transformed in the Israeli psyche; it became a symbol not of weakness but of survival, and a bitterly rooted motivation to never, ever allow anything like it to happen again, at all costs.

Young Ofer Feniger felt compelled to write to his girlfriend after witnessing the Eichmann trial: "I feel that from all the horror and the helplessness, a hugely powerful strength is growing in me." A typical native-born Israeli, Ofer speaks as the voice of a generation reconstructed by its vicarious experience of the Holocaust, which is what the very public Eichmann trial afforded to many. It was a communal rite that united all Jews.

Ofer reveals a widespread response when he writes that the trial made him "strong to the point of tears; sharp as a knife; quiet and terrible; that's how I want to be! I want to know that never again will hollow eyes look out from behind electric fences! Not if I am strong! If we are all strong! Strong, proud Jews! Never again to be led to the slaughter."<sup>20</sup>

Now we have to juxtapose that with Arab political hyperbole. After Eichmann, rhetoric like Nasser's vow to complete the "eradication of Israel" could not be heard only as the words of a blowhard. "Nasser speaks clearly, as

Hitler did on the eve of the Second World War," wrote columnist Ze'ev Schiff for *Haaretz*, expressing an opinion that was growing at precisely the rate of Nasser's increasingly malignant threats. When Hitler talked like this, no one took him seriously.<sup>21</sup> The post-Eichmann thinking said, "Let's not make that mistake again."

It was impossible to shut out. The Eastern Mediterranean is a crowded house and Israelis could easily receive broadcasts from Cairo and judge Nasser's Hitler impersonation for themselves. No Arabic? Not a problem. As a courtesy to its audience, Egypt broadcast the threats in Hebrew, too. "Your leaders will not help you," the Cairo propagandists raged, "they will bring a Holocaust upon you!" A letter from a Tel Aviv woman to her family back in Boston captured the ambience: "Anyone who can pick up Cairo television must have been wetting themselves with fear over the past few weeks."<sup>22</sup>

Israel's leaders were frightened, too. They were confident they could win a war, but not if they waited to be attacked first. Generally, the civilian and military leadership thought the situation was far more dangerous than anything Israel had experienced, far more serious than the 1948 War of Independence. If convinced that Nasser really was going to attack, they would have to preempt or be annihilated.

Yitzhak Rabin was military chief of staff. As war became imminent, he instructed schools and public buildings to prepare to serve as hospitals, stating that he anticipated casualties in the tens of thousands. Rabbis were dispatched to go through public parks to sanctify them as burial grounds. As Segev notes, "Only a society drenched in the memory of the Holocaust could have prepared so meticulously for the next one."<sup>23</sup>

American Christian leaders expressed the same fears. They joined together in signing a petition in the name of "Americans of all persuasions and groupings" to "urge the Administration to support the independence, integrity and freedom of Israel." The Johnson White House had to listen: the petition was signed by a host of Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Russian Orthodox leaders. This is already an unusual coming together of minds, but the breadth of support is illustrated best by considering two prominent signatories, hardly figures associated with conservative politics: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and Dr. Reinhold Niebuhr.<sup>24</sup>

To reiterate: no one wanted this war. Nasser did not want it and Israel did not want it. This is absolutely clear from the archival record. As often happens, a series of unintended consequences, energized by foolish, difficult-to-retract verbal bombast, escalated and spun out of control. Key factors: Nasser had painted himself into a corner with his big mouth and was forced

to position armor and troops into a threatening stance, poised apparently for an invasion; Israel mobilized its reserves in response, thinking he would not invade, but not quite sure. The tipping point: Soviet disinformation led Tel Aviv to judge that the invasion was imminent and that a preemptive strike on Egypt's air forces was their only chance. Once it started, treaty obligations drew in the remaining unwilling parties of Jordan and Syria.

This is, of course, the Six-Day War, so-named by Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan, who was given the honor when it was all over. The name is not so much about the war's length as it is about Israel's inexplicable success. God did the work of Creation in six days and rested on the seventh; Israel's deliverance from Nasser's Egypt appeared to be every bit as miraculous.

At war's end, Israel was left in control of Gaza, the Golan Heights, Moses' Sinai, and all of the West Bank's biblical Judea and Samaria. It was a wholly unexpected and exhilarating outcome. The lands they acquired were the lands of the Bible, the missing pieces of prophetic fulfillment. The acquisition of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount was the most surprisingly miraculous thing of all. Jewish people now had access to the Western "Wailing" Wall, the only surviving part of Herod's Temple, and furthermore, they had absolute control of the Muslim holy sites.

For the Arabs, it was equally stunning. Jordan and Egypt's armed forces were totally decimated; Syria was humiliated. Ten Arab soldiers were dead for every Israeli killed in combat, despite the Jews being on the defensive in a confined space.

At first, it wasn't clear even if Muslims would be allowed to worship again at the place of Muhammad's ascent into heaven. It was for Arabs a disaster of biblical proportions every bit as much as it was a Bible-sized epic of salvation for Israelis.

Dispensationalist Christians were elated. The second portion of Jesus' prediction about the End Time was fulfilled! The long dispensation of Gentile rule over Jerusalem was finished! The City of David was now firmly under Jewish feet for the first time in 2,000 years! Evangelical leaders in America at once recognized the implications: this was something that was supposed to happen, something predicted and expected—but wow, it really happened! And against overwhelming odds! Angels must have fought on Israel's behalf to secure such a lopsided victory! The Bible had come to life!

John Walvoord, president of Dallas Theological Seminary, characterized the war's outcome as having "climaxed one of the most remarkable fulfillments of biblical prophecy since the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70."<sup>25</sup>

In short order, Carl Henry, the editor of the highly regarded *Christianity*

*Today* magazine, called for Christian leaders to assemble in newly restored Jerusalem. This "Jerusalem Conference on Biblical Prophecy" hosted over 1,500 delegates gathered from thirty-two nations.

Israel's founding prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, addressed the delegates quoting from Isaiah.<sup>26</sup> Although Ben-Gurion was a socialist pioneer, and not a religious man, he disclosed here, as he'd done many times in his life, the underlying inspiration of the Bible in his secular nationalism and humanistic ideals. Standing before the applauding Christians, he appeared every inch the Messiah's donkey.

The conference was not for dilettantes: these were serious leaders, including the pillar of the Southern Baptists, W.A. Criswell; representatives of the National Association of Evangelicals; the venerable Dr. John R.W. Stott from London; leaders of powerful youth organizations, including Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship and Youth for Christ; and prominent theologians from the Dallas and Talbot theological seminaries, plus the Gordon-Conwell Divinity School, among others.

Talbot's dean, Charles Feinberg, spoke in reference to Ezekiel 40-48 to show that, with Jerusalem now freed from the feet of the Gentiles, the next prophetic event had to be a rebuilt Temple. His closing remarks: "With charity toward all and not one whit of malice toward any, we hold unwaveringly to the literal interpretation of Ezekiel 40-48: THE TEMPLE WILL BE REBUILT!"<sup>27</sup>

A reporter commented that the majority of delegates showed their agreement with Feinberg through their enthusiastic applause. Dr. C. Everett Koop, a prominent Presbyterian and legendary pioneer of pediatric surgery, was one of them. The future United States surgeon general remarked that all agreed on "the soon return of the Lord."<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, Pat Robertson was literally breaking ground on what would become the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) when news of the Israeli miracle broke. He saw the two events as divinely connected. Pat would go on to become immensely influential—not just on yours truly, but at the highest levels of American politics, as founder of the Christian Coalition, the American Center for Law & Justice (ACLJ), and Regent University, to name a few of his achievements. CBN was the foundation of it all, a foundation laid exactly as Jerusalem was being reclaimed by the feet of Jewish warriors.

Fittingly, in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Six-Day War, CBN produced *In Our Hands*, a film about Israel's 55th Paratrooper Brigade, which had led the battle for Jerusalem. It was their soldiers who

telegraphed the news to the world: "The Temple Mount is in our hands!"

Commenting to the *Jerusalem Post* on the film, CBN spokesman Michael Conrad effectively summarized the feelings of a great many evangelical Christians, including, no doubt, a few who managed to be elected president of the United States:

The Six Day War is of tremendous importance to Christians... It is seen as the fulfillment of a prophecy given by Jesus in Luke 21:24: "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."

"We believe the times of the Gentiles have been fulfilled—the Jews are back, and Israel has been reborn," he said. "The Jews have been set apart, unable to assimilate into the cultures of the dispersion and are being gathered once more to the land of Israel."<sup>29</sup>

Mather's prophecies continue to be fulfilled.

### *Fulfilling Prophecy*

We might expect that CBN would mythologize the Six-Day War, but most mainstream reporting in 1967 did the same thing. *Time* set the tone with its star-struck description of Moshe Dayan, Israel's "dashing, one-eyed Hero of Sinai," who led his troops through "astonishing hours of incredibly accurate bombing and strafing."<sup>30</sup> Israel's white-hat heroism glows bright against the darkness of communism. "Israel erased an expensive decade of Russian military aid to the Arab world."

Nasser and company lay on the page in vivid contrast to Dayan's suavit  and cowboy derring-do. *Time* magazine paints the Arabs as inept, insanely violent, and cowardly, calling Nasser "venomous." (Only King Hussein's troops received praise, although the editors cast the king himself as Nasser's dupe.) *Time* further describes Arabs as "hostile" and "menacing"; their desire for Israel's destruction isn't geopolitical, it is "lustful."

This opinion-setting report, the first and most widely read, evokes a pistol-packing Jewish maiden under the threat of Arab rape. "Ever since Israel was created 19 years ago, the Arabs have been lusting for the day when they could destroy it... With a hostile Arab population of 110,000,000 menacing their own 2,700,000, the Israelis could be forgiven for feeling a

fearful itch in the trigger finger." An innocent teenager, Israel will be excused for blowing the head off of this Arab predator.

A photograph shows Dayan and Yitzhak Rabin at the Western Wall just after its capture; both are dressed in battle fatigues and helmets, the subliminal message being that the cowardly, loud-mouthed Nasser never got close to the fight he started, while these biblical heroes led their troops from the front. The image caption speaks volumes: "RABIN & DAYAN AT THE WAILING WALL—THE SYMBOL OF THE NATION BECAME THE SYMBOL OF GREATNESS."

The chances for future peace were judged to be slim because, "envenomed by their latest defeat," the Arabs were likely to "embark on a new orgy of irredentist fervor."<sup>31</sup> If they were defeated again it was their own fault, owing to their "ruinous enmity toward Israel." Envenomed, Lustful, and Menacing versus Dashing, Astonishing, and endowed with Greatness: who would you root for?

Seth King chimed in for the *New York Times* to assess the Israeli capture of Jerusalem as the return of "the site of King Solomon's temple to the control of a Jewish state after nearly 2,000 years."<sup>32</sup> On June 28, an editorial in the same publication, while cautioning that Israel's plans to annex the Old City of Jerusalem did not bode well for peace, nonetheless states that "no one can seriously dispute the legitimacy of Israel's interest in the Old City nor the reasonableness of its demands."<sup>33</sup>

I've cited these reports to show how quickly non-religious people raised in a Judeo-Christian culture can fall in line with serious millenarians regarding sacred Jerusalem. If space allowed, we could do the same thing with reference to media reports from the Islamic world, colored instead by their own mythologies of Jerusalem. To this day, Arab and Turkish press paints geopolitical developments in terms of victimization by the rapacious Crusader-Zionist alliance. It is very difficult to filter out the lexicon of millenarianism from political developments in Jerusalem—perhaps impossible—and the more intense the struggle, the more likely we are to see the world polarized into camps supporting one side or the other.

In Israel, secular autonomy was the war's biggest casualty, transformed forever by a transfusion of religious Zionism into the modern Israeli bloodstream. Fear was transformed into messianic fervor. "The people are drunk with joy," was how Israeli poet Natan Alterman put it. Segev summarized the euphoria as a quest "for the most elaborate superlatives; no flowery phrase or cliché was left unused."

Their euphoric speechlessness drove secular-minded Israelis to the Bible

for the right words: "The Messiah came to Jerusalem yesterday.. and he rode in on a tank," was the assessment of the centrist daily newspaper *Maariv*. Other papers carried headlines straight from the biblical conquests of Jericho and the cities of Canaan—often word-for-word quotes from the Hebrew Bible. The media repeatedly characterized the six days as "days of miracles."<sup>34</sup>

Hard-nosed Moshe Dayan was no exception: "We have returned to all that is holy in our land. We have returned never to be parted from it again."<sup>35</sup> Among the first to reach the Western Wall, which no Jew had been able to visit since 1948, it was Dayan who placed a written prayer within its cracks before anyone else could—it was for everlasting peace. It is a lovely prayer and the cornerstone of Isaiah's vision, but General Dayan's placing it there reminds us that since the day the prophet uttered it, his transcendent words have mostly been a cause for war.

For Religious Zionists, the days of miracles were proof again that God worked through their secular kin. Rabbi Avraham Isaac Kook's son, Zvi Yehudah, rose to the occasion, interpreting the Six-Day War as evidence that his father's teaching was correct: the Jewish people were in the middle years of an unfolding messianic redemption that had already begun, and all Israelis, even unbelievers like Dayan, were active participants in fulfilling it.

With the promised lands of Judea and Samaria—the West Bank—under Israeli control, logic dictated that redemption would be advanced by settling on those lands, just as Joshua did after the first deliverance from Egypt. Micah Goodman summarized the logic for *Haaretz*: "Settling the land is, then, both mitzvah and prophecy. It fulfills the initial parts of the vision of redemption and causes the fulfillment of the subsequent parts of the visions."<sup>36</sup> (A mitzvah is an act of religious obligation and a righteous deed.)

Ezekiel's prophecy of the dry bones was in the midst of fulfillment: in 1948, the dry bones were knit together, the skeleton of redemption was assembled. The Six-Day War put flesh on the bones. *Time* noticed the sequence. Less than a month after the war, the magazine's editors reminded readers of the rabbinical claim: "Israel has already entered its Messianic era." In 1948, recalls *Time*, "Israel's chief rabbis ruled that with the establishment of the Jewish state and the 'ingathering of the exiles,' the age of redemption had begun." And now, after the Six-Day War, "many of Israel's religious leaders are convinced that the Jews' victory over the Arabs has taken Judaism well beyond that point."

If 1948 put the bones together, and the Six-Day War put flesh on them, this, says *Time*, "raised an interesting theological conundrum." YHWH's life-

giving spirit could enter the assembled flesh and bones only once the LORD's *shekhinah* glory returned to a rebuilt Temple. Indeed, in the chapters immediately following the dry bones, Ezekiel's next step is to describe the gloriously rebuilt Temple in detail. *Time* poses the obvious question: "Has the time now come for the erection of the Third Temple?"<sup>37</sup>

They got an answer from historian Israel Eldad: "We are at the stage where David was when he liberated Jerusalem. From that time until the construction of the Temple by Solomon, only one generation passed. So will it be with us." When *Time* asked, "And what about that Moslem shrine?" Eldad replied, "It is of course an open question. Who knows? Perhaps there will be an earthquake."

What would clear-minded Israeli secularists say? *Time's* editors note that "although Zionism was largely a secular movement... one of its sources was the prayers of Jews for a return to Palestine so that they could build a new Temple." It's a sound observation, acknowledging the inseparability of Israeli nationalism from religion.

If any anecdote can illustrate Jerusalem's power to intoxicate the non-religious mind, it is Dayan's statement shortly after taking the Temple Mount. When asked his motivation in the battle, this icon of native-born profanity was suddenly smitten by the Holy Spirit: "Everybody fought for something that is a combination of love, belief and country. If I may say so, we felt we were fighting to prevent the fall of the Third Temple."<sup>38</sup>

The "Third Temple" means Ezekiel's prophesied Temple. If a secular icon like Moshe Dayan could become a warrior-prophet, the whole nation could. Why wait for an earthquake? If the actions of the Israeli people cause prophecy to be fulfilled, if settling the land is a mitzvah, wouldn't removing the Dome of the Rock also logically have to be a mitzvah—an act that would lead to the next stage of redemption? A significant number of well-placed and well-financed Israelis and their Christian supporters thought so.

If they had to, they'd make a geopolitical earthquake of their own.

### *Driving the Messiah's Donkey to World War III*

In the early 1980s, a conspiracy of twenty-seven such believers tried to fulfill the mitzvah. The plan was not just to destroy buildings sacred to Islam, like the Dome of the Rock, but also to assassinate Palestinian leaders, blow up Palestinian passenger busses, and kill as many Muslim worshipers as possible. The plotters were not on the fringe; they were ordinary citizens, scholars of religion and veterans of the Israel Defense Forces.

In 2004, when a similar conspiracy surfaced, Likud Party parliamentarian Ehud Yatom sounded the alarm. As a commander of the Shin Bet unit that broke up the original plot in the nick of time, Yatom wanted everyone to understand how "very close" it had come to succeeding. His concerns are all the more compelling in light of his proximity to the case and his ideological position: Yatom was a hawkish member of the conservative Likud Party. The Likud is entirely sympathetic to Religious Zionist plans and a champion of settlement on the West Bank.

Also, it must be said, Ehud Yatom does not possess a squeamish disposition. He once obeyed unlawful orders to execute two Palestinian hijackers after their capture ("I smashed their skulls"); this led left-wing Meretz party boss Yossi Sarid to describe him as "the vermin of Israeli society, the rotten fruit of a military mentality devoid of values."<sup>39</sup> And yet, with all that, the possibility of blowing up the Dome of the Rock gave Yatom chills.

If the plot had succeeded, he said, "it would have meant the entire Muslim world against the State of Israel and against the Western world, a war of religions... Today's terrorist attacks would be nothing compared to what could happen—even World War III."<sup>40</sup>

This would have been fine with the 1984 plotters. That was their goal: to cause an apocalyptic war, one which they truly believed would conclude as miraculously as the Six-Day War had, only this time with the rebuilding of the Temple and Israel's refounding as a kingdom under the Messiah.

What would the plotters say today? Just ask them. Yehuda Etzion has prominently dedicated himself to provocative action on the Temple Mount, incessantly challenging Israeli government prohibitions against Jewish activities there. Etzion was not only a member of the 1984 conspiracy—he was the man who planned the bombing. (Though convicted of terrorism, all the plotters were pardoned by 1990.)

Other Temple Mount activists hope to negotiate a Muslim surrender. The terms of capitulation would see the relocation of al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock to another site. "This is the place that symbolizes Zionist redemption, without it there is no meaning to Jewish life in this land," says Gershon Salmon, the founder of the Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful Movement.

Like many, Salmon's passion for the Temple Mount was aroused by the Six-Day War. He typifies those messianic enthusiasts who do not come from a religious background. Since the Six-Day War, his secular views have evolved into a kind of nationalist messianic vision—religion formed in an improvised rather than orthodox mold, the Messiah's donkey suddenly aware of its

reason for existence. Salmon's biography illuminates the many "non-religious" Israelis who identify with Religious Zionism in the polls.

His more traditional counterparts are found in the Temple Institute, a religious body promoting a scholarly view in which the rabbinical sages have sanctioned rebuilding the Temple. Their work includes manufacturing the requisite clothing and tools for the priests, including the identification of the "Red Heifer," a flawless cow that must be used to consecrate the new sanctuary.

Have a look at their web site; maybe they've found the heifer by now.<sup>41</sup> And by all means take a break from reading and look at their slick videos on YouTube. One in particular is especially powerful: a young boy awakes on the morning of Tish'a b'Av, the anniversary of the destruction of the Temple. With keenly Paradise-laden phraseology, the synopsis explains that the boy "discovers the possibility of a better world, one in which the Holy Temple has been reestablished, and peace and happiness fills our lives."<sup>42</sup>

The special effects are startling. We walk in live action from the boy's point of view through the streets of Jerusalem's Old City until we reach the Western Wall Plaza. There, over the top ledge, we see the looming, unmistakable facade of the Holy Temple, sitting where we are accustomed to seeing the Dome of the Rock. As a former Jerusalemite, I can vouch for the realism and emotional effectiveness of this piece. It will without doubt serve to convince more than a few young Israelis that this dream is within reach.

The truth is that it would not take anything so extreme as demolishing the Dome of the Rock to set off an apocalyptic chain reaction. Every little thing is like a finger on the trigger. For example, when Salmon's group announced a plan to lay a cornerstone for the new Temple in 1990—just one symbolic stone—it provoked a protective response from Muslim Arabs that overwhelmed the Israeli police and ended in 21 deaths and 125 wounded. In 2000, soon-to-be prime minister Ariel Sharon sparked the Second Intifada simply by making a walking tour on the Mount.

The tensions run both ways. What would happen if an Israeli leader were to decide that Judea and Samaria were negotiable, that things might be returned in some measure to the pre-1967 status quo? That was put to the test when Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed an agreement with King Hussein of Jordan and Yasser Arafat in 1993. The world applauded, but the mayor of Jerusalem described the agreement as "a dark cloud over the city."

If anyone had the right to reset the West Bank to pre-1967 lines, it was Rabin. He had been the armed forces chief of staff in 1967, the secular vehicle by which the Temple Mount and all the West Bank were secured.

With Dayan, he was one of the first to reach the Western Wall, making him a biblical hero. Now, as prime minister, he appeared ready to give it all away to Arafat, a bona fide terrorist.

Nothing could protect Rabin. Despite his historical credentials, he was summarily condemned by Israel's right wing and denounced as worthy of death by numerous influential rabbis. Settlers portrayed him as a traitor who stood in the way of fulfilling prophecy. Yigal Amir, a life-long scholar of the Talmud, determined it was a mitzvah to shoot and kill Rabin in 1995 at a peace rally; his stated reason was that any withdrawal from the territory captured in 1967 would deprive God's people of their "biblical heritage."<sup>43</sup>

For a sober and complete study of the link between Rabin's assassination and its religious cultural foundations, see *Murder in the Name of God: The Plot to Kill Yitzhak Rabin*.<sup>44</sup> Or, for a more hot-blooded account, Israeli author Seffi Rachlevsky writes compellingly to connect the dots between religious teaching about the End Time and acts of violence like this. "The Jewish underground of the early 1980s... and Amir should not be viewed as the acts of a few deranged individuals," writes Rachlevsky, "but as something much more."<sup>45</sup> The something more is broad popular belief in redemptive violence. Violent extremists do not exist in a vacuum; they take action on what thousands believe and say should be done.

What does the average Israeli think about the Temple Mount? In a 2010 poll by Israel's parliamentary television service, 49 percent of Israelis said they favored rebuilding the Holy Temple. Only 23 percent said they did not want it to be rebuilt; the remainder were undecided. The poll also showed that 42 percent believed that, in fact, it would be rebuilt at some point.<sup>46</sup>

"Messianists have hijacked Judaism," writes Rachlevsky, "leading us all down the garden path to Armageddon." He fears for his nation, arguing that if this trend is not contained, the "black hole" of those utopian ideologies will "swallow up religious Judaism, and after that perhaps Israel as a whole."

### *The Black Hole*

All sides frame the Jerusalem question in irreducible terms; every aspect is non-negotiable, every decision an escalating provocation, every death a martyr's. Figures as fundamentally different as Donald Trump and Ayatollah Khomeini have been irresistibly sucked into the Black Hole.

Iran is so drawn to it that the last Friday of Ramadan is "Jerusalem Day," dedicated to the liberation of Jerusalem and the destruction of the "cancerous tumor" that is the State of Israel.<sup>47</sup> Why would Iran be so interested

in a city that possesses no resources or practical strategic assets and that does not have access to shipping lanes nor even a decent airport? It has nothing to do with the plight of the Palestinian people—the answer lies entirely with eschatology, Muhammad's transit between heaven and Earth from Jerusalem's Foundation Stone.

Iranian moderates are as vigorous on this issue as the most rabid fundamentalists. Former Iranian president and champion of interfaith dialogue Mohammad Khatami instructed his people on their responsibilities: "In the Koran, God commanded to kill the wicked... If we abide by human laws, we should mobilize the whole Islamic World for a sharp confrontation with the Zionist regime. If we abide by the Koran, all of us should mobilize to kill."

Consider also Israel's trade partner, Turkey. President Erdoğan is known for his revival of Ottoman principles and his unprecedented defense of Palestinians, notable mainly because Turks and Arabs have not historically gotten along very well. The Ottomans were much kinder to Jews than to Arabs. Erdoğan, however, has been heavily influenced by modern Arab Islamic revivalism. As it turns out, a great many Turks felt as offended and oppressed by post-World War modernism as the Arabs did. Longing for the proud days of the caliphate brings devout Arabs, Turks, and Kurds together as never before.

Erdoğan made this clear when he reconsecrated Hagia Sophia as a mosque in 2020. You will recall that this was the Byzantine mother church and then the caliphical mosque under the Ottomans. Turkey's anti-Muslim post-war ruler, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, turned it into a museum along with the sultan's palace. When President Erdoğan reconsecrated it as a mosque, he linked this decision explicitly to Jerusalem. "The resurrection of Hagia Sophia is a harbinger of the Masjid al-Aqsa's attainment of freedom. The resurrection of Hagia Sophia is the footsteps of the will of Muslims all over the world to exit the interregnum." ("Interregnum," Turkish *fetret devri*, is a period without revelation, often used in the Middle East to refer to the period following the First World War.)<sup>48</sup>

The soon-to-be freed Masjid al-Aqsa is of course the Muslim mosque adjacent to the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem. It is the way Muslims refer to the entire Temple Mount upon which both sit. This is one of the three holy places of Islam—not the third in importance, but one of three together. The Quran says that in bridging Earth and heaven, the Mi'raj connects Mecca with Jerusalem. "Exalted is He who took His Servant by night from al-Masjid al-Haram to al-Masjid al-Aqsa, whose surroundings We have blessed."

By making this connection, Erdoğan says that restoring Hagia Sophia as a mosque is the first step to Muslims taking Jerusalem back. According to President Erdoğan, we hear it in "the footsteps of the will of Muslims all over the world." Jerusalem remains the focus, again not for geopolitical interests but eternal ones.

Erdoğan clearly made that point again while opening the October 2020 session of Turkey's parliament: "Knowing that this struggle will continue until the Judgment Day, we will always be prepared, always strong and always vigilant." He uses the Turkish word *mücadele* (mujah-deh-leh) for struggle, formed from the Arabic word *jihad*. The struggle, or jihad, toward Judgment Day, is over Jerusalem: "Here I underline the following point. The Jerusalem matter is not an ordinary geopolitical problem for us... Jerusalem is our city, it is a city belonging to us."

This wasn't the first time Turkey's president expanded on Jerusalem's meaning. In another official statement in 2017, he summed up the city's importance to Islamic eschatology, which emphasizes Jerusalem as the place connecting Earth and heaven:

Time flows in Jerusalem, not according to the cycles we know, but in its own course. Jerusalem is passion, longing. The illumination of humanity's eye, the bliss of its heart. Jerusalem is the closest place on earth to Allah's heavenly throne. Because Jerusalem is the second stop of the Isra and the first step of Miraj; The first qibla of the ummah, Jerusalem, the city of the Prophets, is the holy glory and honor of all Muslims. The messages of the Prophet about Jerusalem are that transparent and clear. For this reason, every day Jerusalem is under occupation and captive under the Crusaders' dirty feet, shame is brought upon Muslims. Until he freed again Jerusalem Salahadin Eyyubi's eyes knew no comfort of sleep.

So much is there. The different flow of time, Jerusalem as the closest place on Earth to Allah's throne: President Erdoğan says it all.

On another occasion, when three Molotov cocktail-throwing Muslim youth were killed by Israeli police in a riot, Erdoğan made a heart-tugging appeal to Muslim listeners the world over: "Today it is *cuma* [Friday], for Muslims it is a holy day, and today in Jerusalem the police, military and all the security forces there have attacked Muslims." Erdoğan made his motives clear: "If Israeli soldiers are dirtying al-Aqsa with their boots, the reason is we fail to defend it decently. Let's defend Palestine just as we defend Mecca and Medina."<sup>49</sup> For Erdoğan, Palestine is Jerusalem—it is al-

Aqsa. "Jerusalem is the red line for all Muslims," he declared a few months later.<sup>50</sup>

Jerusalem even overcomes the division between Shiite and Sunni End Time warriors. The liberation of Jerusalem from Crusaders and Jews eclipses the antipathy that elsewhere drives Sunni and Shiite to slaughter each other by the thousands. It explains why Iran sponsors anti-Sunni militias everywhere, but supports Hamas, a Palestinian Sunni movement originally part of the Muslim Brotherhood. It's because Hamas is dedicated to liberating Jerusalem and killing Jews.

The founding covenant of Hamas describes Palestine as "the navel of the globe" and refers to a prophecy saying that "the Holy Land... will be in constant struggle till the Day of Judgement." This effectively puts the Palestinian question beyond normal politics; it isn't as simple as a question of national sovereignty or statehood. Article 11 of the Hamas charter declares all of Palestine to be consecrated ground and says that no politician has the right to give any of it up. It says, in other words, exactly what Jewish settlers and Christian Zionists are saying.

Article 7 quotes Muslim scripture in a way that contradicts any effort by moderates to resist the terrorist-jihadist call. "The last hour would not come unless the Muslims will fight against the Jews and the Muslims would kill them until the Jews would hide themselves behind a stone or a tree and a stone or a tree would say: Muslim, or the servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me; come and kill him..."<sup>51</sup>

This is a favorite prophecy of militant jihadists, the sentiment of which—death to the Jews—finds its way into a great many Muslim sermons and prayers, and not just in the Middle East.

Following the July 2017 incident that enflamed Turkey's Erdoğan, two prominent California imams called for the destruction of the Jewish people citing this hadith. At the Islamic Center of Riverside, Mahmoud Harmoush preached that Israel was plotting against the holy sites of Mecca and Medina and told the faithful that to thwart Israel's plots, they must "wake up" for "prayer is not the only thing." What else could there be? He left it to their imaginations, then prayed, "Oh Allah... destroy them... and rend them asunder... turn them into booty in the lands of the Muslims." Harmoush prayed further for God to "destroy them... disperse them and rend them asunder."<sup>52</sup>

Meanwhile, in the university town of Davis (noted for its liberal concerns—e.g., a toad tunnel to protect amphibious passage across the I-80 freeway, and municipal fruit trees to allow foraging for the homeless), local imam Ammar Shahin prayed that God would "liberate the Al-Aqsa Mosque from

the filth of the Jews" and "annihilate them down to the very last one. Do not spare any of them."<sup>53</sup> This is hardly in the spirit of Davis, a sanctuary city whose "Principles of One Community" hails diversity and affirms "our shared responsibility to promote and sustain a united community that acknowledges and celebrates differences..."<sup>54</sup> The Islamic Center presumably thrived happily in this embracing culture.

There is no doubt about the language used. It is awful, because the language of the source, the original hadith, is awful. What can we make of this ubiquitous, poisonous text? It is certainly not unorthodox—it is *sahib*, meaning it is of the highest order of reliability and authority. Put in the most flattering light, it might be interpreted as a prediction of something evil: "In the End Time Muslims will kill Jews and the rocks will not hide them." But most read it as prescriptive: "Before the end can come, you must kill the Jews."

By coincidence, I saw an article just today from a Turkish Islamist news site close to the ruling party: "The Final War Between Jews and Muslims." It quotes the same hadith, stating that Jesus will come only when this last battle-to-end-all-battles over Jerusalem takes place. It is the war "that will finish off the Jews."<sup>55</sup>

A number of verses in the Quran also urge their slaughter. Moderates argue that these must be considered in context, and that under Islamic dominion Jews were historically protected. They can point to Hebrew passages that have similar calls to kill worshipers of Baal, and they may say correctly that regards the Jewish Temple Mount, Jewish terrorists and settlers use a similar logic.

All true. Christians and Jews, however, are more easily rid of the problem, since there are no Baal worshipers today, whereas there are a great many Jews. Sure, we can find Christian and Jewish preachers sputtering hate, likening Muslims to the Moabites, for example. But those preachers are quickly recognized and condemned. To read a scripture about Baal and equate it with a living community is simply not possible; for Muslims, however, there is an easy and direct identification between Jews then and now.

Muslims should not be exempt from the criticism that their Abrahamic brethren apply to themselves—and especially not in a place like Davis, California, where no measure of hate speech is normally allowed. Not even toward toads.

Considering now the Black Hole as a total phenomenon, a picture of jarring paradoxes materializes. As it stands, pragmatic moderates like the late

Prime Minister Rabin or Jordan's King Hussein have more in common with one another than they do with their own millenarian constituents. Meanwhile, Hizbullah, Hamas, or Islamic Jihad agree entirely with Israel's settlers and Christian millenarians in denouncing any compromise over Jerusalem. As James Walsh noted for *Time* shortly after Rabin's assassination, "the crowning irony now is that Palestinian bus bombers and Jewish extremists have unwittingly found common cause in trying to destroy any workable peace."<sup>56</sup>