# Potential for Apocalypse

## Violence and Eschatology in the Israel-Palestine Conflict

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## Abstract

The conflict in Israel-Palestine has helped to produce one of the world's most consistently volatile geographical hotbeds. Although the reasons for this conflict are many and complex, religious difference is universally cited as one of the region's most explosive and decisive issues. This paper deals with eschatology, or the study of last things, as one branch of religion that is particularly prone to produce violent reactions. There are two principle reasons why this is the case. First, apocalyptic prophecies are inherently violent. This violent tendency is, moreover, compounded in Israel-Palestine because Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all predict that Jerusalem will be the site of the bloody events of the end of days. Second, these apocalyptic visions deepen the problem by contributing to situations that are likely to produce wide-scale violence as predicted by the theories of Manus Midlarsky, Thomas Robbins, Jessica Stern, and James Waller.

## Introduction

[1] "Yeah, but I like *those* terrorists." This was the reaction of a woman – as selfless, caring, and loving a woman as I know – to the information that a Jerusalem institution she had visited the previous year was operated by a man convicted of plotting to blow up the Dome of the Rock. Such a statement, made by such a woman, was the result of a sincere religious conviction and goes to underscore the intensity of the religious conflict that continuously smolders in and around the State of Israel. Unfortunately, this conflict often escalates beyond mere words, culminating in encroaching settlements, suicide bombings, and outright warfare.

[2] From what does this conflict stem? There are many answers to be sure – the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is a multi-faceted phenomenon with political, geographic, ethnic, historical, as well as religious components. Yet religion is often at the center of the conflict and certain

aspects of religion make its adherents particularly likely to resort to violence. For the present paper, two such facets of religion are of central concern. The first of these, although the term is somewhat problematic, is fundamentalism. The term "fundamentalism" was originally used to describe strongly conservative evangelical groups in the United States, but it is useful in discussing certain movements within Judaism and Islam as well. Essentially, fundamentalism may be viewed as a reaction against modernism. Bruce B. Lawrence characterizes such reactionary movements in terms of their "affirmation of religious authority as holistic and absolute, admitting of neither criticism nor reduction; it is expressed through collective demand that specific creedal and ethical dictates derived from scripture be publicly recognized and legally enforced" (27). Moreover, fundamentalists "declare themselves to be advocates of universalist norms" that are "codified in Holy Writ" and, therefore, "require assent not debate" (41).

[3] It is through the lens of fundamentalism that the second such aspect of religion – eschatology, or the study of "last things" – must be viewed.[1] As Stanley J. Grenz explains, eschatology can be defined more specifically as the doctrine of "God's goal or purpose for his activity in the lives of individuals, in human history, and in creation" (571).[2] For those Christians involved in the present study, eschatology is inextricably tied to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. However, fundamentalist Jews and Muslims have very different ideas about God's ultimate goals and purposes for humankind. For many Jews, and particularly those of present concern, eschatological yearnings revolve around the hope of a Messiah and the reconstitution of the biblically prescribed land of Israel. Islamists (a term often used to describe fundamentalist Muslims) also await the return of Christ, but in a different context than do Christians. For these Muslims, Christ's return is part of Allah's larger plan of bringing the world under the rule of Islam. The likelihood of continuing conflict, moreover, is enhanced by the fact that the land of Israel-Palestine is central to the fundamentalist, eschatological schemes of all three religions.

## Eschatology and Violence

[4] It is not surprising that competing forms of fundamentalist eschatology, centered on one geographic region, will result in conflict. This tendency for conflict escalates when real-world disagreements between intransigent religious groups can be affirmatively aligned with theoretical models of religious terrorism and violence. Such is the case in Israel-Palestine, where the real-world ramifications of such eschatological teachings can be well understood via the theory developed by genocide scholar Manus Midlarsky. In short, Midlarsky argues that "threat (the fear of potential loss) and vulnerability" are the "two necessary conditions for the occurrence of genocide" (4). That is, "the targeted population needs to be perceived as threatening" and "must be vulnerable to mass murder. At the same time, the potential perpetrators of genocide also must experience some vulnerability to generate their real or

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[1] Eschatological yearnings are not unique to religion, but are found in many, if not most, all-encompassing worldviews. For example, Marxists traditionally long for the creation of the dictatorship of the proletariat and, ultimately, to the advent of a truly classless society.

[2] Although Grenz happens to be an evangelical Christian, his definition of eschatology is sufficiently broad to encompass the Jewish and Muslim views as well as those of the pertinent Christians.

fantasized images of threatening civilian population" (4). Furthermore, Midlarsky contends, genocide is implemented via the means of *realpolitik*. In other words, genocide is used as a political tool for one group to achieve its goals via the extermination or forcible removal of another group.

[5] Midlarsky's model is particularly enlightening when applied to the religious situation of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Indeed, both the Israelis and Palestinians face a grave threat of loss and both suffer from intense vulnerability. At the same time, members of both groups have argued for the use of force to entirely remove the opposing population from the land. Although it might be argued that American fundamentalist Christians do not face the threat of substantial loss in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, many of them perceive a great threat. That is, they consider an attack against Israel as paramount to an attack against the United States, or, even worse, as an attack against God. Furthermore, particularly since the violence of September 11 attacks, they feel themselves to be under increasing assault by Islam.

[6] Midlarsky's model, while helpful, does not provide the entire picture. This is because peoples' actions do not always conform to an objective, workable model of *realpolitik*. Why? It is here argued that *realpolitik* must be interpreted through the eye of the beholder. In other words, supposed *realpoltikal* actions only make sense when viewed through the eyes of the one by whom they are initiated. In this instance, religion, as described below, provides the substantial ideological background for the relevant political views and actions.

[7] As Mark Juergensmeryer explains, such religious conflict is often couched in terms of "cosmic warfare." That is, the political scope of the struggle is translated into spiritual and metaphysical battles between good and evil (146). This is especially likely, Juergensmeyer explains, when the conflict is characterized as a protection of basic identity, when defeat would be unthinkable, and/or when victory cannot be achieved by normal means in the physical world (161-62). A relevant example is available within the Muslim religious milieu, where many Islamists view globalization as an attack against Islamic religion and society. Because defeat in this instance is beyond the realm of contemplation and, moreover, because globalization cannot be defeated by the Islamists in real terms, such Muslims are likely to describe the struggle against "the West" in cosmic language.

[8] Eschatology often serves to heighten the aspects of cosmic warfare. Thomas Robbins writes that "'apocalyptic expectations' or visions of an imminent total transformation of the world" are "a key factor characterizing spiritual movements involved in extreme violence" (61). Why is this the case? Those with an apocalyptic outlook are likely to believe that the end-time will be "suffused with violence and persecution" against the saints (62). Thus, apocalypticism often carries with it an inherent level of violent expectation.

[9] Once the struggle has been conceived in cosmic, apocalyptic terms, it becomes increasingly easy to view opponents as the "other." In his investigation into genocide, James Waller describes how "Us vs. Them" thinking leads people to exaggerate the differences between their own group and other groups. Ultimately, such thinking can lead to the radical, dehumanizing thinking that is required for otherwise normal people to perform acts of terror or genocide (238-44). Jessica Stern puts the same concept in specifically religious terms: "Religion has two sides – one that is spiritual and universalist, and the other particularist and

sectarian" (XXVII). Eschatology, because it often deals with the final battle between good and evil, has a way of enhancing such dualistic, "particularist and sectarian" thinking. Robbins agrees, commenting, "To the degree that real or imagined threats to the group are perceived as associated with an endtimes scenario, 'enemies' will be demonized and perceived as representing Satan, the Antichrist, or some other eschatological dark horse. His minions may be violently resisted" (62).

[10] The situation in Israel-Palestine, then, is highly volatile – in part because of the various kinds of fundamentalist, eschatological expectation that focus on the area. This eschatology provides the ideological background through which violence becomes a viable solution of *realpolitik* as described the theories of Midlarsky, Robbins, and Waller.

**Jewish Eschatology**

[11] Two often related phenomena dominate the eschatological yearnings within fundamentalist Jewish eschatology: religious Zionism and messianism. In fact, it was secular left-wing Zionism, not religious Zionism, that dominated the State of Israel from before the time of its modern founding until the 1960s. Since the 1967 War, however, religious Zionism has become highly influential among Israeli Jews. Daphna Baram argues that the Zionist movement has evolved to the point that "Today Zionism means adhering to the idea of Israel as a Jewish state rather than a state for all its citizens. It also means upholding the historical narrative that all Israel's activities have been benign and defensive, and that the Arabs, the Palestinians in particular, brought their woes on themselves by attacking Israel" (34). Such Zionism is usually based on the biblical claim that the entire land of Canaan was promised to Abraham and his descendants in the book of Genesis (Anderson). For such people, the evacuation of any settlements on the land that made up biblical Israel is unthinkable. In other words, they believe that Canaan is their eternal, immutable, and supernatural possession (Anderson: 33). In addition, religious Zionism is often intermeshed with eschatological longings in the form of messianism, which was also boosted by the great Israeli victory in the 1967 War. As Stern notes, "For messianic Jews, the victory [in the 1967 War] was a modern miracle of unimaginable proportions, a miracle that indicated the imminent arrival of the Messiah" (92).

[12] In addition to the aforementioned unqualified claims to the biblical land of Israel, fundamentalist Jewish eschatological hopes are manifested most commonly in absolute support of the Israeli military and in calls for the construction of a Third Temple. Unabashed support of the Israeli military is felt most strongly, perhaps, in the theology of Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook (son of the eminent Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook). Kook and others argue that Israel's military domination of the region is a divine duty that will help to usher in the messianic epoch, even going as far as to state, "The Israel Defense Force is total sanctity; it represents the rule of the people of the Lord on His land" (quoted in Ruether and Ruether: 180). In opposition to many otherwise likeminded rabbis, Kook contends that the messianic age is not one of supernatural intervention or divine miracles, but of Israeli conquest and settlement of their biblical inheritance. Moreover, a number of such rabbis transfer the biblical commandment to exterminate the Canaanites to the present day, interpreting it as a mandate to eliminate the presence of the modern-day Arabs within greater Israel (Kahane 1977: 393; Ruether and Ruether: 180).

[13] Eschatological violence also manifests itself in the form of appeals for the construction of a Third Temple. The great problem with such requests, of course, is that the Dome of the Rock sits atop the Temple Mount – the only suitable place for a Third Temple in the eyes of ultra-Orthodox Jews. Some Jewish thinkers, including Zvi Yehudah Kook, believe that the construction of the Temple would unite the Jewish people and would thus be a great step towards the final solidification of the State of Israel (Schwartz: 174). Others, such as radical activist Yoel Lerner (who was imprisoned for plotting to blow up the Dome of the Rock), believe that building the Third Temple will pave the way for the coming of the long-awaited Messiah (Juergensmeyer: 46). Yehuda Etzion, a Jewish mystic who, like Lerner, has been arrested for his schemes to destroy the Dome of the Rock, succinctly describes the beliefs that these groups hold in common: "The one thing I am sure of . . . is that the Dome of the Rock is a temporary building. It must come to an end. Exactly when and exactly how I cannot say. But as a principle, I am sure its end is near" (quoted in Stern: 106).

[14] The situation in Israel-Palestine fits well into Midlarsky's theoretical model for mass violence even if Jewish fundamentalism is not taken into account. Israel is a small country of just over six million Jews that is surrounded by openly hostile Arab-Muslim nations whose combined populations are greater than a 100 million (McGeveran: 791-92; Gilbert: 141-45). Israel's Jewish population has reason to feel vulnerable. In addition, the Palestinian population within Israel and the occupied territories is currently substantial and is, moreover, growing at an incredible rate (Friedman: 271). The threat of loss, therefore, is very great.

[15] The ideological framework of religious Zionism and messianism further compounds the likelihood of violence. Indeed, such factors have led many fundamentalist Jews to describe the current struggle in cosmic and dualistic terms. For example, Yoel Lerner believes that the redemption of humanity wrests upon whether or not the Jews can create the necessary conditions for the arrival of the Messiah (Juergensmeyer: 46). Similarly the Gush Emunim, a messianic sect whose purpose is to form settlements in the Occupied Territories, proclaim that the Hebrew Scriptures forbid the return of a single inch of the Jewish Promised Land. They also equate Israel's enemies with Satan and argue that any attack on the State of Israel is an attack on God (Ruether and Ruether: 180).

[16] It becomes clear, then, that the language of cosmic warfare can easily segue into dualistic thinking. For many fundamentalist Jews in Israel, it is not difficult to dehumanize Israel's enemies as the faceless "other" once that enemy has been literally demonized. Yet, the dualism does not end with Israel's enemies, but extends to those Jews with whom fundamentalists disagree. The rift between religious and secular Jews in Israel is, in fact, very great. One survey from 2000 reported that eighty-two percent of Jewish Israelis believed that the relations between religious and secular Jews "were poor, that they were deteriorating and that they represented the most severe rift between Israeli Jews" (Cohen and Rynhold: 725). For their part, many religious Israelis refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of secular Zionism, arguing that those who claim to be secular are actually reacting, although unaware, under religious impulses (Schwartz: 159). Although such sentiments may be relatively benign in themselves, others are more violent. The late rabbi Meir Kahane, once dubbed the "Israel's Ayatollah," argued that the "ultimate solution" is the "understanding by the Jew that his fate lies only in knowing that he is part of the chosen people of God, bound to observe those laws and statutes given at Mount Sinai" (1988: 433). This logically led Kahane

to repudiate vigorously the legitimacy of the secular Jewish state, which he was not ashamed to brand as "the enemy" (Juergensmeyer: 56). Indeed, although Kahane, Lerner, and a good number of their likeminded compatriots have professed to love all Jews, many fundamentalist Jews were unable to restrain their glee following the 1995 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. Why? Rabin was guilty, in their minds, of attempting to negotiate away part of their biblical heritage and, consequently, of hindering the coming of the Messiah (Stern: 92)

## Christian Eschatology

[17] Christian eschatological expectation regarding Israel-Palestine is most evident among Christian Zionists, many of whom are fundamentalist, American evangelicals. Christian Zionism arose in the early part of the nineteenth century, nearly fifty years before the advent of modern Jewish Zionism, as a result of the eschatological theories of the English theologian John Nelson Darby (Schoeni: 3). Adherents to Darby's system, dispensational premillenialism, read the Bible as a complicated system of prophecies that lay out the end-times scenario of the Second Coming of Christ. In essence, dispensational premillenialists maintain that the reestablishment of Israel is an apocalyptic sign that the final messianic age is imminent. More precisely, they believe that the bulk of the Jews must return to Israel (the land which God promised them) and that the State of Israel must be restored to its biblical borders. The premillenialist system eventually leads to an event know as the rapture, when the true Christian church is taken up to heaven. The rapture is followed by seven years of unspeakable torment in which the Jews will recognize Jesus as the Messiah before the final battle of Armageddon, where Jesus will return, destroy the Antichrist, and reign in a new Jerusalem for 1,000 years.

[18] This view has become incredibly influential among conservative evangelicals in the United States (Weber).[3] Pat Robertson, John Hagee, the late Jerry Falwell, and other evangelical leaders have been among the most unshakable supporters of the State of Israel and, almost without exception, maintain the biblical right of the Israelis to possess the entire "Land of Israel" – including the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip (Gormley: 267). Many also join with ultra-Orthodox Jews in calling for the reestablishment of the Jewish Temple on the Temple Mount (Will: 261). As one may imagine, such views easily lend themselves to the endorsement of violence. Indeed, Falwell, Robertson, and Hagee have all called for the forcible removal of Palestinians from all areas that were occupied by Israel during biblical times (Gormly: 267; Hagee: 26). Such a stance shows little concern for the fate of Palestinian refugees and Falwell, at least, went as far as to completely absolve the State of Israel of any responsibility to the Palestinians (Ruether and Ruether: 178). Robertson has even suggested that Yitzhak Rabin's assassination and Ariel Sharon's stroke were the result of divine punishment, meted out from God because of their plans to divide the biblical inheritance (Strickert: 80-81). For his part, Hagee endorses the Jewish maxim, "If

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[3] For example, the best-selling fiction series *Left Behind* is inspired by this system of eschatology. Moreover, Hal Lindsey's *Late Great Planet Earth*, a thorough explanation of the system based upon the contemporary political situation (of the time of its publication), was the second best-selling book of the 1970s – trailing only the Bible – and every major American revivalist since D. L. Moody has been a premillenialist of some kind. For further discussion, see Weber.

one comes to slay you, slay him first," as a "relevant moral guide for dealing with the modern-day [Muslim] terrorists" (Hagee: 36).

[19] It might seem that because American evangelical Christians are in a relatively secure position, they would not be motivated by Midlarsky's criteria which requires the threat of loss. Such a conclusion, however, is faulty for two reasons. First, many of these Christians – and Falwell, Robertson, and Hagee in particular – view the peril of the State of Israel as a grave political and religious threat. Politically, these evangelical leaders often explicitly equate the interests of the United States with those of Israel. In their study of religious nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Rosemary Radford Ruether and Herman J. Ruether write that in Falwell's mind there was "a political commonality between America as a 'Judeo-Christian, freedom-loving, democratic' state and Israel as a Jewish, 'freedom-loving, democratic state'" and, moreover, that "America and Israel stand together against an evil world" (177). In his analysis of Pat Robertson's television program, *The 700 Club*, Eric Gormly had similar findings, reporting, "Robertson's essential message is that the U.S. must support Israel's hard-line policies to combat Palestinian terrorism or risk the survival of Israel and America" (255).

[20] Second, although the population of the United States might seem relatively safe at the present time, many premillenialists argue that this is only a temporary condition. The reason for this assertion is, again, eschatological. According to the standard dispensational schema, the Antichrist will come out of Europe and will rule the entire world. For Hal Lindsey, author of the 1970 best-seller *The Late Great Planet Earth*, this means: "It is clear that the U.S. cannot be the leader of the West in the future" (161). Lindsey goes on to comment: "It is quite possible that Ezekiel was referring to the U.S. in part when he said: 'I will send fire – upon those who dwell securely in the coastlands . . .'" (161). Hagee takes things a step further by developing specific theories that describe, in some detail, exactly how the fall of the United States will come about. He claims to possess credible evidence that Al-Qaeda has acquired nuclear weapons and that sleeper cells are planning to simultaneously detonate them in seven major U.S. cities (27). But that is not all. According to Hagee, Iran is rapidly developing a secret weapon, the so-called "electromagnetic pulse," so powerful that the detonation of a single such weapon could knock out all of the electricity in the entire United States for several months. In Hagee's words, "We will cease to be a superpower in one-billionth of a second" (28).

[21] One might think that such dispensationalist teachings would lead to a sense of reservation because there seems little reason to resist what has been predetermined. Hagee's interpretation, however, is quite different. For example, he writes: "We must be prepared to stop this evil enemy in its tracks. There isn't very much time to get it right – the stakes are high, and failure is not an option! Unless we prepare today, tomorrow could dawn with the horrors of an Iranian nuclear strike on Israel – or America" (3). There are a number of reasons for such an exhortation. One reason is that the fate of the United States is difficult for even the most confident prophet to determine. More important, however, is the fact that Falwell, Robertson, Hagee, and others transfer God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12 to the modern State of Israel. Here God tells Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse" (Genesis 12:3). Furthermore, because the United States is often equated with Israel and because the United States is currently Israel's greatest

protector, to defend the United States is, in some roundabout sense, to defend Israel. Finally, many dispensationalists are not content to sit by and allow prophetic events to occur. Instead, like some of their fundamentalist Jewish counterparts, they wish to play a role in the coming of the apocalypse. Gormly's report on *The 700 Club* revealed, "the key motivation for this position [Pat Robertson's support for the modern State of Israel] rests on the belief by many Evangelical Christians that apocalyptic events are coalescing in Israel, and that U.S. policy can and must help lay the foundation for Christ's return" (255). Hagee's call for action, then, begins to make sense when his mindset is taken into account. In the mind of many dispensationalists action is needed to defend Israel and, because the future of the United States is unclear, the effort is not futile. If nothing else comes of it, the United States should defend Israel in order to gain the blessings of God.

[22] Not surprisingly, the imagery of cosmic warfare is often evoked in dualistic terms – and not without basis in Christian tradition. The book of Revelation is itself filled with such imagery: "And war broke out in heaven; Michael [the defender or Israel] and his angels fought against the dragon . . . who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world – he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him" (Revelation 12:7-9). Tim LaHaye, author of the best-selling *Left Behind* series of novels, employs similar language by titling a chapter "Satan versus Israel" in his commentary on the final book of the Bible, *Revelation Unveiled*. Likewise, in the opening to his *Jerusalem Countdown*, Hagee declares, "The world is about to discover the power of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Keeper of Israel, 'who . . . shall neither slumber nor sleep' (Ps. 121:4). His righteous fury will be evident in the defense of Israel" (3).

[23] Dualistic thinking is, similarly, a constant presence in the statements of such fundamentalists. Falwell resolutely declared that "To stand against Israel is to stand against God" (Durham: 151). Shortly after the September 11 attacks, he also made a guest appearance on *The 700 Club* and compared the Palestinians to Hitler because, in Falwell's mind, they wish to exterminate the Jews and conquer the world. He went on to say, "These Islamic fundamentalists, radical terrorists, Mideastern monsters are committed to destroying the Jewish nation, [they want to] drive Israel into the sea, [and] conquer the world" (Gormly: 263). In the same broadcast he referred to Yasir Arafat as a "barbarian" and elsewhere referred to the prophet Muhammad as a "terrorist" (Davidson: 164).

[24] Hagee uses similar "us versus them" language. Although his chapter "Unveiling Islam" in *Jerusalem Countdown* purports to offer an "unbiased" account of the Islamic faith, Hagee's assessment is, in actuality, nothing more than a polemical caricature. For example, he argues, "truth could conquer deception if the world would recognize that the Islamic terrorists are not fanatics – but *devout followers of Muhammad* who are following his example and doing what their Islamic Bible teaches them to do" (33). His analysis continues, "We can sit around making diversity quilts and thinking happy thoughts, or we can, with charity, commit ourselves to soberly assess the historical and present-day reality of the absolute commitment of Islam to violence, to murder, and to terror toward anyone who rejects their faith" (34). What becomes clear, despite Hagee's claims to the contrary, is that precious little "charity" is extended to Muslims or their faith. Instead, Falwell, Hagee, and many other dispensational fundamentalists subscribe to a form of "us versus them" thinking in which the United States (or, perhaps, only the faithful Christians in the United States) and the State of Israel are held

up as the hope of humankind while Muslims, and particularly Arab Muslims, are demonized as the barbaric and unknowable "other." Such language heightens prejudice among Christians against Muslims. It raises volatility and, ultimately, works to produce an atmosphere in which violence becomes increasingly likely.

**Muslim Eschatology**

[25] Regrettably, religious, ideological, and political difficulties are no less severe among Muslim Arabs. These difficulties, moreover, are amplified by eschatology. Just as in the cases of Judaism and Christianity, Islamic eschatology has both real-world political aspects and cosmic, spiritual elements. Also, as in the previous cases, it is with fundamentalists that such eschatology plays the greatest role. In religious terms, certain Muslims are just as dogmatically intransigent as their Jewish and Christian counterparts in terms of their real-world claim on the land of Israel-Palestine. The basis for this claim is the Muslim tradition that the Temple Mount was the place where Muhammad ascended to heaven, making it the third holiest site in Islam. The claim is also a direct result, however, of the Islamic doctrine of the two houses. According to the doctrine, which is still accepted as credible by a large number of Arab Muslims today, the planet is divided "into two sectors: *Dar-al-Islam* (House of Islam) and the rest of the world, *Dar-al-Harb* (House of War), whose inhabitants (infidels) would one day convert to Islam or at least live under its flag" (Schwab: 340). Moreover, proponents of the doctrine proclaim: "Because it was conquered as a result of the orders of God, Palestine became an irrevocable part of the House of Islam" (Schwab: 340). This doctrine is eschatological in that it describes Allah's ultimate goal for humanity. As such, the doctrine's divine mandate regarding the land of Israel-Palestine is strikingly similar to those claims posed by Zionist Jews and Christians.

[26] The doctrine of the two houses also leads to an inflammatory political ideology. The charge of imperialism is perhaps the most common Arab denunciation of the West. The term "imperialism," however, has a somewhat different meaning in the Islamic world than it does in Western nations. For many Arab Muslims, the notion of imperialism is tied to the term "missionary" and is associated with the Crusades as well as more recent Western colonial empires (Lewis: 15). As Bernard Lewis explains:

> The offense of imperialism is not – as for Western critics – the domination by one people over another but rather the allocation of roles in the relationship. What is truly evil and unacceptable is the domination of infidels over true believers. For true believers to rule misbelievers is proper and natural, since this provides for the maintenance of the holy law, and gives the misbelievers both the opportunity and the incentive to embrace the true faith. But for misbelievers to rule over true believers is blasphemous and unnatural, since it leads to the corruption of religion and morality in society, and to the flouting or even the abrogation of God's law . . ." (15).

Thomas Friedman makes a similar argument that is more directly related to the Arab-Israeli problem. He believes that Muslim rage is rooted in the deep gap that now exists between Islam's self-perception and the reality of poverty, oppression, and underdevelopment in which a majority of Muslims currently live (134). For Friedman, Israel is a continuous reminder to Muslims of their seemingly unjust lot in the world. "How," they ask, "could a

tiny Jewish state amass so much military and economic power if the Islamic way of life – not Christianity or Judaism – is God's most ideal religious path?" (134). According to Friedman, when Muslims are killed in India (because there are a billion Hindus and they are not part of the Muslim narrative) or by their own brutal dictators (because it is in the Arab-Muslim family) it is not a major, polarizing event. But, "when a small band of Israeli Jews kills Muslims it sparks rage – a rage that must come from Muslims having to confront the gap between their self-perception as Muslims and the reality of the Muslim world" (134-35). Such frustrations are essentially eschatological because they relate to the difference between reality and the expectation of how Allah's ultimate plan for humanity should be unfolding. The results of such a failure are unthinkable. In a very real sense, then, such Muslims face a penetrating, agonizing threat of loss that goes to the very foundation of their religion and, indeed, to the roots of Islamic civilization.

[27] Muslim eschatological expectations, however, do not end with currently observable, real-world concerns, but drift into the prophetic and cosmic realms frequented by Jewish and Christian millenialists. Although there is no single, standard Muslim version of the end-times, many Muslims believe that the Mahdi (a descendant of Muhammad) and Jesus Christ (who, like in Christianity, will return to earth) must defeat the Antichrist in an epic, worldwide battle (an-Naqshbandi: 68). Muslim tradition also teaches that the sun will rise from the west at the time of the end (Cook: 8). More than that, Sufi mystic Shaykh al-Haqqani explains, divine judgment will be meted out on humanity for its disobedience: "Soon huge events will come on earth . . . As a punishment for our support [of Satan], a strong fire will come. A strong fire will blow from the East to the West and then from the West to the East and from the north to the South and from the South to the North, from the continents to the oceans and from the oceans to the continents" (an-Naqshbandi: 68). Furthermore, the doctrine of paradise, or heaven, is another form of eschatology, and one that is particularly prone to violent exploitation within Islam. It is well known that a number of Islamist organizations encourage the practice of suicide bombing through the promise that those who die in this way will be rewarded in paradise with the prize of numerous virgins (Stern: 54).

[28] Such cosmic imagery is frequently translated to the earthly political situation. As such, Islamists often view matters dualistically – Muslim battles with Jews, Christians, and Hindus are simply the earthly manifestation of God's coming triumph over Satan. Nowhere is this more relevant than in Israel-Palestine. It has already been established that the existence of the State of Israel is unacceptable to many Muslims. For Islamists, however, Israel is not simply a political or military entity that must be destroyed – it is the work of the devil himself. David Cook writes that many apocalyptically minded Islamists believe that "all of history has been controlled by a group of Jews who, because they knew more than anybody else and had unlimited amounts of money and unassailable positions of power, together with satanic authority and the monomaniacal purpose of subverting all of humanity and driving it into hell, have directed all past historical events" (20). Such a conspiracy began, evidently, with the subversion of the message of Jesus by the Apostle Paul and continues to the present day under the "evil Zionist world government" (21-24). According to this view, the world is "totally dominated by the Jews – both as a people and as an evil, demonic presence somehow transcending the Jews as a people – and ultimately controlled by the Antichrist"

(23). The State of Israel, then, is viewed merely as the tip of the iceberg of a much larger conspiracy of which the United States and the rest of "the West," driven by hidden and devilish Jewish power, are the principle players.

[29] Furthermore, the events which are to usher in the Islamic messianic age require that Jerusalem be under Muslim control. The State of Israel, then, is an impediment to the coming of Christ and the Mahdi, which literally cannot take place until Israel is wiped off the map and replaced with a Muslim nation. In a 1998 interview, Usama Bin Laden told ABC reporter John Miller that war between Muslims and the State of Israel is inevitable because "the Messenger of Allah [Muhammad] promised us in an authentic prophetic tradition when He said the Hour of Resurrection shall not come before Muslims fight Jews and before Jews hide behind trees and behind rocks" (Logevall: 69). More chilling is the fact that many Islamists, particularly Palestinian Islamists, fail to distinguish between Israeli soldiers and civilians. As Dr. Abdel Aziz Rantissi, a leading figure in Hamas, told Jessica Stern, "All Israelis are combatants because they all participate in the army. All Israelis are the children of those who threw us off our homeland" (Stern: 57). The combination of all of these views can lead to extraordinarily alarming conclusions. The promise of sexual gratification as a reward for murdering Jewish infidels is one such conclusion with real-world implications. One sixteen-year-old Hamas participant remarked to an American reporter, "Most boys [who entertain thoughts of becoming suicide bombers] can't stop thinking about the virgins" (Stern: 55). Other conclusions can be even more frightening. The paranoia induced by the supposed satanic nature and all-encompassing power of the Jews has led some of the most extreme apocalyptic Islamists to proclaim that all Jewish people, everywhere, must be exterminated (Cook: 26).

## Conclusion

[30] In his diatribe against Islam, John Hagee writes that "Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini declared: 'The purest joy in Islam is to kill and to be killed for Allah.'" Hagee then asks, "Is that *fanaticism* – or simply being faithful to the Islamic Bible?" (32). One might sincerely ask the same question of all of the figures discussed in the current study: are they fanatics or are they simply being faithful to their eschatological views? The great problem with Hagee and other Christian, Jewish, and Muslim fundamentalists, is that they equate their own opinions with divine truth – to stand up to a fundamentalist is to resist God. As such, fundamentalists become completely convinced of the absolute truth of their perspectives. After all, how can God be wrong? When destructive eschatological imagery is added to the picture, violence, in word if not always in deed, is the natural outcome.

[31] Because it is the sight of the intense eschatological longings of three of the world's great religions, Israel-Palestine has become a hotbed of end-times speculation and of vitriolic outbursts. Thankfully, none of these fundamentalist groups have possessed the *realpolitikal* power to enact that which their eschatological views seem to require. Their violence has been limited to isolated suicide bombing, aggressive settlements, and, most often, to vicious diatribes. But what the theories of Midlarsky, Robbins, and Waller seem to suggest is that the potential for more grievous acts of violence is very great. Let us hope that such potential is never realized.

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