

Londonderry Free Presbyterian Church



“HEZBOLLAH v. ISRAEL: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE MIDDLE EAST CRISIS”

by Dr. Ian Brown (7-26-2006)

“Conflict in the Middle East flows from generation to generation like a river of tears and bad blood,” observed Mart DeHaan.

From the days of Abraham, when this conflict was sparked by the birth of Ishmael in Abraham’s house (Genesis 16&21), an unending current of personal rejection, revenge, and mutual loss has been evident between Israel and many of its Arab neighbours.

Some of the most bitter battles in this struggle have been fought on the soil of Lebanon.

After the 1948 Arab-Israeli war, 110,000 Palestinians fled or emigrated from Israel to take refuge in Lebanon.

Their numbers were swollen to more than 300,000 when the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was evicted from Jordan after plotting to kill their king in September 1970.

These Palestinian fighters and refugees who entered Lebanon repeated what they had done in Jordan; they created an unofficial ‘state-within-a-state’ in South Lebanon – and proceeded to use southern Lebanon as a base for their raids on northern Israel.

- In 1978, Israel invaded Lebanon in an attempt to root out the Palestinian militants.

The United Nations sprang into action, and passed UN Resolutions 425 and 426, which called for the immediate withdrawal of Israeli forces and an end to military action in Lebanon. At the end of their operation, Israeli forces withdrew from Lebanon, leaving behind a UNIFIL force.

- Four years later, in 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon again. This time it was in response to an assassination attempt against Israel's ambassador to the United Kingdom, Shlomo Argov by Fatah – Revolutionary Council, and to artillery attacks launched by the PLO against populated areas in northern Israel. Israel's attack forced PLO forces out of Lebanon (mostly to Tunisia), and Israel occupied the southern part of the country.

In 1985, Israel withdrew its forces from parts of Lebanon and remained in a 4-6 km deep strip of southern Lebanon named by Israel "The Security Zone," which Israel insisted was necessary as a protective measure to defend its Northern towns against Katyusha rockets. This occupation lasted until 2000.

However, this freedom from northern attacks was not set to last.

The 1982 'Peace for Galilee War' was no sooner over, with one terrorist organisation (PLO) being evicted, than another entered southern Lebanon ... in the form of a new grouping, Hezbollah.

Toward the end of 1982, Iran sent fighters from its 'Iranian Revolutionary Guards' to help in the establishment of a revolutionary Islamic movement in Lebanon. This Hezbollah organisation was established as a body for Shi'ite fundamentalists, led by religious clerics, whose members would participate in the 'Jihad' - Holy War - against Israel. The use of terror would be their principal means of attaining political objectives.

Following the withdrawal of the main body of IDF troops from Lebanon in 1985, with Iranian and Syrian backing, Hezbollah began to establish an extensive military network in the Ba'albek area and Beqa'a Valley. It established storage depots for weapons, recruited activists and fighters, and provided widespread aid to residents in S. Lebanon, such as the donation of money, equipment, medical supplies, etc., to gain support from the local population in favour of Hezbollah's activities in the South. Thousands of Hezbollah activists and members have since spread into the Shi'ite neighbourhoods in southern and western Beirut as well as into southern Lebanon, recruiting additional activists and fighters among the local Shi'ite populations.

- One of the first acts of the newly formed Hezbollah in 1983 was to launch a truck-bomb attack against the Beirut barracks of peace-keeping forces. This attack cost the lives of 241 US servicemen and 56 French servicemen who were sleeping in their respective barracks.

- The bloodshed continued into the 1990's with multiple bombings in Argentina of Israeli and Jewish community facilities - one in March 1992 that killed 29 and another in July 1994 that killed 96.

- Hezbollah is also credited with blowing a Panamanian jet out of the sky the same year killing 21 people.

When the situation on its own border became unbearable, Israel launched various Operations to push back the Hezbollah force in southern Lebanon, such as:

- “Operation Accountability” in 1993,
- “Operation Grapes of Wrath” in April 1996.

In mid-2000 Israel withdrew its troops from the Security Zone in South Lebanon, ending almost 20 years of operation. This was considered by some Lebanese a victory for Hezbollah and gave a huge boost to the popularity of this guerilla group in Lebanon – one of the few Arab military groups ever to succeed in forcing Israel to back down.

Still, this withdrawal was not enough for Hezbollah.

Looking for another excuse to keep attacking Israel, they latched onto a dispute over a 35 square kilometre (13.5 sq mi) parcel of area at the junction of the borders of Syria, Lebanon and Israel, ... the Sheba’a Farms – claimed by both Syria and Lebanon, but controlled by Israel. (Israeli maps, verified by the United Nations, show the territory as part of Syria which lost it along with the Golan Heights during the 1967 Six Day War).

Hezbollah renewed attacks on Israel over their contention that the area belongs to Lebanon.

The Current Situation

The incident that sparked the recent round of trouble took place on 12 July 2006, when Hezbollah initiated an unprovoked rocket and mortar attack on Israeli civilians and troops in the northern Israeli village of Shelomi, resulting in five civilian casualties.

A large ground contingent of Hezbollah militants then attacked two Israeli armoured Humvees on a routine patrol of the Israeli side of the border with anti-tank rockets. The militants succeeded in killing three soldiers and kidnapping two others (both reservists who were on their last day of operational duty).



An Israeli tank was destroyed and four Israeli soldiers killed when the Hezbollah used a 200-300 kilogram (660 lb) improvised bomb. Over the next several hours, IDF soldiers and Hezbollah terrorists waged a fierce firefight in Lebanese territory, while the Israelis tried to search for the kidnapped soldiers, leading to the death of another Israeli soldier. By then, 8 Israeli soldiers had been killed, 2 captured, and 6 wounded – one of the military’s highest one-day death tolls in more than four years.



- In Lebanon and elsewhere, the attack emboldened Hezbollah's supporters, who greeted the news by handing out sweets and setting off fireworks.

- Israeli tanks and troops moved toward the Lebanese border throughout the day.

On Wednesday, 13 July, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said Israel held Lebanon responsible for the Hezbollah raid and promised a "painful and far-reaching response. ... The murderous attack this morning was not a terrorist act, it was an act of war."

In an operation reminiscent of the invasions of 1993 and 1996, Israel launched "Operation Just Reward," later renamed "Operation Change of Direction." This retaliatory strike has so far included bombing raids by the Israeli Air Force (IAF), an air and Israeli Sea Corps naval blockade of Lebanon (especially southern Lebanon and Beirut), as well as a limited ground offensive into southern Lebanon by IDF troops.



Israel's army chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz, said, "We will fight terror wherever it is because if we do not fight it, it will fight us. If we don't reach it, it will reach us."

Hezbollah continues to direct extensive rocket attacks on Israel's northern cities, including areas such as Haifa, which earlier had been out of its range.

There are parallels in what is occurring in this conflict and the one in which we are engaged as the Lord's people.

The first parallel centres on:

[1] ERADICATION.

Hezbollah has consistently demanded the destruction of Israel.

In its world view, first published in February 1985, Hezbollah insists:

- The solution to Lebanon's problems is the establishment of an Islamic republic;

- “Western imperialism” must be fought and eradicated from Lebanon (this means they want complete American and French withdrawal from Lebanon, including all their institutions);
- The conflict with Israel is viewed as a central concern. This is not only limited to the Israeli Defence Forces’ presence in Lebanon; rather, their expressed goals are the complete destruction of the State of Israel (which it decries as “the little Satan,” and views as foreign to the region and a threat to Islam and Muslims) and the establishment of Islamic rule over Jerusalem.

In an effort to realise its goals, Hezbollah leaders actively plan and perpetrate terror attacks against IDF forces, preach religious extremism against Israel, and disseminate Iranian ideology.

Sheik Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, said:

- In January 2000, “When we speak about Jerusalem we don’t want anyone to misunderstand. We do not mean East Jerusalem. We do not mean the Holy Jerusalem We do not mean Jerusalem, the city. When we say Jerusalem, we speak of it as a symbol of all Palestine and the entire nation that is under assault by the scheme of global arrogance and Zionism that throughout the past 50 years has been implemented on our land. ... Israel is a cancerous, usurping entity without legitimacy or legal character.”



- On June 2, 2000, in a speech broadcast via telephone to a Palestinian rally in Gaza, Nasrallah called on the Palestinians to, “fight the Zionists with stones, daggers, knives and bombs, expel them from the land, and make them return to whence they came”

He urged Palestinians to undertake suicide bombings such as the one perpetrated at Beit Lid in Israel where 22 young Israelis were murdered. In this particularly savage attack, bombs exploded at timed intervals in order to kill those who rushed to help the first victims.

Little wonder that, when Ted Koppel of ABC News interviewed Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah on October 20, 2000, he said, “If I were an Israeli leader, listening to you right now, I would say Nasrallah, you are asking me to talk about negotiating my own surrender, my own suicide. Why should I even continue talking with you, or anybody else representing the Palestinians, if, ultimately, all you want to do is destroy me?”

- In October 2002, Nasrallah asserted that if the Jews “all gather in Israel, it will save us the trouble of going after them worldwide.”

This is so typical of Arab rhetoric against Israel. They (a) PREACH IT IN THEIR SPEECHES.

Nasrallah’s position finds an echo in the opinion of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the ‘Supreme Leader’ of Iran. The Ayatollah described Israel as an “infectious tumour for the entire Islamic world.”

Syria - the other nation that heavily promotes Hezbollah - is no better. The official radio station of the Syrian Government, (Damascus Syrian Arab Republic radio in Arabic), carried a live sermon from the Al-Uthman mosque in Damascus on 27 February 2004.

Dr Abdallah Rabih delivered the sermon - and prayed: “O God, deal with the criminal Zionists and those with them and behind them for they are within Your power. O God, scatter them, disperse their assemblies, lower their flags, destroy their economy, and make the cycles of evil turn around against them. O God, show us the miracle of Your power on them. O God, make them destroy themselves. O God, bring down your anger on them.”

Also, they (b) TEACH IT IN THEIR SCHOOLS.

Of all the Arab countries, Saudi Arabia is perceived to be a friend of America ... and yet lessons in their textbooks - that are exported in large quantities to Muslims in other countries - depict Christians as swine and Jews as apes!

“The apes are Jews, the people of the Sabbath; while the swine are the Christians, the infidels of the communion of Jesus.”

“Allah’s Apostle said, ‘The Hour will not be established until you fight with the Jews, and the stone behind which a Jew will be hiding will say, “O Muslim! There is a Jew hiding behind me, so kill him.”’” (Sahih Bukhari, vol. 4, bk. 52, no. 177; there are many similar ahadith).

The position of this trio of darks forces - Hezbollah, supported and assisted by Iran and Syria - is plain. They want nothing less than the total elimination of Israel and eradication of Israelis!

And this is the purpose behind the Hezbollah rockets that are raining down on Israel at this moment!

At this moment in time, missiles are the mainstay in the Hezbollah offensive against Israel. More than 2000 rockets and missiles have been fired into Israeli towns, cities and agricultural villages since the current round of fighting erupted. Apparently, there are

many more where those have come from: the Hezbollah leader, Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, has repeatedly said his group has more than 12,000 rockets - most of them Katyushas.

But the missile issue is not just a matter of numbers:

- Experts agree that these inaccurate, short-range Katyusha rockets that make up the bulk of Hezbollah's arsenal (they have a range of only about 12 miles), do not pose a serious military threat to Israel.



They are a grievous threat to the civilian population, of course, and are an extremely effective terror weapon, forcing Israeli residents to sleep in bomb shelters, sometimes for days on end, in fear of their attacks.

Because of these rockets, Israeli Defense Minister Peretz told commanders to prepare civil defense plans, and some 220,000 Israeli civilians were sent to bomb shelters.

The Israeli town of Nahariya lies only 14km from the Lebanese border; 80% of its 60,000 population has fled repeated Hezbollah rocket attacks.

- However, in addition to the Katyushas, Hezbollah has been supplied with up to 120 Fajr-3 and Fajr-5 rockets, with ranges of 22 miles and 45 miles respectively.

For the first time, Hezbollah attacks have penetrated as far south as Haifa, 30 miles south of the Lebanese border and Israel's third largest city, as well as the Jezreel Valley and the cities of Nazareth and Afula. It was a Fajr-3 that hit Haifa on Sunday, 16 July, killing eight people.

- Plus, Robert Lowe, manager of the Middle East program at London think tank Chatham House, said: "There may be a missile in their (Hezbollah's) possession capable of reaching Tel Aviv" – about 100 miles



south of the Lebanese border. This city is the hub of the country, with a metropolitan area of over a million people; an attack there would represent a major escalation of the Hezbollah attacks.

Experts agree that Hezbollah, already a formidable fighting force, is growing ever more sophisticated. It has augmented its arsenal of rockets with innovative technology such as night vision and has flown remote-controlled drones, or Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, over northern Israel at least twice since 2004.

Who is supplying Hezbollah with this kind of weaponry?

... Iran.

“This relationship with Iran has been going on for more than a decade and has led to the exchange of steadily more sophisticated technologies,” said Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington.

According to intelligence sources, a major weapons consignment destined for Hezbollah arrived at Damascus airport from Iran in March. This Iranian consignment was transported in a military convoy through Syria and along Lebanon’s Bekaa Valley to Hezbollah bases in south Lebanon. The convoy had received an official transit permit from the Lebanese government, which knew not only the precise nature of the shipment but also its destination.

Hezbollah’s leader, Hasan Nasrallah, said the kidnapping of the Israeli soldiers had been planned for months and was aimed at forcing negotiations that would win the release of three Lebanese held in Israeli jails.

“Let this be clear, the prisoners will only return home through indirect negotiations and a trade,” he told reporters at a news conference in southern Beirut. “If the Israelis are considering any military action to bring the hostages home, they are delusional, delusional, delusional.”

But we would be suffering from a ‘triple delusion’ if we believed that the only reason behind this recent attack was the return of a couple of prisoners!

There is no doubt that both Iran and Syria have vested interests - agendas - in this current conflict.

SYRIAN AGENDA.

Syria has a clear agenda in this conflict: it is using Hezbollah to strike Israel – so that it can reassert its authority over all of Lebanon, and maintain some leverage against Israel in its bid to reclaim the Golan Heights (a strategic wind-swept plateau that overlooks the Sea of Galilee and has been under Israeli control since 1967) and She’eba Farms territories.

United States President George W. Bush said (July 20) Syria was using the turmoil in an effort to “get back into” Lebanon.

It is only one year after Damascus ended what was effectively a long-term military occupation of Lebanon ... and Mr Bush said of Syria using this incident to reassert its influence in Beirut: “We’ve worked hard to free - and ‘we’ being the international community - worked hard to free Lebanon from Syrian influence It’s in our interest for Syria to stay out of Lebanon and for this Government to survive.”

When the Syrians were in control of Lebanon (the presence of 35,000 Syrian troops, spies, and interference in domestic affairs made Syria the de facto ruler of the area after the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990), they allowed Hezbollah to be the only major military force not to be disarmed in the Lebanese arena.

Syria calculated that Hezbollah’s guerilla war would bleed Israel until it would tire of trying to control Hezbollah’s attacks and would eventually agree to return the Golan Heights to Syria in exchange for peace on its northern border.

Of more concern, however, is the IRANIAN AGENDA for this region.

It is interesting to ask, not why Hezbollah launched its attack on a routine Israeli military patrol along the Lebanese border on 12 July, but why it chose that specific time.

One thing is sure: the attack was neither random nor impulsive. Rather, it appears to have been carefully calculated and intricately planned.

Certainly Hezbollah would not have mounted such an operation without the prior knowledge and approval of its two patrons — Iran, which arms, trains and funds Lebanon’s Shiite radicals, and Syria, which serves as a conduit and provides essential logistical support.

In fact, the operation had probably been on the drawing board for several months.



As far as Iran is concerned, this Hezbollah attack is not only designed to make life difficult for Israel, but:

- Deflect worldwide attention from Iran’s nuclear weapons programme.

The transfer of rockets from Iran to Hezbollah in March 2006 came just one month after Iran had ended its voluntary co-operation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which included surprise inspections of Iran's nuclear facilities.

At the same time as the missile consignment was heading to Lebanon, an unnamed senior Iranian official said that his country would inflict "harm and pain" on the United States and its allies, and vowed to "use any means" to "resist any pressure and threats" designed to curb Iran's nuclear programme.

One month later, the Iranian President Mah-moud Ahmad-in-e-jad, who had called for Israel to be "wiped off the map," made the dramatic announcement that Iranian scientists had completed the nuclear fuel cycle and were enriching uranium – the essential ingredient for a nuclear weapons programme.

So why did Hezbollah wait until last Wednesday before unwrapping those missiles? Largely lost in the heat and dust of the attack and counter-attack was a brief statement issued in Paris on the same day by the French foreign minister on behalf of the foreign ministers of the United States, Russia, China, Britain, France, Germany and the European Union. Since Tehran had not responded to a five-week old demand to resume negotiations with the IAEA over suspending its nuclear programme, "In this context," declared Mr Douste-Blazy, "we have no choice but to return to the United Nations Security Council and take forward the process that was suspended two months ago. We have agreed to seek a United Nations Security Council resolution which would make the IAEA-required suspension mandatory."

That announcement, (which had been anticipated in Tehran), is the likeliest trigger for last Wednesday's attack. And the message that Tehran delivered in return, courtesy of its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah, was loud and clear: Iran would — and could — inflict 'harm and pain' on US interests; and not just in the Middle East!

This was emphasised in a report to the US Congress in January this year by the new American intelligence supremo, John D. Negroponte. He noted that Iran was perfectly capable of sparking a wide conflict if it felt threatened. Hezbollah, he added, is "Iran's main terrorist ally, which has a worldwide support network and is capable of attacks against US interests if it feels its Iranian patron is threatened."

Also, as far as Iran is concerned, this battle in Lebanon furthers its aims for:

- Dominion of the Middle East and, ultimately, the global triumph of Islam.

On Tuesday, 18 July 2006, Iranian President Mah-moud Ahmad-in-e-jad praised the Hezbollah attacks and claimed: "The day of happiness for the region is near. The world is on the verge of great changes." He accused Israel of "playing with fire."

Douglas Davis, in an article for 'The Spectator,' entitled, 'Iran Has Declared War On The Rest Of The World,' he explained that because of "the current struggle, what should be

known as the Iran-Israel War ... we all know now, if we didn't before, that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad meant exactly what he said when he pronounced his desire to wipe Israel off the map. He is perfectly willing to have a democratic, reviving Lebanon sacrificed merely as an opening skirmish."

Much is riding on the outcome of the current conflict, not only for Israel but also for the rest of the world ... a slew of states in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East itself will all be affected by this. This battle in Lebanon is part of a much wider Shia Islamic conspiracy:

- Former Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff, General Moshe Yaalon, points to a broader Hezbollah agenda: "Hezbollah ideology is not just about Lebanon or about Israel. Hezbollah ideology is Iranian revolutionary, Shia extremist ideology, which means to impose Islam everywhere possible."

Even Sunni Muslims have a deep fear of the emergence of a "Shia crescent" of power that would run from Iran, through Iraq, to Syria (a largely Sunni country led by a Shia splinter group) and to southern Lebanon itself.

- Another commentator, David Selbourne, under the headline, 'The Islamists Are Winning' sees the fighting in Lebanon through a wide-angle lens: "Despite the heat and harm-doing of the present local warfare, the battlefield in the Levant is merely one front, and a minor front at that, in the wider conflict between the Islamic and the non-Muslim worlds ... — a war now being fought, with differing degrees of intensity and in different ways, from Afghanistan to the Horn of Africa, from the Caucasus to Kashmir, from Nigeria to Xinjiang, and from the Levant to South-East Asia — has finally been vanquished."

"Above all, the weapons aimed at Israel are not merely the Katyusha, the Raad 2 and 3, the Iranian Fajr and the Zelzal. Rather, they are the weapons of the Ummah — the community of resurgent Islam, the Church Militant of the 21st century — weapons which are now deployed across the globe. Or, as Hezbollah's leader put it last weekend, 'Hezbollah is not fighting a battle for Hezbollah, or even for Lebanon. We are now fighting a battle for the [Islamic] nation'."

Even allowing for Muslim rhetoric, with its language of blood, fire and sword, Nasrallah's warning should be taken seriously. The confidence shown by Nasrallah and of other fire-breathing Islamic 'clerics' makes clear that the advance of the 'Islamic nation' has got the non-Muslim world, and above all the United States, in growing trouble!

- America's leaders themselves are unable to decide who and what they are fighting — whether it is Islam, 'Islamic radicalism' or 'terror.'

- And while they strike out against either or all of these enemies in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, etc., they have yet to realise the fact that many of these terrorist organisations are being funded directly from contributions raised among Muslim populations in the USA!



Extermination of Israel is the name of the game for Hezbollah, Iran and Syria ... and Israel, quite understandably, is determined to resist this cross-border missile threat to its towns and cities by applying a blunt lesson in deterrence. It has vowed to "finish the job" on Hezbollah, bombarding its infrastructure before seeking to establish a buffer zone and the deployment of an international force.

The Israeli Cabinet authorised "severe and harsh" retaliation on Lebanon after the kidnapping and killing of its soldiers. Israel's chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz, told Israel's Channel 10, "If the soldiers are not returned, we will turn Lebanon's clock back 20 years." Prime Minister Ehud Olmert promised Lebanon a "very painful and far-reaching response."

A comprehensive assault on Hezbollah would require a move into the strategically important Bekaa Valley, a step that would send alarm bells ringing in Syria, risking an even wider confrontation.

To set the present unrest against a BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

There is no doubt that:

- God chose Israel out of all the peoples of earth to have a special place in the history of redemption through Jesus the Messiah. Deuteronomy 7:6 says, "For thou [art] an holy people unto the LORD thy God: the LORD thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that [are] upon the face of the earth."
- He promised the land of Canaan to Abraham and his seed (cf. Genesis 13:15; Genesis 26:3-4; Genesis 35:10-12; Deuteronomy 34:4) and the boundaries of that land were clearly drawn, "from the river of Egypt unto the ... river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18).
- God assured them of penalties should they disobey Him - they would be punished and scattered throughout the world (Deuteronomy 28:15, 63-64; Matthew 21:43); and of a return to the land He had appointed for them (Deuteronomy 30:3-5).

The most notable occupants of Palestine during Israel's exile, were the Arabs who settled there from surrounding nations. Obviously, having lived in Palestine for several hundred years, the Arabs claim a right to the land.

- The New Testament repeats the promise that God has a future for Israel (Romans 11:25-27), and many see the return of Jews to their land since 1948 as a fulfillment of the prophecies in Ezekiel 20:33-35 and Ezekiel 36:16-24.

The major problem is that most Jews have returned to their ancient land in unbelief. Most of the Jewish people are at enmity with God. They reject the Gospel of Jesus as their Messiah (Romans 11:28).

This signals to me that I must act with caution in endorsing everything modern Israel does!

- Keeping in mind the promises God has made to this nation, I have a sympathy for her in her plight.

- I agree with her right to repel terrorist attacks, and often admire her stoical determination.

- However, I must be cautious and try to distinguish between what God is doing in Israel and what Israel herself is doing, with or without the approval of God.

I know that human error always intermingles with the purposes of God – that we often try to be wiser than, and run ahead of, God.

The early history of the nation of Israel is a supreme object lesson of this: at the age of 85, Abraham - “the father of a great nation” was still without a child and heir. Believing that his wife Sarah could no longer have a child of her own, the couple decided it was time for them to act outside of God and solve their own problem (Genesis 16:3). Within a year Ishmael was born to Hagar, Sarah’s maid.

Now there were two wives and two sons competing for Abraham’s affection. The house was not big enough for all of them. Abraham asked Hagar and Ishmael to leave ... and though they went into the wilderness and were about to die, Heaven responded tenderly to their tears (Genesis 21:17-20), the Angel of the Lord preserved them, and a rather troubling prophecy was made concerning Ishmael (Genesis 16:12): “And he will be a wild man (literally, a ‘wild donkey’); his hand [will be] against every man, and every man’s hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.”

What is happening in the Middle East is Abraham’s estranged children are now fighting over his legacy ... and the bitterness of this fight proclaims to me that one of the chief lessons we may derive from this conflict is how much we need Christ – the Prince of Peace!

In terms of a SPIRITUAL APPLICATION

Our enemy, like Israel's, is intent on our total destruction; 1 Peter 5:8&9: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: 9 Whom resist stedfast in the faith"

For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work his woe
His craft and power are great
And armed with cruel hate

There are no half-measures with him ... and no sooner does he back, off until the offensive is renewed with terrible ferocity again.

[1] Eradication;

[2] EVALUATION.

Any assessment of this war must include a (a) PHYSICAL EVALUATION.

CASUALTIES, in other words.

Through figures cited may not be very accurate, to date the hostilities have cost:



- 392 Lebanese lives
- and 41 Israeli deaths.

It is claimed that very few Hezbollah fighters have been killed and that most of the Lebanese who have died have been civilians.

Dan Halutz, former Israel Air Force commander, claimed that close to 100 Hezbollah fighters had been killed.

However, Hezbollah have only confirmed a small number of casualties so far and the exact figure remains unclear.

Understandably, publicity has centred on civilian deaths.

Israel has been accused of intentionally targeting civilian infrastructure and causing numerous civilian deaths.



In its defence, Israel has stated that “Hezbollah has a huge arsenal and has fired 1,000 missiles at us. We are acting in self-defence. We are targeting only military objectives, including transport facilities that Hezbollah can use, but you have to remember that Hezbollah often hides in civilian areas. We sent flyers and gave other warnings to civilians to leave before our attacks.”

- No area seems safe, - although

TV reports suggest that vast parts of Lebanon are not being hit by Israeli warplanes.

- Advice given by the Australian Foreign Minister, Alexander Downer, stated that any Australians stuck in the south of Lebanon should stay away from Hezbollah defensive positions and remain in their homes. “Stay put but make sure you keep well away from Hezbollah or any Hezbollah infrastructure. If they do that - they should be all right,” Mr Downer said.

One fact that does not seem to receive as much media attention is that Hezbollah has indiscriminately fired more than 2000 artillery rockets at civilian areas in Israel throughout the conflict, landing in all major cities of northern Israel including Haifa, Nazareth, Tiberias, Nahariya and Safed. Approximately 750,000 people - or 12% of Israel’s population currently live in areas that are being targeted by this guerrilla group.

‘Human Rights Watch’ stated on 18 July that “Hezbollah’s attacks [on Haifa] were at best indiscriminate attacks in civilian areas, at worst the deliberate targeting of civilians. Either way, they were serious violations of international humanitarian law and probable war crimes.”

In addition to deaths, due to the fighting,

- 500,000 civilians have been displaced in southern Lebanon;
- 220,000 in northern Israel.

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan has said Lebanon faces a “massive” humanitarian task that needs urgent funding. In the absence of a ceasefire, it was “imperative” to establish safe aid corridors in Lebanon, Mr Annan said. Israeli officials later said Prime

Minister Ehud Olmert had decided to open a humanitarian corridor between Lebanon and Cyprus.

An obvious conclusion: war is extremely nasty and cruel!

App: the devil never spares anything - not even the innocents - to obtain his object (cf. Egypt ... Bethlehem).



When we think of the POLITICAL EVALUATION of this conflict, it appears that there is hardly any country in the world that does not have a vested interest in events that occur in this region.

We should begin with:

- LEBANON itself!

After almost 30 years of this bitter struggle being contested on its soil, the Lebanese must have the depressing feeling that, once again, they are being asked to pay the price for unfinished business between Syria and Israel. They must feel that everybody has their own agenda – and they are but an ‘abused pawn’ on their chessboard

A student at Christian St. Joseph University in Beirut, who was active in the anti-Syrian demonstrations in April, articulated this view: “When foreign powers want to wage war, they do it in our country. We’ve been at war for 25 years although Lebanon has no weapons industry. We pay for all the Arabs.”

Almost immediately after hostilities began, Lebanon’s Prime Minister Fouad Siniora called for a ceasefire. On 14 July, following a phone call between Siniora and President Bush, the Prime Minister’s office issued the statement that “Prime Minister Siniora called on President Bush to exert all his efforts on Israel to stop its aggression on Lebanon, reach a comprehensive ceasefire and lift its blockade.”

Condoleezza Rice, speaking from St. Petersburg on 16 July, seemed to oppose an immediate cessation of violence, claiming that the ceasefire demanded by Siniora would be unworkable unless it addressed Hezbollah violence and the support it gets from Syria and Iran. She said the only way to deal with the problem is “to deal with the extremists, isolate the extremists, and put in place moderate democratic states.”

Despite long-standing UN resolutions, Lebanon has failed to rein in, far less subdue, the Hezbollah terrorists.

Before this return round of fighting erupted, the Lebanese government was under international pressure to deploy troops in the south of the country to rein in Hezbollah guerrillas - but even then, many considered it too weak to do this without deeply fracturing the country.

An Italian paper quoted Lebanese Prime Minister Fuad Saniora on Thursday, 14 July 2006, as making his strongest statement yet against the Shiite militant group. The Milan-based newspaper 'Corriere della Sera' quoted him as saying in an interview that Hezbollah has created a "state within a state," adding: "The entire world must help us disarm Hezbollah. But first we need to reach a cease-fire."

But Saniora issued a statement denying the statement. In a dramatic reverse, he said he told the paper that the international community must help press Israel from Chebaa Farms, a small border area that Lebanon claims and Hezbollah points to as proof of the continued need for armed resistance.

Saniora told the paper that "the continued presence of Israeli occupation of Lebanese lands in the Chebaa Farms region is what contributes to the presence of Hezbollah weapons. The international community must help us in (getting) an Israeli withdrawal from Chebaa Farms so we can solve the problem of Hezbollah's arms," the statement said.

In Lebanon, there is anger at:

- Hezbollah, for provoking Israel into attacking Lebanon (some have expressed the view that Hezbollah should be pursued to destruction);
- Israel, for unjustly punishing a country that has hardly any control over Hezbollah (According to MSNBC, "Today, we sat down with Lebanon's prime minister. He said that in the last five days, Israel has set his country back 50 years");
- America, and the international community, for not doing enough to end the conflict.

There has been a mixed response from ARAB NATIONS:

Hezbollah's attack on Israel has exposed deep divisions in the Arab world. A meeting of the foreign ministers in Cairo from 'The Arab League' (a 22-member bloc that has often served only to advertise how little in common the region has) got nowhere.

- Iran, Syria and Yemen declared support for Lebanon and Hezbollah.
- However, Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia also criticised Hezbollah for harming Arab interests and blamed them for starting the conflict (while simultaneously criticizing Israel for what they view as an over-escalated response).

They are well aware that their people, watching the frequent satellite pictures of Lebanese children killed by Israeli missiles, may embrace Hezbollah as champions. Many Arab governments have played to those instincts by supporting those who attack Israel.

At the same time, allies of the West, such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan and Qatar (Sunni Muslim countries), are alarmed at what Hezbollah has done. It reveals their deep fear about the emergence of a 'Shia crescent' of power that would run from Iran, through Iraq, to Syria (a largely Sunni country led by a Shia splinter group) and to southern Lebanon itself.

- RUSSIA.

Russia sharply criticised Israel over its onslaught against Lebanon. The Russian Foreign Ministry Sergei Lavrov said Israel's actions have gone "far beyond the boundaries of an anti-terrorist operation" and called for an immediate cease-fire.

I wonder does he have the same opinion about his own army's activities in repressing the Muslim uprising in Chechnya?!

Over the past two years Russia has quietly moved from a position of co-operation with the United States to one of rivalry. President Putin, the former KGB officer, is staking a claim to superpower status for his country – bolstered by billions of dollars in oil and gas revenues – and to an independent position on a variety of international issues, including Middle East ones ... simply because he has a 'fierce desire' for global-power status and recognition.

- AMERICA.



Washington is sympathetic to calls to provide humanitarian aid to the people of Lebanon, but rejects calls for an immediate ceasefire, saying that this would be a "simplistic" solution to the problem and should only be agreed after certain conditions are met.

On 13 July, George W. Bush said, "The root of the problem is Hezbollah," and added that the U.S. is "never going to tell a nation how to defend herself."

On Thursday (July 20, 2006), the House of Representatives passed a resolution supporting the attack on Lebanon. The final vote was 410 to 8. The Senate unanimously passed a similar measure earlier that week.

And as for the main protagonists in the conflict, Hezbollah and Israel?

- HEZBOLLAH.

Hezbollah has demanded that Israel trade three Lebanese prisoners for the two captured Israeli soldiers and declare an unconditional ceasefire, but Israel refuses.

If Hezbollah is able to emerge with even a shred of military credibility from its encounter with Israel when the Security Council calls time, the outcome will be perceived as a huge victory for Islamism. This 'triumph' would be likely to carry the seeds of accelerated radicalisation, with possibly devastating consequences — not only for the West but also for a clutch of Middle East states that are already facing a burgeoning Islamist threat: Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain and, of course, Lebanon itself.



- ISRAEL.

On 14 July BBC News reported that Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert would agree to a ceasefire if Hezbollah returned the two captured soldiers, stopped firing rockets at Israel, and if Lebanon implemented UN Security Council Resolution 1559, which calls for the group's disarmament.

Two days later, it was reported that Israel would agree to a ceasefire under two conditions:

- 1) The return of the two soldiers captured on 12 July and,
- 2) The Army/Government of Lebanon would have to ensure that Hezbollah would pull back to the Litani River.

On Monday, 17 July Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said the fighting in Lebanon would end when Hezbollah guerrillas freed two captured soldiers, rocket attacks on Israel stopped and the Lebanese army deployed along the border.

Will a COMPROMISE position be reached?

Israel has compromised, signed peace accords, and given ground in the past - but discovered that its enemy is treacherous and relentless!

- When the first Israel-PLO agreement was signed in September 1993 (the famous 'Oslo Accords'), Israeli leaders promised that a drop in terrorist activity would follow. The reverse occurred. More Israelis were killed in terrorist attacks after the accords than before. In the 30 months after that date, more Israelis were killed by terrorists (213) than in the preceding decade (209 from January 1983 to September 1993).

Overall, Israel suffered 73% more terror fatalities in the two years after the 1993 deal than in the two years before it.

CONCLUSION?

Hilal Khashan, a professor of political science at the American University of Beirut, said he expected a cease-fire agreement to be reached some time next week under which Hezbollah will disarm and stop attacks on Israel. In exchange, Israel will leave an area on the two countries' common border called Sheba Farms, which Hezbollah claims belongs to Lebanon. The two sides will swap prisoners, including the two Israeli soldiers kidnapped July 12.

"Hezbollah's days are numbered," Khashan said in a phone interview. "Eventually it will be a political party without a military wing. By losing the Sheba farms, it loses its justification of existence as an armed group."

As far as the Christian's struggle with the world and the devil is concerned:

in spite of what all the contrary voices / opinions state, past compromises would teach us that no peace is possible – and no negotiation is profitable (cf. Romans 12:1&2). Ephesians 4:27 is good advice: "Neither give place to the devil."

We have a responsibility to denounce our enemy, not allow him to operate on our territory, shake off all his sympathisers ... and take a stand against all evil!

[1] Eradication;

[2] Evaluation;

[3] EVACUATION.

The conflict in Lebanon has prompted a mass escape from the war zone.

- As Israel went on the offensive, it dropped leaflets and broadcasted warnings to the population of south Lebanon to vacate villages and towns. This sent panicked residents streaming to the coastal city of Tyre.

"We left immediately when we heard the warning, not stopping to pack or even bring money," said Ali Hijazi, who undertook the perilous trip from Aitaroun along cratered roads to the seafront Rest House hotel in Tyre, which has become a refugee centre.



Nicholas Blanford, writing for 'The Australian' from Tyre (July 20, 2006), titled his article, 'Exodus: Thousands Flee As Blitz Destroys Homes.'

- On Thursday, 14 July, about 40 U.S. Marines arrived at a beach just north of Beirut in a landing craft and picked up 300 Americans who they ferried to the amphibious assault ship USS Nashville just off the coast. The Nashville is supposed to sail for Cyprus with about 1,000 Americans.

As the people gathered on the beach, some with shirts draped over their heads to protect themselves from the sun, a U.S. Embassy official, speaking through a megaphone, pleaded for patience, reassuring the crowd that all those who registered to be evacuated would be assisted. Some 8,000 of 25,000 U.S. citizens in Lebanon have asked to leave.

One US family said they were leaving Beirut soon, but in sadness, "because I will leave all of these wonderful Lebanese people behind in sorrow and heartache."

- Saturday, 22 July, was the deadline for British passport holders to escape the country. People were told they had to register before 4pm, or stay and sit out the war. The last British evacuees, all 700 of them, left on board a ship for Cyprus.

For some, it was a peculiarly agonising decision: families were split because of those who had British citizenship and those who did not. As they said their emotional good-byes yesterday, they did not know when - if ever - they would see each other again.

Some were desperate to go; others were waiting until the 11th hour to make their decision - hoping something would give on either side, or something would change to allow them to stay. They had hoped that such a dramatic departure would never be necessary!

Some made it with minutes to spare,



including one British woman who just about made it down from the mountains in time.

It reminds me of the advice God's angels gave to Lot and his family as they impressed on them the urgency about leaving Sodom and Gomorrah; Genesis 19:17: "And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed."

As a spiritual application:

- We should be acting as those heroes of faith did, recognising that this world is not our home, that we seek a better, more permanent city - an eternal home for the soul - and should be living in the light of it (Hebrews 11):

Soon we'll leave this world of sorrow,
For the homeland of the soul

Soon will the Lord, my Life appear;
Soon shall I end my trials here,
Leave sin and sorrow, death and pain.
To live is Christ, to die is gain.

Soon will the saints in glory meet,
Soon walk through every golden street,
And sing on every blissful plain:
To live is Christ, to die is gain.
(Joseph Hoskins).

- There are people who need to be making good their escape by coming to God in by the only route possible – repentance of sin and faith in Christ alone.

O escape to yonder mountain!
Refuge find in Him today;
Christ invites you to the fountain,
Come and wash your sins away,
Do not tarry,
Come to Jesus while you may.

They should be pleading, in the terms of Psalm 71:2, "Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape: incline thine ear unto me, and save me."

... and should be reminded, Hebrews 2:3: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard [him]";

... because ...

“For when they shall say, ‘Peace and safety’; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

Hebrews 12:25: “See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more [shall not] we [escape], if we turn away from him that [speaketh] from heaven.”