



JOEL C. ROSENBERG

EPICENTER STUDY GUIDE



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Epicenter Study Guide

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WELCOME TO THE EPICENTER

Wars and rumors of war. Jihadists in Jerusalem. Chaos in Gaza. Missiles in Lebanon. Suicide bombers in Iraq. Genocide in Sudan. An Iranian president vowing to wipe Israel “off the map.” Millions convinced the Messiah is coming. Poverty. Illiteracy. Hardship and suffering. Yet always a fervent prayer for peace.

No wonder the eyes of the nations are riveted on Israel and her Islamic neighbors, the epicenter of the momentous events that are shaking our world and shaping our future.

What will tomorrow bring? How will the rumblings in the Middle East affect your world and change your future? Does the Bible actually give us advance intelligence as to what is coming, what it means, and how we can be ready?

WHY USE THIS STUDY GUIDE?

As you embark on a journey to find the answers to these important and increasingly urgent questions, I hope that you will find this *Epicenter Study Guide* helpful. I wrote it for several reasons:

1. To help readers of my nonfiction book *Epicenter* continue and even accelerate their own personal quest to understand the Middle East’s past, present, and future.

2. To help pastors and other religious leaders better explain God's plans for the people of the epicenter.
3. To create a resource that would encourage small group studies and discussions of the epicenter.
4. To inspire a new generation of evangelical Christians with a passion for compassion, a burning desire to bless Israel and her neighbors in real and practical ways.
5. To mobilize a global movement of millions of people praying daily, knowledgeably, and faithfully for the peace of Jerusalem and the entire region, according to Psalm 122:6.

What are your goals for reading using this guide? What do you hope to learn? to achieve? Knowledge is important. So is faith. But the Bible says, "faith without works is dead" (James 2:26). I agree. For me, it's not enough to know the history and future of the Middle East. Nor is it enough simply to believe that God loves all the people of the Middle East—Jew and Gentile alike—and has a wonderful plan and purpose for their lives. For me the question is, so what? How will you and I act on that knowledge? How will our knowledge and our faith spur us to love and good deeds? How will what we know and what we believe change us? How will it shape what we are willing to say and what we are willing to do? These are the questions that matter most.

If you aren't open to having your life change radically, I would recommend you skip this study altogether. But if you are truly serious about pursuing truth and truly open to letting God take you on an adventure more exciting that you could have hoped for, dreamed of, or imagined, then by all means, please proceed.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

Along with study questions for every chapter of *Epicenter*, this guide includes five additional studies with new material that will help you explore what the Scriptures say about the epicenter. As you begin, a few quick thoughts.

First, I recommend that you carve out at least thirty minutes a day, preferably in the morning, for at least five days a week to work on the questions in this guide, read the Scriptures that I cite, chew them over, and have some time for prayer. This will help you get the most out of the material and help you establish the wise habit of a daily ap-

pointment with the living God, if you don't have such an appointment already.

Second, in addition to studying through this material on your own, I recommend that you find a friend or a group of friends and meet together once a week over a cup of coffee to compare notes, discuss what you're learning, and pray together. Proverbs 27:17 tells us that just as "iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another." You may not always agree with the views and perspectives others have on this material, but you will more than likely think deeper and more carefully if you don't study in isolation. Plus, you'll have more fun and hopefully develop stronger friendships along the way.

Third, I recommend that you use a New American Standard Bible (NASB) to answer the questions in this guide. There are many excellent translations of the Bible available, to be sure, and you would be wise to cross-check passages with the NASB *and* other translations. But I have found that studying Bible prophecy requires as precise a word-for-word translation from the Hebrew and Greek as you can possibly get. My experience, along with conversations with Bible scholars and Hebrew and Greek experts, has led me to trust the NASB the most for my own personal study of prophecy.

That said, *"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe"* (Ephesians 1:18-19). May God bless you as you begin your journey.

Joel C. Rosenberg

JERUSALEM, ISRAEL

JANUARY 2008

INTRODUCTION: ALL EYES ON THE EPICENTER

“Like it or not, we live in interesting times.”

// **EPICENTER, PAGE xix**

1. As you begin reading *Epicenter*, how extensively have you been following the events unfolding around the world? Are you an avid watcher of the evening news? Or have places like the Middle East seemed too remote to be very concerned about?

2. Do you know someone currently serving in the armed forces in the Middle East or who has served there in the past? Have you

been tracking developments in Israel or the Muslim world more closely since the events of September 11, 2001?

3. Pick up a current newspaper or newsmagazine—or go to an online news source—and jot down some of the headlines concerning Jerusalem, Israel, and the Middle East. Why do you think so much attention is focused on this part of the world? Is too much attention being paid, in your view, or not enough?

4. Do you think it's important for Christians to keep a close watch on world events? Why or why not?

5. Read Matthew 10:16. What does it mean to be “shrewd as serpents”? How might this command of Jesus relate to staying informed about what’s going on around the world?

6. Are you new to reading or studying the Bible and learning about the epicenter from God’s perspective? If so, what got you interested in this study? If you have been studying the Bible for some time, why did you choose this particular study at this particular time?

7. The *Random House Unabridged Dictionary* defines *epicenter* in two ways: as a geological term describing “a point, directly above the true center of disturbance, from which the shock waves of an earthquake apparently radiate”; or as “a focal point, as of activity.” In your view, is the term *epicenter* an apt description for the Middle East today? Why or why not?

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8. Current events are not the only reason to describe Israel and her neighbors as the “epicenter.” Look up the following passages of Scripture. What is the Bible’s perspective of this part of the world?

EZEKIEL 5:5 • EZEKIEL 38:12 • ACTS 1:6-8

9. What can you conclude from these verses about how the God of the Bible regards Israel and Jerusalem?

10. Look up Psalm 122 and study it closely. According to these verses of Scripture, how are we supposed to regard Israel and Jerusalem?

11. What threats to Jerusalem are currently being reported in the media? What are some specific ways, therefore, you can “pray for

the peace of Jerusalem”? Jot down some thoughts and then take a few minutes to lift up these needs before your Father in heaven.









UNDERSTANDING GOD'S HEART FOR THE EPICENTER

While the Bible is God's love letter and instruction manual for *all* of mankind, it was written in the epicenter, through people living in the epicenter, and it teaches us much about the history—and future—of the epicenter. The narrative of the Bible even begins in the epicenter. The Garden of Eden, described in Genesis chapters 2 and 3, is widely believed by scholars to have been located in the country we now call Iraq. The flood described in Genesis chapters 6 through 8 began in the Middle East and eventually covered the entire earth. Genesis 8:4 says Noah's ark "rested upon the mountains of Ararat." Some scholars believe that mountain range is in northeastern Turkey or northwestern Iran. In order to properly understand current and future events in the epicenter, it's important to have a solid grasp of its history.

1. One of the most important early passages of Scripture as it relates to prophecy is Genesis chapter 10. Take a moment to read it now. Then read Ezekiel 38:1-6. Which names do you read in these verses that are also found in Genesis 10:2. Read Genesis 11:1-9. What modern-day country was known as Babel or Babylon back

in the time Genesis was written? After God chose to confuse the languages of the people groups centered around Babel, what did he also choose to do with these nations?

2. Later in this study, we will track where these descendants of Noah migrated to, where they eventually settled, and what modern-day countries describe where these people groups are located. For now, though, let's focus on the journey of one of the families scattered by God after the incident in Babel. Read Genesis 11:27-31 and consider Abram's family, which eventually became the nation of Israel. Who was Abram's father? What city or village does the text say their family lived in (in the country we now call Iraq)?

3. Read Genesis 12:1-5. Why did Abram set out for Canaan? What did God promise him? How did God say he would treat those who blessed Abram and his descendants? How did God say he would treat those who cursed Abram and his descendants?

4. Isn't it interesting that God chose an Iraqi (specifically, a Chaldean) named Abram—who eventually became known as Abraham—and told him to uproot his entire household, travel across the epicenter, and settle in the land that would become known as Israel? Isn't it fascinating, too, that Abraham listened to God and obeyed without complaint? Could Abraham really have anticipated what the future held for him? Could he possibly have foreseen the full extent to which the Lord was going to bless his descendants? What thoughts or questions do these events stir in you?

5. Would you uproot your family and move to another country if God were to speak to you?

6. These chapters of Genesis reveal God's heart of love and compassion for the people of the epicenter. He has a plan for them. He wants to bless them, not curse them. He wants to lead them on a great adventure, if they will only listen to him and follow him with all their heart. How about you? Do you believe that God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life? Why or why not? (If you are curious about how to begin a personal relationship with God, please turn to the last section of this study for more information.)

7. Take some time to pray for the Lord to reveal himself more clearly to you. Ask him to show you how much he loves you. Ask him to show you the plan and purpose he has for you and your family. Then take some time to pray for the people of Iraq, Syria, Israel, and the rest of the epicenter, that they would read the Bible for themselves, understand God’s heart of love and plan for their lives, and obey him as Abraham did.

CHAPTER ONE: PREDICTING THE FUTURE

“It was one thing to write a novel that opened with a kamikaze attack against America that essentially comes to pass. But until that moment, few people had been talking publicly about the possibility of going to war with Iraq. Except me.”

// EPICENTER, PAGE 4

1. *Where were you when you heard the news about Pearl Harbor? Where were you when you heard that John F. Kennedy had been shot? These were common questions asked by previous generations of Americans. One of the defining questions for Americans today is, Where were you on September 11, 2001? What were you doing when you heard the news of the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania?*

2. *Did the events of that day alter your thinking about national security, the role of the United States on the world stage, and the situation in the Middle East? If so, explain. If you live in a country other than the U.S., how did 9/11 affect you and your perspective?*

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3. Is it possible, in your view, for human beings to accurately and consistently predict the future? What about God? Is he able to tell us the future? Why or why not?

4. Look up the following verses. What is the common message of these passages?

JEREMIAH 33:3 • DANIEL 2:20-22 • DANIEL 2:27-28
AMOS 3:7 • 2 PETER 1:20-21

5. Do you believe the prophecies found in the Bible truly foretell future events, particularly specific events in specific epicenter countries? Why or why not?

6. Read the following Scriptures and note what each one says about God's Word:

2 SAMUEL 22:31 • PSALM 119:16 • 2 TIMOTHY 3:16

7. Based on these Scriptures, what do we know about the credibility of biblical prophecy?

8. Of some 1,000 prophecies found in the Bible, scholars say that half of them have already come true. The rest deal specifically with events that will happen in history's last days, in the millennial kingdom, and beyond. What are some examples of Bible prophecies that have already come true?

CLOSING PERSONAL NOTE

I hope this Epicenter Study Guide has been helpful to you. I am grateful for your interest in this important subject, and I pray that the Lord will richly bless you and your family as you bless Israel and her neighbors in the name of Jesus.

Joel C. Rosenberg

APPENDIX: BIBLE PROPHECY AND YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

The number-one question I am asked as I travel around the world is, “How can you be Jewish and believe in Jesus?” I have been asked by reporters and talk radio hosts. I have been asked by members of Congress, generals, and diplomats. I was recently asked by an Islamic leader in the Middle East. It is an excellent question, and one that I am honored to answer.

Let’s begin by considering a few important passages.

In Luke 2:25-35, an Israelite named Simeon blessed Jesus and told Mary, “Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and for a sign to be opposed—and a sword will pierce even your own soul—to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.”

Anna, the Hebrew prophetess—and a widow at the age of 84—never left the Temple, continually fasting and praying. In Luke 2:36-38, we read: “At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and continued to speak of Him to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.”

In Acts 17:2-3, we read that the apostle Paul—a highly trained Jewish legal scholar—went into synagogues and “reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the [Messiah] had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, ‘This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the [Messiah].’”

How did Simeon and Anna know Jesus was the Messiah?

Why were they so expectant that the Messiah was about to arrive?

How was Paul able to use the Scriptures to prove to the Jewish people that Jesus is the Messiah?

The fact is, the Hebrew Scriptures were filled with critical clues to the identity of the coming Messiah, clues I wholeheartedly believe were fulfilled by Jesus of Nazareth. On pages 261–267 of *Epicenter*, I describe my own spiritual journey at some length. But here, let me share with you a series of Scriptures that were helpful to me and my family as we came to believe that Jesus really is the Jewish Messiah and the Savior of the entire world. It is my prayer that as you study these Scriptures for yourself, they will be helpful to you as well.

Messiah will be born in Bethlehem.

MICAH 5:2-5A • (MATTHEW 2:5-6)

Messiah will be born of a virgin.

ISAIAH 7:14 • (MATTHEW 1:18-25)

Messiah will live and minister in Galilee.

ISAIAH 9:1-3 • (MATTHEW 4:12-16)

Messiah will teach with parables.

PSALM 78:2 • (MATTHEW 13:34-35)

Messiah will be a human child, a son, but be called “Mighty God” and “Prince of Peace.”

ISAIAH 9:6 • (MATTHEW 27:54, EPHESIANS 2:14-18)

Messiah will have the “Spirit of the Lord” and bring “good news to the afflicted” and “proclaim liberty to the captives.”

ISAIAH 61:1-3 • (LUKE 4:18-21)

Messiah will be “despised and forsaken.”

ISAIAH 53:3, PSALM 22:1 • (MATTHEW 27:46)

Messiah will be betrayed by a friend.

PSALM 41:9 • (MATTHEW 26:23-25)

Messiah will be sold for thirty pieces of silver.

ZECHARIAH 11:12-13 • (MATTHEW 27:2-4)

Messiah will be mocked and sneered at.

PSALM 22:6-8 • (MATTHEW 27:29)

Messiah will be surrounded by evil men who will pierce his hands and feet.

PSALM 22:16, ZECHARIAH 12:10 • (MATTHEW 27:27-35, JOHN 19:34-38)

Messiah’s enemies will cast lots for his clothes.

PSALM 22:18 • (MATTHEW 27:35, JOHN 19:23-24)

Messiah will be tortured and killed “for our transgressions . . . crushed for our iniquities.”

ISAIAH 53:5 • (ROMANS 4:24-25)

Messiah will be a “guilt offering.”

ISAIAH 53:10 • (HEBREWS 10:10)

Messiah will be assigned a rich man’s grave.

ISAIAH 53:9 • (MATTHEW 27:57-60)

Messiah will live again.

ISAIAH 53:10, PSALM 16:8-11 • (MATTHEW 28:1-20, ACTS 2:22-32)

Messiah will be cut off before Jerusalem is destroyed.

DANIEL 9:27 • (MATTHEW 23:37-39 AND 24:1-2)

One last thought in this regard.

Many people ask me how I can believe that God has a son, aside from whether Jesus is, in fact, God’s “only begotten Son,” as John 3:16 tells us he is. Actually, it’s not hard at all for me to believe that God has a son. I don’t pretend to fully understand it. I cannot fully explain it. But the Hebrew Scriptures are crystal clear that the Lord God of Israel has a son and that we should honor him, get to know his name, and understand the price he has paid to cleanse us from our sins.

Consider the following verses:

- Psalm 2:7, 10-12—“I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, Today I have begotten You. . . . Now therefore, O kings, show discernment; Take warning, O judges of the earth. Worship the LORD with reverence and rejoice with trembling. Do homage to [or “Kiss”] the Son, that

He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!”

- Proverbs 30:4—“Who has ascended into heaven and descended? Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has wrapped the waters in His garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is His name or His son’s name? Surely you know!”
- Zechariah 12:10—When the “Spirit of grace” is poured out on the Jewish people, “they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn.”

What do these passages mean?

What do they mean to you?

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SUGGESTED READING

- *Are We Living in the End Times?* by Dr. Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins
- *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary: Understanding the Meaning of Every Prophetic Passage* by Dr. Tim LaHaye and Ed Hindson
- *The Complete Book of Bible Prophecy* by Mark Hitchcock
- *The Second Coming of Babylon* by Mark Hitchcock
- *Every Prophecy of the Bible: Clear Explanations for Uncertain Times* by John F. Walvoord
- *The Final Act: Setting the Stage of the End Times Drama* by Chuck Smith
- *God's Blueprint for Bible Prophecy: Daniel* by Kay Arthur
- *Bible Prophecy for Kids: Revelation 1–7* by Kay Arthur and Janna Arndt
- *The Temple and Bible Prophecy: A Definitive Look at Its Past, Present, and Future* by Randall Price
- *Things To Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* by Dr. J. Dwight Pentecost

- *The Rise of Babylon* by Charles H. Dyer
- *Josephus: The Complete Works* by Flavius Josephus
- *Standing With Israel: Why Christians Support the Jewish State* by David Brog
- *Light Force: A Stirring Account of the Church Caught in the Middle East Crossfire* by Brother Andrew and Al Janssen
- *Secret Believers* by Brother Andrew and Al Janssen
- *Back To Jerusalem: Three Chinese House Church Leaders Share Their Vision to Complete the Great Commission* by Brother Yun, Peter Xu Yongze, Enoch Wang, with Paul Hattaway

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