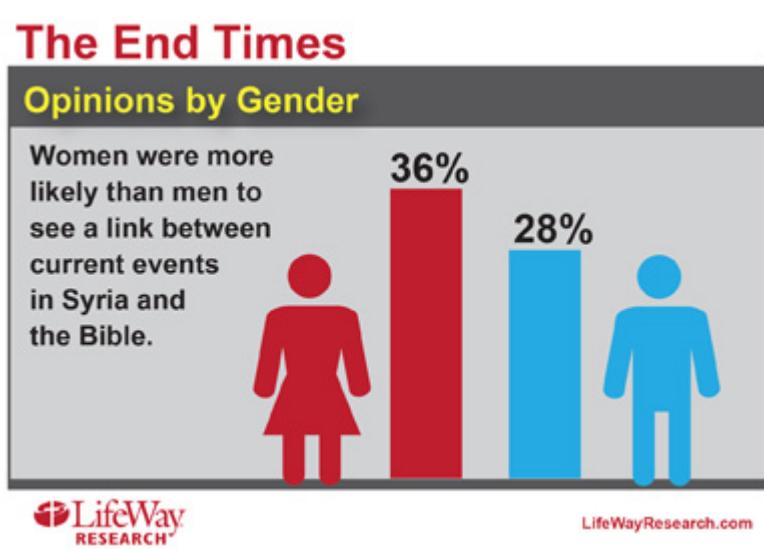


Syria crisis prompts end-times thinking

September 19, 2013

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP)—A third of Americans believe recent conflict with Syria fulfills Bible prophecy about the end of the world, according to a telephone survey conducted in early September by [LifeWay Research](#).

With the threat of U.S. airstrikes against Syria dominating the news cycle, 32 percent of the 1,001 survey participants agreed with the statement: “I believe the battles in Syria are all part of the prophecies of the Book of Revelation.”



One in four—26 percent—said they believe U.S. military intervention in Syria might lead to the Battle of Armageddon prophesied in the Book of Revelation just prior to the Second Coming of Christ. One in five—18 percent—said they

believe the world will end in their lifetime.

Those results surprised Ed Stetzer, president of LifeWay Research. “We weren’t talking about Armageddon during the air strikes on Bosnia,” Stetzer said in a news release.

The fact that Syria is mentioned in the Bible and its close proximity to Israel, however, have prompted considerable end-times speculation about

international reaction to news that forces of President Bashar al-Assad used chemical weapons on civilians.



Carl Gallups “Many students of the word of God see a major alignment of ancient prophecies regarding the end times being fulfilled right before our eyes,” end-times author Carl Gallups [told WorldNetDaily](#). “More importantly, we are the first generation in history to see such dramatic and striking alignments.”

Gallups, a graduate of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and former Southern Baptist youth evangelist who since 1987 has been pastor of [Hickory Hammock Baptist Church in Milton, Fla.](#), isn’t alone in that assessment.

Most cite Isaiah 17:1, which proclaims: “Behold, Damascus will cease from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap.”

“Now, when Isaiah wrote these words, the sword was probably the most advanced weapon that men wielded,” Hal Lindsey, author of the 1970 bestseller *The Late, Great Planet Earth*, [observed](#) in May. “The weaponry capable of laying waste to a massive city in the course of a few hours was uninvented—even unimagined.”



Hal LindseyEvents described by the prophet could be accomplished only by nuclear weapons, Lindsey asserted.

“A few weeks ago, I went into some detail about the Bible’s prophecy concerning the destruction of Damascus,” the dispensationalist and Christian Zionist preacher and teacher said in the Sept. 6 “Hal Lindsey Report” [video broadcast](#).

“We discussed scenarios in which Bashar al-Assad, in his desperation, might intentionally provoke a war with Israel by hitting them with repeated waves of chemical attacks—his weapon of mass destruction,” Lindsey said. “Israel might be forced to stop such attacks using its weapon of mass destruction—nuclear missiles.”

That would both fulfill the prophecy in Isaiah 17 and set up the events of Ezekiel 38, a cataclysmic battle with a northern foe identified as Gog and Magog, Lindsey said.

Dispensationalism is a method of Bible interpretation that forecasts a literal 1,000-year reign of Jesus on earth following a Rapture of Christians and a seven-year Great Tribulation, a notion affirmed by Christian Zionists, who believe prophecies about biblical Israel are unfolding today in the modern Israeli state.

“If one Israeli dies from chemicals coming from Syria, Israel is going to take the issue into her own hands,” Jan Markell, founder and director of Minnesota-based Olive Tree Ministries, [told OneNewsNow](#). “She would do some real destruction to the city of Damascus. Israel will send a huge

message to the rest of the Islamic world this is what happens when you mess with us."

Walid Shoebat, a Palestinian-American Christian who converted from Islam, regards the "Shia-Crescent"—which includes Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Azerbaijan—as the "Persian bear" described alongside the Babylonian Empire, modern-day Iraq, portrayed as a lion in Daniel 7-8.

"Our primary concern should be that one day our own nation will work with NATO to militarily strike the Assad regime and allow the revolutionaries to prevail," Shoebat [warned](#) in March. "Such an act will not only enable Islamic fundamentalism to further expand, but empower Turkey to commence its much aspired empire—that is—a revived Ottoman empire."

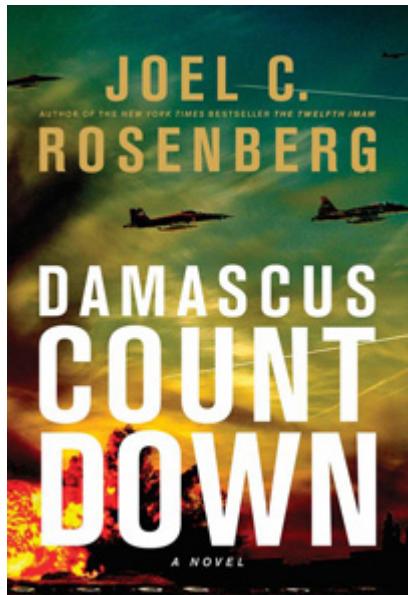


Such views are outside the mainstream of theology taught at most seminaries, but they remain popular in cultural expressions like the 16 bestselling *Left Behind* novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, which have exceeded 63 million in sales since the initial launch in 1995.

They also wield political clout. Started in 2006 by Texas pastor John Hagee, [Christians United for Israel](#) now claims 1.3 million members poised to lobby members of Congress on matters of public policy.

"Is it a novel or today's headlines?" is a marketing slogan for end-times author Joel Rosenberg's newest book, [Damascus Countdown](#). Rosenberg has met with politicians, including former presidential candidate and Texas

Gov. Rick Perry, and is quoted by media as an expert on the Middle East.



"It's a very sobering thought to think that a judgment of a city or a country could happen in which an entire city could be wiped out, but that is in fact what the Bible is predicting," Rosenberg [said recently](#) discussing Damascus on Fox News.

It's too early to know if Syria's current actions are the same as those foretold by Isaiah, Rosenberg said, and he thinks it's wrong for people who teach Bible prophecy to "try to say for certain that it's going to happen now."

But he sees parallels between the nation's current 7 million refugees and the situation described in the oracle against Damascus in Jeremiah 49.

"Prophecy says that people will flee, but there will still be people in Damascus when the prophecy happens," Rosenberg said. "The bottom line is we don't know whether these two prophecies—Isaiah 17 and Jeremiah 49—will happen in our lifetime or soon, but they could, because they haven't happened yet."