



## Unholy Terror #1

by Ronald L. Dart

*[In this special edition of the Born to Win program, Christian Educational Ministries presents Unholy Terror—a program recorded in 1998 and most relevant today. Ronald L. Dart reviews the history of the religion of Islam and explains what its modern adherents want from the world.]*

When someone blows up a building and injures hundreds and thousands of people; or maims and kills men, women, and children—whether it’s an embassy in Kenya or Tanzania or a federal building in Oklahoma—the most natural question in the world is: “Who did this and why did he do it?” Even an act of terrorism is normally done by someone *for some reason*. Who are these people? And why are they killing people? And if they’re really terrorists, why are they hiding their identity and their purpose? Normally, when a bomb goes off, somebody comes up and says, “Hey, we did this. We’re the National Liberation Front”, (or whatever particular “Front” they are), “and here’s what we want. Here are our demands. Here’s what we’re insisting on.” Then you understand, at least, what you’re doing and why you’re doing it. And if they’re really terrorists, why, when they’re brought to trial, would they plead *not guilty*? Why, in the old days, a terrorist would stand defiant and say, “Yes, I did it! And I would do it again for the cause.” When a bomb went off in London, the IRA usually stepped up and claimed responsibility for the bomb. And everybody knew, in general, the terms—what it was that the IRA wanted.

But much terrorism these days seems pointless. Or, if it has a point, it’s too obscure—maybe too far off in the future—to make very much sense to the people who are dying and to the people who *love* the people who are dying. As a rule, civilized governments are limited to pursuit of terrorists as they would any other criminal: detection, arrest, conviction, punishment. But the United States has just recently set out on an undeclared war against terrorism. After the bombings of the two embassies in Africa, when detection showed them who had done the deed, the USA bypassed arrest and conviction and went *straight* to punishment and interdiction. They said, “We have evidence that these people are planning to do more of it and, therefore, we’re going to do what that we can to *keep* them from doing it. We’ll kill the people who are going to do it or we’ll destroy their supplies; we’ll destroy their lines of communication. We’ll do what we have to do.” It is sort of like *war*. Someone said, not that long ago, that World War III would be a *terrorist* war. If that’s the case, then the first shots may have been fired in World War III.

The very idea, though, seems outrageous. How could some obscure terrorists in the Arab world bring about World War III? Who are these people and what is it that they want? Well, answering this matter in simple terms is not so very easy, but I will give it a try. To understand who these people are, we have to go back a *very* long time. If you’ve read the Bible, you know who Abraham is. He was a friend of God. God had made certain promises to Abraham and to his seed—that is, to his children. The problem was that Abraham *had* no children. His wife, Sarah, was infertile. Not only was she infertile, she had long since passed menopause. They were both *old* people and children—well, children were no longer possible. And yet his children, according to God, were supposed to be like the sands of the sea for multitude. They were to be a *huge* tribe of people, and nations, and companies of nations, and so forth.

Problem was, there were no children. Well, Sarah decided that the solution to the problem was surrogate motherhood. Old idea, isn't it. You'd think, with modern science—where it's done with test tubes and artificial insemination—that this is something in the new world. Oh, no. Surrogate motherhood goes back a long way. The difference is, it was done the *old-fashioned* way back then. In Genesis 16, the story is told that:

**Genesis 16**

*NIV*

<sup>2</sup> [...] she said to Abram, “The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my slave; perhaps I can build a family through her.” Abram agreed to what Sarai said.

And I suppose he took a look at Hagar and thought, “Well, maybe this isn't such a terribly bad idea, after all.”

**Genesis 16**

*NIV*

<sup>3</sup> So after Abram had been living in Canaan ten years, Sarai his wife took her Egyptian slave Hagar and gave her to her husband to be his wife.

<sup>4</sup> He slept with Hagar, and she conceived.

And then, when she knew she was pregnant, something very predictable began to happen: She began to despise her mistress. What a surprise. Who could have thought that this would produce anything other than domestic bliss, right—a maid-servant pregnant, a child on the way, when the true wife could not bear children? This was a very bad idea from the start and, by this time, everybody knew it. It's not entirely clear what Sarah's feelings were on this matter. It depends on the translation you read. The NIV says:

**Genesis 16**

*NIV*

<sup>5</sup> Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering.” [...]

And that's typical. That's the way I would normally expect a lot of women to respond: “This is your fault—all your fault—that this is happening.” The King James Version says:

**Genesis 16**

*AKJV*

<sup>5</sup> And Sarai said to Abram, My wrong be on you: [...]

I guess you can take it whichever way you wish. But she went on to say:

**Genesis 16**

*NIV*

<sup>5</sup> [...] “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me.”

<sup>6</sup> “Your slave is in your hands,” Abram said. “Do with her whatever you think best.” Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her.

What a shame.

## Genesis 16

NIV

<sup>7</sup> The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur.

<sup>8</sup> And he said, “Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?” “I’m running away from my mistress Sarai,” she answered.

<sup>9</sup> Then the angel of the LORD told her, “Go back to your mistress and submit to her.”

<sup>10</sup> The angel added, “I will increase your descendants so much that they will be too numerous to count.”

<sup>11</sup> The angel of the LORD also said to her:

“You are now pregnant  
and you will give birth to a son.  
You shall name him Ishmael,  
for the LORD has heard of your misery.”

That name Ishmael, by the way, means “God shall hear”. Then he tells us something about this child, Ishmael, and it’s important to know this. I’ve brought you all the way to here because, in the conversation about terrorists (and we’re going to be talking particularly about Arab terrorists) here is the origin of what we’re now dealing with today. He said of Ishmael:

## Genesis 16

NIV

<sup>12</sup> “He will be a wild donkey of a man;  
his hand will be against everyone  
and everyone’s hand against him,  
and he will live in hostility  
toward all his brothers.”

Now, the brothers of Ishmael would be the other sons and grandsons of Abraham—Isaac, Jacob, *Israel*. So from this ancient time, down to this, one set of the sons of Abraham have been the enemies of all the rest. The wild ass of the desert was the image God chose to describe the independence of the desert nomad—not a gregarious animal, not an animal that gathered in flocks, but a total loner. The hard life of the desert bred a man who could not live close to others because the environment would not support it. There wasn’t enough grass or water so they had to live *far* apart in the desert and they often found themselves in conflict over scarce resources. And through this—through this very difficult environment—over centuries, a very hard tradition arose of men who were uncontrolled, uncontrollable, and often in conflict. These people—the Ishmaelites, the descendants of Abraham and exiled brother to Israel—are the Arab peoples of today’s world. Israel got the good land and the Arabs got the desert. It was a great set up for a 3,000-year sibling rivalry, don’t you think? Well, God had intended from the beginning that the blessings for Abraham’s children should fall on a legitimate heir—the sons of his *true* wife. And God made that plain, Abraham just had a hard time believing it. And finally, in Genesis 17, verse 15, God said:

## Genesis 17

NIV

<sup>15</sup> [...] “As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah.

<sup>16</sup> I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her [*a son by **her**, not by somebody else*]. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

<sup>17</sup> Abraham fell facedown; he laughed and said to himself [...]

You've got to realize: Abraham is an *old* man; he's like 100 years old and Sarah is only about ten years younger. And God says, "Oh, yes, Sarah is going to bear a child you're going to have a son" and so forth and Abraham fell on the ground and laughed out loud. And he said:

### Genesis 17

NIV

<sup>17</sup> [...] "Will a son be born to a man a hundred years old? Will Sarah bear a child at the age of ninety?"

<sup>18</sup> And Abraham said to God, "If only Ishmael might live under your blessing!"

You know, I can kind of understand his response here. In one way, you shudder a little bit to think, "How in the world can a man sit there and laugh at God?" That sounds like a recipe for disaster right off the start. But it is kind of funny, in its way, and it's also understandable in the sense that, you know: a man 99 years old, expecting a child at 100 years old; his wife at age 90...a child is a lot of trouble for a long time. I'm not so sure he really *wanted* another child. In fact, if you read the scripture, it's pretty plain he didn't. Abraham *loved* Ishmael. *This* was his son. They had worked side by side together. He had trained the boy in the care of cattle and the supervising of men. He was his son. He loved him and he cared about him and he *really wanted* Ishmael to receive God's blessing. And God said:

### Genesis 17

NIV

<sup>19</sup> Then God said, "Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him.

<sup>20</sup> And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation."

Well, Ishmael would wait a *long time* for the fulfillment of that promise. And when it came to pass it was earth-changing.

For generations, Ishmael lived the life of a *wild man*—Ishmael and all of his descendants. I said "for generations"—for over 2,000 years—the Arab culture developed away from his brothers, the Israelites. In fact, when they branched off together—when Ishmael was living with Abraham—they all spoke the same language. And in the process of time their languages evolved into separate channels. Arabic became a recognized language long before Hebrew did, in fact. The two languages developed once this separation was made. And for 2,000 years the Arab culture—with the difficult life of the desert shaping their character, shaping their approach to life, shaping *everything* about them—brought about this fiercely independent desert Arab. He came to be *through* that world. Independence bred tribalism, and tribalism brought incessant *wars*.

But the wars that the Arabs fought among themselves and with their neighbors were nothing like the wars of Persia or Rome or Greece. They weren't wars for territory, so much, or control or slaves. (I suppose they were fought over a well here and there and??? some difficulty, and some small property deal.) But mostly they were fought according to a strict code of honor and chivalry, and they were fought more for *glory* than for anything else. And, as a consequence, there was the code of honor that they lived by. Because victories fought for glory...there's nothing in it unless it was fought *honorably*. Glory depended on the battle being fought fairly and without treachery. With treachery there was no glory. Battles were often fought by appointment, and champions fought in front of both armies. Historian [and General] John Glubb, who studied the Arab people, said:

The Arab nomads were passionate poets and every incident of these chivalrous encounters were immortalized in verse and recited every night around the campfires which flickered in the empty vastness of the desert peninsula.

It's important to understand what it is that has shaped a people, and oftentimes, long after we have forgotten the events that shaped us, we still carry the character that was built in us through all that. One can imagine the desert Arab, riding back and forth on camels, and waving sabers in the air and shouting. Actually, the image that many of us carry would probably come from something like *Lawrence of Arabia* where they were riding their camels back and forth and firing rifles into the air—much of it for display—before serious fighting began. In other words, the riding back and forth, the shouting in the air, and the firing off of the rifles—all of this has more to do with the the display leading up to a battle, and the battle itself would be fought honorably and without treachery and without any of those things.

I couldn't help thinking of this years ago when two Libyan jets came charging off the coast challenging two American jets that were out over the sea off Libya. They sallied forth firing their rockets into the air, and the two Navy Tomcats promptly shot them down. The Libyans probably considered this rather un-chivalrous, I think, because it probably had more to do with display than with anything else. The Navy planes should have probably fired their rockets off out into space in some other direction and they could have circled one another and shouted threats at one another and gone back to their bases, and nobody would have been hurt. Unfortunately, in a modern world, you can't take chances like that, and the Navy shot them down.

The religion of these ancient desert Arabs was pagan to the core. They worshiped spirits, and they would make a pilgrimage to a sacred rock or a sacred tree. By the 6<sup>th</sup> century (this era) the Kaaba temple in Mecca contained some 365 idols in that place, of different kinds of gods that Arabs worshiped. And the reason why they were there was that Mecca was a trade center and everybody came there and it attracted people for both trade and for worship. Now, about this time, the prophecy that Ishmael would become a great nation (which had not been forgotten by God) finally began to come into play. And it came about in the *strangest* of ways. It is, in a way, like a story from the Arabian Nights: Once upon a time, there was a man named Mohammed.

Mohammed was known as a quiet, affectionate, and kindly man. He had been, in his earlier years, a caravan master—what some people derisively might call a camel driver. But then he married, and since his wife was a rich widow he had plenty of time for solitude and meditation. He was 40 years old in the year 610, when he had his first vision from God. He was sleeping in a cave in the mountains when, by his own account, the angel Gabriel spoke to him. The message is known. It was this:

Read in the name of thy Lord who created, Who created man of blood coagulated. Read! Thy Lord is the most beneficent, Who taught by the pen, Taught that which they knew not unto men.

*Qur'an 96:1-5*

The Arabs are great poets, and they are the ones who really invented rhyming verse. Well, Mohammed, when he heard this, was afraid; he thought he might be demon-possessed. But when he ran out of the cave, he saw the angel Gabriel (as he put it) "in the form of a man with his feet astride the horizon." So Mohammed began to tell people about his vision and (hardly any surprise) no one believed him. It was three years before another vision came along and commissioned him to preach. And he began to preach, and his disciples numbered at first three and then four and finally, after four years of preaching, his disciples only numbered about 70. But Mohammed persisted. He claimed he was sent to restore the

religion of Abraham, and he cited all of his visions and his revelations to his disciples. He claimed they were the actual words of God which he repeated word for word. His disciples memorized all of his recitations and, after his death, they were written down to form the Qur'an. It may come as a surprise to learn that Mohammed wrote *none* of the Qur'an, just as Jesus wrote none of the New Testament. None of the Qur'an was written, in fact, until after Mohammed died, just as none of the New Testament was written until after Jesus died.

It's significant, I think though, that he presented himself as being sent by God to restore the religion of Abraham. And this harkens back 2,000 years. To realize that—for all these years, for generation after generation after generation—they had *lost* the religion of Abraham. They knew *nothing* of the God of Abraham. They worshiped trees and rocks and sticks and idols. And finally along comes a man with a vision from God to restore their original faith. There is no suggestion that he saw himself bringing about the promises given to Abraham that Ishmael would be a great nation. No, none at all. Just simply to restore the *religion* of Abraham. Now, the religion that he restored differed in some very important ways from what we read in the Old Testament about the religion given to Abraham.

According to Islamic thought, the will of God is made known to man through the Qur'an. The Qur'an is the record of God's revelation to his messenger, Mohammed. And Mohammed is believed to be the *last* of a long series of prophets including Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus, and others. Now, notice this, though, that Islam does not present a *different* God from that of Israel—only a *late revelation* of that same God to the Arab peoples. Islamic doctrine is based on what they call the “Five Pillars of Islam” and I'll list them briefly for you: The first is their profession of faith. You may have heard it: “There is no god but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet.” According to Muslim doctrine, you have to profess this or recite this at least once in your lifetime—aloud, correctly, and on purpose—with an understanding of its meaning and with intent from the heart. That's simple. The second pillar is the familiar five congregational prayers every day, where everybody puts their rug on the floor, bows toward Mecca, puts their head to the floor, and prays. The third pillar is a welfare tax called *zakat*. The Qur'an threatens with the *direst* punishment in the hereafter those who hoard wealth without considering the needs of the poor. In Islam, the practice of usury—charging interest—is forbidden.

The fourth pillar of Islam is the fast of the month of Ramadan, in which fasting begins every day at daybreak and ends at sunset. I guess you can eat all you want all night, but during the day you don't eat. The fifth pillar of Islam is the annual pilgrimage to Mecca known as the *hajj*. It's prescribed for every Muslim once in every lifetime, but it's conditional upon his means to go. Of course, these are the pictures you oftentimes see in newsreels or in magazines of the *huge* crowds of people who circle the *Kaaba* when they go on their *hajj* to Mecca. And, of course, once you've been there, the salutation in front of your name can change from “Mister Jones” to “Hajj Jones” because that is a part of your title; it's one who has made the pilgrimage.

The Arabic term *Islam* literally means “surrender”. A believer is called a *Muslim*, which is the active participle of *Islam*, because he accepts *surrender* to the will of Allah. Allah is the one God, creator, sustainer, and restorer of the world. And there's one very important thing you should know about Islam: Islam is *absolutely uncompromising* in its monotheism. This grows out of the fact that it was a reaction, in many ways, to the incredible polytheism—the total pagan worship of various and sundry gods—that Mohammed came to correct. Out of this doctrine—out of this rigid monotheism—grows a lot of trouble for the Western Christian world. For the very idea of the Trinity violates the unity of God and casts a Christian who believes that Jesus is God in the role of an *infidel*. For there is only one God, according to the Muslim. His name is Allah, not Jesus. And to call Jesus God? Well, that's pagan.

But the religion of a Arabia, prior to Mohammed, was polytheistic. Mecca was the center of it. It's central shrine was something of a pantheon to many, many peoples. There were even Christians statues and icons in the Kaaba. The Meccans encouraged all this. Why? Well, because when people made pilgrimages to Mecca to their idols, *they brought trade*. Now, when Mohamed came on the scene and began to preach *against* polytheism, he threatened both the *religion* and the *commerce* of the Arabs of

Mecca. (And you can take your pick as to which of these was most critical.) But they finally forced him to flee out of Mecca to Medina in the year AD 622. His flight is called the *hegira*; it marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.

And there's something interesting, here, that's important to know. Until his flight from Mecca, Mohammed has taught a *gentle* religion. It was full of care for the poor and concerned with social justice; patient under tribulation and patient under persecution. But when he got to Medina, everything changed. As Mohammed began to acquire power, he announced that God had ordered all Muslims to *fight the unbelievers*. According to John Glubb, the historian:

The prophet, so patient, humble and devoted under persecution in Mecca, commenced to use power politics after his arrival in Medina. Not only does he resort to war against the Meccans, but in Medina he drives the Jews into exile and arranges for his opponents to be assassinated.

Mohammed himself, however, claimed that he preached the same religion as Abraham and Moses and Jesus. It's a sad thing to note how a gentle religion that had endured persecution became itself a persecutor when it gained *power*. It's precisely the same thing that happened in the Christian church when the church, instead of being persecuted, came into power and began to persecute others.

It's hard to know with any certainty what God might have revealed to Mohammed, for the religion of Islam as we see it today varies not only from the Qur'an, but from the earliest teachings of the Prophet himself. Now, let all the serve as background, because there are some very important things for Westerners to understand about Islam in the modern world. And they have a direct relationship to the threat of terrorism and to what *may* turn out to be a terroristic war in the months and years ahead. For one thing, our idea of the separation of Church and State is *absolutely foreign* to Islam. It's important, if you're a Western observer, to realize it. Islam draws no distinction between the religious and the temporal areas of life. A lot of people in our society think, "Well, I can have my secular life—my job and all—and this is over here. And my religious life is over on the other side of my life." Not in Islam. Therefore the Islamic State is, by definition, a *religious* state. Religion and State are one.

One more thing, now, that's very important: Muslims in general do not believe that men can be made righteous by moral example or intellectual persuasion alone. They consider that *force* may also be necessary. Classical Islamic doctrine holds that the world is divided into three parts: the zone of Islam, the zone of peace (and that means those nations with whom Muslims had peace treaties), and the zone of *war*—that's the rest of the world. Now, I'll give you one guess as to which of those zones you and I live in.

I'm out of time for now, but we'll talk about this next time. We'll talk about *who* these people are, *why* they're doing it, and what *the Bible* tells us about it all. Until then, this is Ronald Dart.

*Christian Educational Ministries*

P.O. Box 560 ❖ Whitehouse, Texas 75791

Phone: 1-888-BIBLE-44 ❖ Fax: (903) 839-9311

❖ [www.borntowin.net](http://www.borntowin.net) ❖

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