

God Has Big Surprises Planned for the Middle East

What the Holy Spirit did in the former Soviet Union in 1989 will happen again in Islamic nations.

I'm old enough to remember when the Berlin Wall fell in 1989. Freedom protesters danced in the streets in Eastern Europe and Communist regimes fell like dominoes. A huge door of evangelistic opportunity opened in a region where Christians had suffered unimaginable persecution.

The fall of the Soviet empire caught most Christians by surprise. Even though many believers on both sides of the Iron Curtain had been praying for a spiritual breakthrough, few expected the entire region to open so suddenly. Many American Christians remained suspicious—especially those who had warned that Yury Andropov was the Antichrist. (Oops! Wrong again. He died after being in office for only 15 months.)

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The collapse of Communism was one of the

greatest social and political shifts in my lifetime. But when it happened I remember receiving a strong impression from the Holy Spirit, like an elbow in my side. I sensed the Lord say that I would live to see the day when the Arab world will also open to the gospel.

Fast forward to 2011. Today we are witnessing what some journalists have called Youthquake—a freedom movement in the Middle East that is being engineered by young Arabs. *Time* magazine announced this week: “The protests rippling from one end of the Middle East to the other are the handiwork of a new generation of men and women who have known little political freedom in their lives—and are no longer willing to wait for it.”

The youth movement that erupted in Tunisia in December spread to Algeria, Jordan, Yemen, Egypt and Sudan in January. Street protests and Facebook campaigns spread the fervor to Palestine, Iraq, Bahrain, Iran and Libya this month—and the pro-democracy contagion shows no signs of slowing. One young activist in Iraq, Muntazer al-Zaydi, explained the events of the last two months in this way: “Young people watch satellite TV and ask why Americans can elect new leaders every four years but they cannot.”

What’s astounding about this movement is that it has absolutely nothing to do with the U.S. military. American leaders, in fact, were as surprised as the rest of the world when Arab regimes began to

fall.

The Christian naysayers (especially those who make lots of money by selling end-times hysteria in their books and blogs) believe this is all the work of the devil. They insist that militant Islamists are poised to take over every Arab country to pave the way for the Antichrist.

Everyone has the right to be a pessimist, I suppose, but I don't believe the Bible is a pessimistic book. It's full of hope.

My Bible says Christians are called to take the gospel to every nation—and Jesus calls us to bravely preach His message no matter what obstacles we face. He does not call us to be wimps, pessimists or fear mongerers. My Bible says Christ's kingdom will increase, and that the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (see Hab. 2:14). God wants us to have a victorious mindset about the future. After all, we are on the winning team!

A few weeks ago I spent time with Natasha Shedrevaya, a Russian evangelist who has planted more than 300 churches in the former Soviet Union. The daughter of an atheist, Natasha believed there was no God until she met a tiny group of Pentecostals who were persecuted and repressed by their government. After she met Christ the Iron Curtain fell, and she began braving sub-zero weather in Siberia to preach the gospel in her homeland.

I believe this same evangelistic fervor will one day be common in places like Saudi Arabia and Iran. The same freedom that began spreading in Russia in the early 1990s will eventually influence the darkest and most repressive Islamic nations. Christians in the Middle East have been praying for liberty, and God has heard their cries.

This does not mean we won't encounter difficult challenges in the days ahead. Paul the apostle wrote the Corinthians:

"For a wide door of effective service has opened to me, *and there are many adversaries*" (1 Corinthians 16:9, emphasis added,

NASB). When doors of freedom and opportunity open, the devil accelerates his attacks. We can be sure that Satan will not give up the Middle East region without a fight.

But I'm not afraid of the Middle East uprising of 2011. God's hand is all over it. I'm preparing myself for even more of His surprises in the days ahead.

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