

# Heavenly Minded

*This Ole' House  
Understanding Islam  
Middle East Peace?  
IDF War Options  
Crust-busters  
Love Without Works*

Vol. 1, Issue 8

## **Report: 165,000 Christians Will Be Martyred This Year**

WHEATON, IL (ASSIST) --  
Some 165,000 Christians will die for  
their faith in Jesus this year. That is  
the view of religious statistician  
David B. Barrett in his new book  
"Today's Martyrs."

Since the crucifixion of Jesus  
more than 43 million Christians have  
been killed for their faith.  
Persecution is on the rise due to the

expansion of Islamic and Hindu  
extremism as well as the  
appearance of new dictatorships in  
Africa.

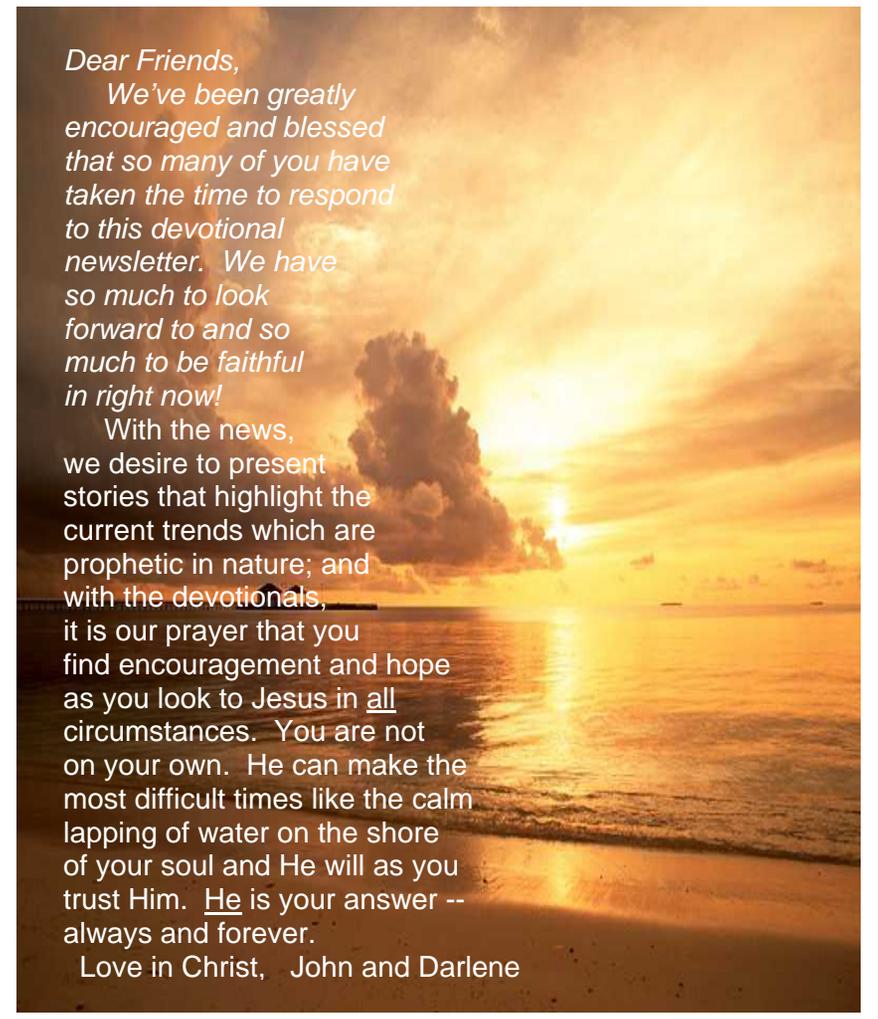
Also a persecution index  
provided by Open Doors with  
Brother Andrew lists 28 countries  
with strong or even massive  
persecution. In another 23 countries  
Christians suffer discrimination and  
in some regions severe harassment.

*Dear Friends,*

*We've been greatly  
encouraged and blessed  
that so many of you have  
taken the time to respond  
to this devotional  
newsletter. We have  
so much to look  
forward to and so  
much to be faithful  
in right now!*

With the news,  
we desire to present  
stories that highlight the  
current trends which are  
prophetic in nature; and  
with the devotionals,  
it is our prayer that you  
find encouragement and hope  
as you look to Jesus in all  
circumstances. You are not  
on your own. He can make the  
most difficult times like the calm  
lapping of water on the shore  
of your soul and He will as you  
trust Him. He is your answer --  
always and forever.

Love in Christ, John and Darlene



# THIS OLE' HOUSE



The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, And saves such as have a contrite spirit.

My hand trembled as I carefully put the tiny pin back in the loop of the watchband and gently slipped it into place. You see, this watch is incredibly special to me and when it had broken, there was just no question as to whether I would fix it. Someone said, "Are you sure you want to try?" and I answered, "Are you kidding!? Of course!"

Now consider this - you and I are broken too. We are made far more intricate than the watchband of course, but we don't work, we don't function as originally designed. We are a sad comedy of missing the mark, one malfunction after another. But, we're in good company – our dear brother and apostle, Paul, wrote,

*"...what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do... I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.*

*For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. ...For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom 7:14-24)*

In this passage of scripture, he explains clearly that the problem with us is sin or to be more specific, our sin-nature.

Some of you know that before you establish a saving relationship with God through belief in Christ, you are bound, that is captive, to this sin-nature. However, once you recognize the power of what our Lord did for us on the cross and receive His gift of salvation, you are free not to sin anymore – you have a choice and the power.

Nevertheless, if you're like the rest of us who love the Lord, you find

yourself making the wrong choices at times – malfunctioning. "...we all stumble in many things" (Jam 3:2) However, the good news is that our Manufacturer is a highly skilled repairman. He is marvelously insightful –

*"...there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." (Heb 4:13)*

and His intent in fixing us is generally not just a temporary remedy but our eternal welfare.

And this is what's disturbing about our God, isn't it? He rarely does anything the way we 'know' it should be done especially when it comes to repairs – critical repairs. Behind the lenses of sin, we see things differently. We often fail to recognize His handiwork and when someone points it out, we often don't want to accept it. We don't 'get it' and sometimes we don't want to 'get it'.

Here's the dynamic – this is what's going on. Sin first deceives us then it distorts our perception of reality. It deceives us into accepting its twisted version of what God is or isn't doing and then calcifies, if you would, our heart and soul so that we resist the truth of eternity (i.e. eternal consequences, heaven and hell) and our God.

*"...but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb 3:13)*

Consequently, we become encased in a temporal view – and it's really pretty nuts. For example, to use an admittedly weak illustration, if your child was very ill

with say a cancer and the doctor told you that there were just two options – one, was to give your child a pain pill and send him home. As a result, he'd feel better for a short while but would succumb to the disease in a few days. Or two, your little one could undergo a move to a nearby facility and receive a fantastic new surgery that though a bit stressful, a bit painful, would heal him for a long life.

What's your choice?

It's obvious, isn't it? No sane parents who loved their child would choose the short term option. Yet, when it comes to our understanding of God's remedies, we usually fail to appreciate the permanence of His eternal fix. We want the pain pill, the earthly, temporal solution because our 'lens' causes us to see it as 'reality' when in fact it is only a vapor.

*"Certainly every man at his best state is but vapor." (Psa 39:5)*  
*"...what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away." (James 4:14).*

Yes, we're broken, and God usually puts us 'in a fix' to fix us. It's because we're broken that we need to be broken! What? Yes, breaking through the hardness of our hearts is God's way of bringing forth His light and of giving us a new walk.

To illustrate this we need to take a look at the Old Testament book of Judges. There, we find a man named Gideon. Now this fellow, became an awesome courageous leader of the nation but he started out as a chicken. When he was first called by the Angel of the Lord to lead an attack against the Midianite

hoards, he was hiding. After this, God had to break through his fear with several answers to his prayers confirming His will. But the real 'shattering' came when He reduced the size of Gideon's army from 30,000 to a mere 300 so that they were outnumbered by their enemy 750 to 1. In God's eyes, Gideon still had them outnumbered but He wasn't doing it Gideon's way. Sound familiar?

But there was more than one result -- of course, God used this little group to defeat the mere hosts of Midian. But He also did something eternal in Gideon. By the time of his attack, this chicken became a real hero of faith (see Heb 11:32) -- utterly dependent on the Lord and trusting Him rather than the doubts of the devil.

This is amplified in type by his plan of attack. You see, each of his men brought with them a clay pitcher, a trumpet, and took up positions surrounding the Midianite camp. Upon Gideon's signal, they broke their pitchers revealing flaming torches inside. Then they blew their trumpets and shouted, "The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!" At this, the enemy host freaked out and began attacking themselves and soon, it was basically a 'mopping up' operation. What a victory!

But our point is that when the pitchers were broken, the flaming lights were revealed, and so it is with God's children. (Read also Jeremiah 18)

Now, this 'breaking-to-fix' doesn't always result in a battle charge into the enemy's camp. Sometimes, the breaking itself has to remain as a

reminder of the fix. Consider the patriarch Jacob:

Here was a man who was always looking for an 'angle', an 'edge', scheming to get his way. From the family birth-right to the patriarchal blessing to the acquiring of his flocks and fortune -- we see him endeavoring to make his way through life on his own terms. When he first meets the Lord at Bethel, he even declares,

*"If God will be with me, and keep me in this way that I'm going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God."* *Gen 28:20,21 emphasis added.* And throughout his early life, though he acknowledged the Lord and his belief in Him, when you study his story you can't help but sense his tremendous self-will and self-reliance.

As he returns to Canaan, (trying to follow the Lord) after more than 20 years of absence, he learns that his twin brother Esau is coming to meet him with a band of 400 men. Now, the reason Jacob fled from the Promised Land in the first place was because he tricked his father Isaac into giving him the blessing rather than to Esau. Consequently, his brother had been furious and sought to kill Jacob.

Obviously, he did not now anticipate a warm welcome from the approaching host. So first, he splits his family and flocks into two groups hoping one will escape if the other is destroyed. Then prays to the Lord, but it's almost like he's just 'covering all the bases' for once again, his clever little mind starts scheming.

He sends drove after drove of presents to his brother hoping to buy his favor.

Finally, he retreats to a campsite alone, looking for a sorely needed rest -- if he's to out-smart his brother again, he's 'got to have some quiet time' and if all else fails, he can run like he did before long ago.

But this is where God steps in -- a "Man" appears in Jacob's camp (the Son of Man -- Jesus) and suddenly they are wrestling. Imagine that, a man actually trying to overcome physically his Creator -- talk about self-reliant!

After tussling literally all night, the Lord puts the 'fix' on Jacob. With the touch of His hand, He puts his hip out of joint. Nevertheless, Jacob fights -- fights with His God! (This should sound painfully familiar to some of us!)

As the morning begins to dawn, his carnal strength is broken and he finally cries out for the Angel to bless him. Now, this was not a victorious cry, but as Hosea 12:4 describes, it was a pitiful cry of desperation and weeping.

At last, this is where God wants him -- he has come to the end of himself. He's held on to the Lord but let go of his schemes, his insufficient self-sufficiency. He is no longer fighting with the Lord but rather clinging to Him. He won't let go until he gets God's help.

The Lord then proclaims that this attitude indeed has power with God and men. That is, his utter dependence on the Lord. Consequently, the Lord does bless him and Jacob is changed. Not only does God deliver him from his

brother, but from himself as well -- his far greater enemy.

And self-will, being the besetting sin that it is, God also leaves Jacob broken physically in order to remind him of the spiritual fix. You see, he limped the rest of his earthly life.

Now, you might respond, "How could a broken body fix anything?" Consider this -- it was the brokenness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, that made it possible for us to be made whole.

*"...the Lord Jesus on the night in which He was betrayed took bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." (1Cor 11:23,24)*

And so, as we trust in Jesus, that is fall on Him -- we ourselves will likewise be broken --

*"The stone (Jesus) which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone, ... And whoever falls on this stone will be broken;" (Mat 21:42-44)* For it is in that state that we get fixed for the long-term -- the "long tomorrow" -- the eternal repair.

I used to like watching this TV show called "This Old House". In it, the crew would, over a series of episodes, take an old house -- one with potential -- and completely re-make it. I mean, they would rip out any and everything that was unnecessary for their desired end result. Then they would painstakingly rebuild it into an amazing dwelling. I real home.

And I've often thought of myself as that ole' house in a way. But, unlike Bob Villa and the boys, who did

such a marvelous job only to have another 'burn-able' building, our Father in heaven is making us for an eternal home (and an eternal home for us!) – more spectacular than mere words can describe!

The final fix on this ole' house is when we are united with our new home in heaven. Until then, don't despair during His repairs. The big, BIG picture is our eternal welfare – and because our God is good and kind and infinitely capable, we can trust Him for the results!

***“When the true story of all things shall be known, then will it appear how precious in God's sight, how***

***powerful in his hands, were many broken things. Broken earthly hopes will be found to have been necessary to the bringing of the better hope which endures forever. Broken bodily constitutions will be found to have been needful in some cases to the attainment of that land where the body shall be weary and sore no more; broken earthly fortunes, to the winning of the wealth beyond the reach of rust and moth and thief; broken earthly honor, to the being crowned with the diadem which fades not away.” P.B. Power***



## ***Love Without Works is Dead***

As I was reading a fascinating church history book, a special passage caught my eye. It stated reasons why the Gospel spread so rapidly during the early church period. It so encouraged and convicted me, I'd like to share it.

First, there was a burning conviction among the Christian believers that Jesus was absolutely the Son of God, that He rose from the dead and that they had been wonderfully redeemed out of a world in rigor mortis. They were so bursting over with this certainty they couldn't keep from sharing it.

Second, they believed that, "only the active love of God could make the Christian life possible and direct the believer outward to the needs of his fellow men." The 'pagans' would remark, "See how much the Christians love each other!"

This kind of love found expression in the care of the poor, of widows and orphans, in visits to brothers in prisons and to those condemned to a living death in the mines as well as acts of compassion during a famine, earthquake or war. Even Emperor Julian (332 – 363 AD) said that, "it was a scandal that there was not a single," one, "who was a beggar and that they cared not only for their own poor but

for ours as well, while those who are Romans look in vain for the help that we should render them..."

Finally persecution helped to spread the Christian faith. The attitude of the martyrs and particularly of the young women who suffered along with the men made a deep impression on non-believers.

This was so convicting as I sat and pondered these points. An old Christian song came to my remembrance – "They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love..." and I as a thought of my own life, I whispered, "I hope so."

The only way the early church was able to live this way, to keep their zeal, was because they truly believed Jesus' words and knew where they were headed. That gave them the drive and confidence to live out their faith.

They had heavenly perspectives – this world wasn't their home. They were even eager to be martyrs for the Lord if necessary because they knew their ultimate destination. They took care of their brothers because they remembered what Jesus said – "Love your neighbor as yourself." and they sincerely obeyed from their hearts. The Bible says "Faith without works is dead" (James 2:26) and that "faith works through love." (Gal 5:6) God help me to carry on their example.

*Darlene*

## Crust-busters

Have you looked in a mirror recently? You should. What you'll see will shock you. At least, it would if you knew what you were supposed to look like. You see, what you're beholding is filled with and ravaged by sin.

Now, if you are not born again by faith in the Messiah, Jesus, what you see is all you've got (and it's rapidly falling apart). On the other hand, if you are saved by believing in what the Lord did on your behalf – dying on the cross for your sins and rising again – what you see in that mirror will one day soon be amazingly transformed.

And here's a question for you who know the Lord – why the wait? No, not weight? Wait. Why does God wait to complete this transformation? I'm ready now! (I think...) I mean, I'm just sick and tired of the sinful old man – oh, not just this body's pitiful appearance but that old sin-nature that presents me with a nearly constant struggle to do what's good and right – and not to do what's bad and wrong.

Why not just completely transform me instantly when I believe? Now, I know there was definitely a difference when I got saved, there is for everyone! At the moment of salvation, we are finally set free from the penalty and power of sin; the eternal penalty and its former power over our lives..

But God doesn't remove that crusty old man yet. I am forced to fight with him daily to break through his crustiness. (Now, admittedly,

sometimes I don't deal with him and the results are really ugly!) But why the wait? Let's do it now, Lord!

### Ever feel that way?

Now, being the crazy nature-lover that I am, I can appreciate this answer and hope you can too. The Bible says that the firmament, that is nature, shows His handiwork (Psa 19:1). This is clearly evident in its beauty, its majesty and its intricacy, but also in the spiritual lessons God displays if we'll pay attention.

There's a wonderful parallel to observe – the lowly caterpillar. Here he goes, inching slowly towards a tasty leaf. And when he finally gets there, he just eats and eats – feeding himself seems to be the only goal in his pitifully limited life. From one leaf-binge to another, he slowly creeps.

But then, suddenly, he gets it into his little caterpillar mind that there's more to life than chlorophyll and he puts himself in a real predicament – dangling by a thread so to speak. You see, he realizes he's 'out on a limb' and it's time to 'turn over a new leaf', to 'branch out' (sorry). Anyway, he takes this whole new course, this leap of faith – and there's a radical change.

Yet to those watching, it's a conundrum, a mystery, a seeming blunder because he's now living in a chrysalis – a very 'limited' life in the world's eyes – no leaf parties, no upward mobility. I mean, life is over, right?

Still, while his fat-cat(erpillar) buddies scorn or laugh or scratch their little caterpillar heads, a metamorphosis is taking place – a dramatic transformation. Within that shell, a whole new creature is being

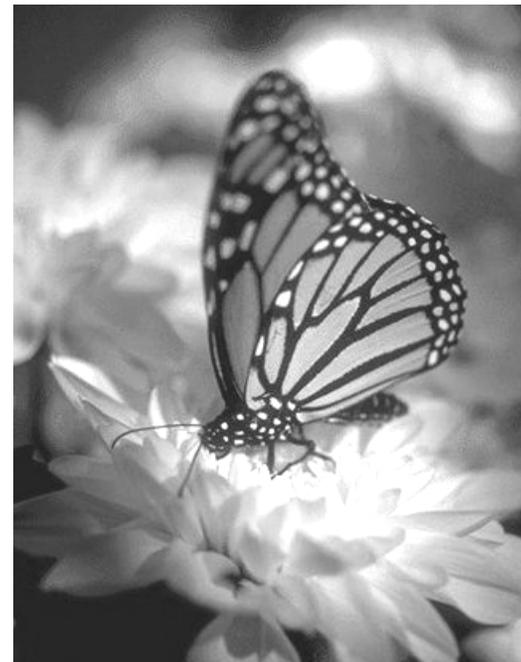
formed (2Cor 5:17). And when the time is right, a struggle begins inside.

At first, the shell – what's left of the old caterpillar resists. But then, there's a crack ... then another. Slowly, and with tremendous effort, this beautiful new creature emerges – fighting and struggling, then resting, then fighting and struggling. You almost feel sorry for him.

Finally, as he breaks free of the old caterpillar shell, he spreads forth his beautiful new wings. Drinking in the sunlight of a new world, he flies over the old world of leaves and twigs. On the breath of God's Spirit, so to speak, in the light of His Son, he now looks for flowers – a whole new diet, a new life, a new freedom – completely unimaginable to the old caterpillar. But the struggle to emerge was very important.

*A scientist studying this phenomenon, cut open the chrysalis just as the butterfly began to emerge, and guess what happened? Instead of helping it, he actually impaired its ability to fly. He found that in the course of the struggle, the breaking loose (that is, with the old caterpillar), the veins of the new butterfly's wings were filled with the fluid that causes them to stiffen and expand. No struggle, no flight – a new creature but no lift-off.*

And so it is with us who believe in Christ. Upon getting saved, we indeed change. Though the world perceives us as 'constrained', we are constrained by love (2 Cor 5:14)



and an inward transformation now begins. As we grow in the Lord, we start to sense the hardness of the old man and the closer we come, by relationship, to the Lord, the more we detest its influence. We want to be free from it.

But the struggle is important and necessary for in it we learn to make good choices – to resist evil and to cling to good. Our eternal character is shaped. We are humbled by the honest assessment of our old nature and we are strengthened as the living waters of God's Spirit course through our spiritual 'veins', preparing us to fly. And fly we will!

So don't be discouraged when the 'old man' rears its ugly head. Fight the good fight (1 Tim 6:12, 2 Tim 4:7).

You will emerge one day soon into a whole new world with a new body, a new perspective, a new life – that for which you were born!