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BILL MOYERS: Welcome to the JOURNAL.

Talk of war with Iran has been on the lips of armchair warriors all week, many of them the same voices that four and a half years ago called for invading Iraq. From former UN Ambassador John Bolton to neo-conservative icon Norman Podheretz to RUPERT MURDOCH's pundits at FOXnews.

In the NEW YORKER, investigative reporter Seymour Hersh called launching an attack against Iran practically a done deal.

But as the drumbeat for war against Iran grew louder this week, you had to wonder if anyone beating those drums ever stopped to ask how an American first strike on Iran would go over with the Iranians.

I don't mean Ahmadinejad or the ayatollahs, who would use the provocation to consolidate their hold on power. I mean the man and woman in the street.

You may remember the name Shareen Abadi. She won The Nobel Prize in 2003 for standing up for human rights in Iran, including fighting discrimination against women. For her efforts, she received death threats from her own people. Here is what this human rights activist said last year about what would happen if the United States attacks Iran. Quote. 'Iranians will unite, forgetting their differences with their government, and they will fiercely and tenaciously defend their country.'

Even so, that doesn't seem to deter powerful forces in this country from making the case for military strikes against Iran.

You're about to meet some of them.

VOICE: The lord utters his voice before his army...The lord utters his voice before his army...

BILL MOYERS: Washington. July 17. A Night To Honor Israel.

VOICES: Blow the trumpet in Zion, Zion!

BILL MOYERS: Over 4,500 people from every state in the union and ten countries celebrate their solidarity with Israel. They call their organization Christians United for Israel. Most are evangelical Christians. CUFI, as it's known, is not even two years old, and it's already a force to be reckoned with. The man behind it is Pastor John Hagee.

JOHN HAGEE: When 50 million evangelical bible-believing Christians unite with five million American Jews standing together on behalf of Israel, it is a match made in heaven.

BILL MOYERS: Pastor Hagee is one of the Christian right's most powerful preachers. Israel is his passion.

JOHN HAGEE: Let us shout it from the housetops that a new day has been born in America. The sleeping giant of Christian Zionism has awakened. If a line has to be drawn, draw the line around Christians and Jews. We are united. We are indivisible. And together

we can reshape history.

BILL MOYERS: Christian Zionists believe Jews are God's chosen people...that God promised the land of Israel to their patriarchs and their descendants.

They say that the Bible requires Christians to give unconditional support to the Jewish people, to be a "good friend" to Christianity's "big brother."

CHRISCHELLE BRUCE: The new Christian of today that is truly walking in the spirit of God will have to acknowledge Israel. There is no way around that. You have to.

GREG STEPHENS: Israel is the only country that God ever established. Every other country has been established by a king or a queen or a congress or a parliament. It's the only country that God ever established.

BILL MOYERS: John Hagee says you need look no further than the scriptures...

JOHN HAGEE: The biblical mandates for supporting Israel began with Genesis 12:3. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse those who curse you. Secondly, David said in Psalms 122:6, "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. They shall prosper that love you."

Because of the fact that in history, if Jerusalem is at war, the world is at war. If there's peace in Jerusalem there's peace in the world.

When Israel became a state, in 1948 I remember well sitting at the table in our home and we heard that announcement come over the radio. And my father said, "This is the most important biblical day in the 20th Century. For all the prophets of the Old Testament have now been vindicated and Israel has been born."

JOHN HAGEE PREACHING: Free is free indeed! Give me praise and glory in the house of God!

BILL MOYERS: From the 18,000 people who belong to his church in San Antonio, Texas to the 99 million homes he says tune into his weekly radio and television broadcasts John Hagee has built an empire sharing the gospel of Israel with evangelicals around the world

And as the leader of CUFI his power extends from the pulpit to politics.

JOHN HAGEE: I would like to read you the greeting from the President of the United States.

"I appreciate CUFI members and all event participants for your passion and dedication to enhancing the relationship between the United States and Israel. Your efforts set a shining example for others and help lay the foundation of peace for generations to come. Laura and I send our best wishes for a memorable event. May God bless you. George W. Bush, President of the United States."

BILL MOYERS: At their July gathering in Washington, CUFI delegates focused on Israel's security and the threat of radical Islam.

CLIFFORD MAY: Islamic imperialists and supremacists

BILL MOYERS: And on their agenda — lobbying in Congress for their pro-Israel platform.

DAVID BROG: Ladies and gentlemen, we're in Washington, DC. We're going to talk to our congressmen so it's extremely important that we take our faith and our values and we marry it with knowledge and understanding of current events. And be able to speak in the language of Washington when we go and speak to our congressmen and senators.

BILL MOYERS: Many of Washington's political elites came to them. Presidential contender Senator John McCain.

JOHN MCCAIN: It's very hard trying to do the Lords work in the city of Satan and I'm very grateful to have all of you here.

BILL MOYERS: Senator McCain was joined by House Minority Whip Roy Blunt.

ROY BLUNT: This is a mission, this is a vision that I believe is a vision for God's time.

BILL MOYERS: Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich...

NEWT GINGRICH: Because this group is made up of people who believe, they understand the passion that comes from belief.

BILL MOYERS: And Senator Joe Lieberman

JOSEPH LIEBERMAN: Of describing Pastor Hagee in the words that the Torah uses to describe Moses, he is an "*Ish Elokim*," a man of God and those words really do fit him; and, I'd add something else, like Moses he's become the leader of a mighty multitude, even greater than the multitude that Moses led from Egypt to the promised land.

BILL MOYERS: With Hagee leading the way, CUFI delegates walked the halls of Congress. Armed with talking points, they divided into small groups to call on individual senators and representatives.

VOICE: Cheer, cheer, cheer!

BILL MOYERS: In the basement of the Capitol, Georgia's delegates talked strategy before meeting their elected leaders.

SCOTT ALLEN: Also during the meeting, as Pastor Haun-- Dr. Haun or I make a point, feel free to clap. You know, we want it a little bit lively, but we don't want to be crazy. Right? So, feel free to clap. And they know we're Christians United for Israel. You can say, "Amen," if you want to.

BILL MOYERS: Republican Representative Phil Gingrey paid the delegation a visit. He's considered one of the most conservative members of the House.

PHIL GINGREY: I think what you'll find in the Congress is a very, very strong bipartisan support for the country of Israel. And that's something that we all seem to agree upon. It's a democracy in a bad neighborhood.

BILL MOYERS: The delegates wasted no time getting to one of their top concerns - the disputed territories and the Israeli peace process.

FEMALE VOICE: The land for peace obviously didn't work in the Gaza Strip. And we're proponents that we don't give up any more land.

It didn't work. And anything else was just gonna cause further loss of land in the state of Israel.

PHIL GINGREY: Yeah. I mean, I think it's a good point. And but on the other hand, I would urge Israel not to put a stick in the eye of the Palestinians if they don't have to.

VICKI LEEMAN: I think you need to hear clearly, sir, that this group is totally against giving any of Israel's land for peace.

BILL MOYERS: There is no room for compromise here.

Christians United for Israel opposes the Bush administration's roadmap for peace and urges American leaders to abandon it.

The plan calls for a two-state solution in the region — if Palestinians lay down their arms and recognize Israel's right to exist, Israel will withdraw from certain disputed territories

and move to help create an independent Palestine.

For these believers the roadmap is inherently flawed because it is not biblically sound — as Hagee often preaches to his congregation.

JOHN HAGEE, SEPTEMBER 18, 2005: But the Palestinians have never owned the land. I want you to hear this very clearly. The land of Israel was given to Abraham, Issac and Jacob and their seed in an eternal covenant. It is recorded in the book of Genesis. The boundaries are there in the Bible. And that land belongs to the Jewish people today, tomorrow and forever because it is their covenant by the word of God.

BILL MOYERS: According to John Hagee, devastating consequences await those who violate God's word. God, he says, may already have sent Hurricane Katrina to punish the U.S. for its role in helping Israel remove Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip.

JOHN HAGEE, SEPTEMBER 18, 2005: I want to ask Washington a question. Is there a connection between the 9,000 Jewish refugees being forcibly removed from their homes in the Gaza Strip now living in tents and the thousands of Americans who have been expelled from their homes by this tremendous work of nature? Is there a connection there? If you've got a better answer, I'd like to hear it.

BILL MOYERS: Back in Washington, CUFI delegates were briefed on what the organizers now consider the defining issue — the challenge of radical Islam.

GARY BAUER: At this very moment there are evil men who worship death — it is a sick philosophy that goes by many names. But I haven't found a better name than Islamo-

FRANK GAFFNEY: The Islamo-fascists have Israel in mind as an appetizer. We are the main course.

BRIGITTE GABRIEL: The difference, my friends, between Israel and the Arabic world is a difference between civilization and barbarism. It's a difference between goodness and evil. And this is what we're witnessing in the Arabic world. They have no soul. They are dead set on killing and destruction.

BILL MOYERS: Brigitte Gabriel was one of the most popular speakers here. Her "American Congress for Truth" is devoted to fighting "the spread of militant Islam" in America.

BRIGITTE GABRIEL: Here's what we're doing. We're taking cities and state and organizing them into chapters. We are appointing people to monitor the media in your local community. Your local newspaper that is anti-Israel, anti-America.

BILL MOYERS: Gabriel is a Maronite Christian from Lebanon. She called on the CUFI delegates to keep their eyes open for the enemy within.

BRIGITTE GABRIEL: Another thing you can do is monitor universities.

Monitor what the professor is saying about the Middle East policy and our foreign policy. The students cannot challenge their professors because they get bad grades. But you can. It's your job and your civic duty to do so.

Another thing you can do — another thing you can do — if you know there is a suspicious mosque in your community or suspicious Islamic organization, find out who owns the deed to that mosque.

Is it some Saudi sheiks or Islamic sheiks outside of America? Write their names down. Come home. Call your local FBI office. Turn the names to them. This is how they can start monitoring them.

Israel's enemies are our enemies.

BILL MOYERS: In New York last week, CUFI members took to the street to protest the

visit of Iranian President Ahmadinejad. They see him as the number one threat to Israel and the world.

JOHN HAGEE: The head of the beast of radical Islam in the Middle East is Iran and its fanatical president Ahmadinejad. Ladies and gentlemen, we are reliving history. It is 1938 all over again. Iran is Germany. Ahmadinejad is Hitler. And Ahmadinejad, just like Hitler, is talking about killing the Jews.

BILL MOYERS: Ahmadinejad has said that Islam would soon reign supreme in a world without the United States and Zionism and that quote 'Israel should be wiped off the map.'

AHMADENIJAD: The Iran of today is a nuclear Iran

BILL MOYERS: As Iran has been actively enriching uranium, the world has been scrambling to determine how it will be used — as an energy supply or as a weapon to make good on Ahmadinejad's threats to Israel.

CUFI DELEGATE: Congressman, we love you. You're a fellow Georgian.

BILL MOYERS: At the Capitol building the CUFI delegation from Georgia urged Representative Lynn Westmoreland to recognize the danger Iran poses.

CUFI DELEGATE: But the greatest threat that's facing us is Iran.

WESTMORELAND: That's right.

CUFI DELEGATE: And the nuclear capability that they are soon reaching. And hopefully we, as Americans, will not allow that to happen.

JOHN HAGEE: What we are trying to say to them is that a) we want you to continue your support for the State of Israel. Secondly, we want you to recognize that Iran is a clear and present danger to the United States of America and Israel. And we support Senator Joseph Lieberman, that it's time for our country to consider a military preemptive strike against Iran if they will not yield to diplomacy. And if they continue the pursuit of nuclear weapons we must not allow them to manipulate the economy of the world because they have a nuclear weapon.

JOHN HAGEE, SEPTEMBER 11, 2005: As we speak Iran is building nuclear weapons...

BILL MOYERS: For John Hagee, what happens in Iran is not just a matter of politics — it's also a matter of theology. His study of biblical prophecy has led him to believe that Iran will figure prominently in the end times - the apocalypse and the return of Jesus.

JOHN HAGEE, SEPTEMBER 11, 2005: Iran will use those weapons on Israel. Anyone who is smart enough to wave bye-bye knows that.

BILL MOYERS: In his book JERUSALEM COUNTDOWN, he writes, "Iran with nuclear weapons will transform the Bush administration's roadmap for peace program into a racetrack to Armageddon."

BILL MOYERS: From his reading of the Bible he lays out a scenario predicting that if Israel and America attack Iran, Russia and its allies — including Iran — will attack Israel, triggering Ezekiel's War. God will crush the invading forces as - quote - "he crushed Pharaoh, Haman, and Hitler so that Israel and the world 'shall know that I am the Lord.'" says John Hagee, the battle of Armageddon will follow.

JOHN HAGEE, SEPTEMBER 11, 2005: They intend to bring that bomb online and if they use it, you think gas is high now. Life as we know it is going to change instantly and forever and I'm telling you, you need to get your life ready to meet the son of God in all his glory. It's going to happen, it's going to happen, it's going to happen.

CONGREGATION: Clap, clap, clap!

JOHN HAGEE: There are going to be people in this tribulation period who do not take

BILL MOYERS: There will be plenty of bloodshed.

JOHN HAGEE: They will have their heads cut off.

BILL MOYERS: But get ready — it's coming.

JOHN HAGEE: We are this close to the rapture of the church of Jesus Christ.

BILL MOYERS: For true believers like Hagee and his followers, it will be a day of deliverance. They will have been raptured — literally lifted into the air — to join the Lord in the heavens.

End Times theology has blossomed from a cottage industry into a dynamic market for books, video games and movies.

BILL MOYERS: THE LEFT BEHIND movie series is so popular it shows up in sermons around the country. John Hagee even had a cameo appearance in it.

But because End Times theology strikes a lot of people as threatening — especially as it relates to the fate of Jews — Hagee plays it down at political gatherings of CUFI.

REPORTER: You write a lot about bible prophecy and the relation, relationship to

BILL MOYERS: He brushed aside questions about it at this press conference in Washington.

JOHN HAGEE: I can make it very clear for you. Our support of Israel has absolutely nothing to do with End Times prophecy. It has absolutely nothing to do with eschatology. We support Israel because we feel Israel is in greater danger right now than in any time in statehood.

BILL MOYERS: So as the head of CUFI, with prominent politicians present, Hagee continues to insist that the peace and security of Israel is an end in itself but as a pre-eminent preacher of end times theology, he holds that the apocalypse is coming no matter what — events in the Middle East anticipate it — even require it.

JOHN HAGEE: Listen to me. Just as I wrote in JERUSALEM COUNTDOWN, Ahmadinejad will not respond to diplomacy. He has no intention of yielding to sanctions. He's stalling for time to make nuclear weapons to attack Israel and to attack the United States.

He will do it. Iran is a clear and present danger to the survival of Israel, to the United States of America and the western the world-- western world. Therefore it is time for America to embrace the words of Senator Joseph Lieberman and consider a military preemptive strike against Iran to prevent a nuclear holocaust in Israel and a nuclear attack in America.

BILL MOYERS: On that, participants at the CUFI summit seem to agree: the times call for urgent action — even military action. Some of them believe war — and rumors of war — are part of God's plan.

SCOTT FARHART: You know, the Bible says to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, pray for the peace of Israel. I don't know if it's actually possible-- the whole Armageddon, end of the world is all going to happen there. So there's always going to be people striving for peace. I think it's our duty to pray for peace. I don't know that peace will ever happen until Jesus comes back and reigns in that city and is the ruler of that city, that's when we'll have peace.

TYRONE MORGAN: We're living in times of fulfillment of what the Bible said will come in the last days. And we're living in those times. We're seeing that fulfilled before our eyes literally. And the things that are happening in Israel, around Israel are just part of what the Bible said would happen.

DONNA MORGAN: The Bible says that there has to be wars. And it says in the end times there will be wars, and for us not to get-- not to worry, because there has to be — there has to be a stand. And God is drawing a line in the sand. He's saying, "You better want to get Christian. You must support Israel." Okay. It's time-- it's time to take a stand. And the rest of world needs to know that. If you really call yourself a Christian-- if you really love Israel, it's time to take a stand now before it's too late.

BILL MOYERS: How many people belong to Christians United for Israel? Well, they say they have the support of 50,000 pastors and their congregations. And that would be no mean number. Let's talk further now with two men who follow closely relations between American Christians and Israel.

Rabbi Michael Lerner is the editor of the widely read and quoted TIKKUN magazine, which he founded in 1986 as a journal of liberal and progressive Jewish thought. He holds doctorates in both philosophy and clinical psychology and has written 11 books, including JEWISH RENEWAL, SPIRIT MATTERS, and his most recent, THE LEFT HAND OF GOD.

Dr. Timothy Weber is himself an evangelical Christian. Once a Baptist now a Presbyterian, a teacher and historian of religion, he taught at Denver Seminary and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, among other schools. He's known as an innovator in graduate theological education and the author of LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF THE SECOND COMING and this one, On the ROAD TO ARMAGEDDON: HOW EVANGELICALS BECAME ISRAEL'S BEST FRIEND. Welcome to you both.

These people seem to be on a roll. They look as if they believe the future belongs to them. Right?

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: This is one group in a long line of similar groups that-- began to organize in the late '70s and early '80s which combined a firm belief of Bible prophecy and a particular political agenda that has gained more and more power as the years have gone on.

BILL MOYERS: How do you account for the fact, rabbi, that there were more political actors among them than there were preachers?

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: I think that that movement has three different parts to it. And one part is those people whose primary agenda is conservative politics in America and are using the issue of Israel as another part of their support for conservative politics. And if the United States moved away from Israel, they might move away from it. The second part are people who are dispensationalists, who believe that getting Israel into a huge battle with the Arab states is going to be good for bringing Jesus back onto our planet. And-

BILL MOYERS: Dispensationalist is a theological concept.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Right. It's a theological concept. Then there are an awful lot of people who genuinely care about Jews; decent good people in this movement who, unfortunately, are being manipulated for a political agenda that is very, very different and, in my view, not at all in the best interests of the Jewish people or in the best interest of Israel.

BILL MOYERS: Before we go any further, give me a shorthand definition of dispensationalism.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Dispensationalism is a particular way of reading Bible prophecy which divides the Bible into two stories. There's a story about God's earthly people, Israel. And then a story about God's heavenly people, the Church. And the basic premise of dispensationalism is that all Bible prophecies concerning earthly events applies to the Jews. And all of those events will be fulfilled literally in the End Times. So, Israel must be returned to the land. They must stay in the land. Without Israel in the land, there can be none of the other events prophesied in the Bible. There can be no rise of Anti-Christ. There can be no rebuilding of the Temple. There can be no Battle of Armageddon. And there can be no second coming of Jesus Christ. So everything is riding on the Jews, getting them

there and keeping them there in the Holy Land.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: But I think-- but what you have to add in there is that when this is a step in the process that they see towards the end of end times in which the Jews will be cast down into eternal damnation and to the fires of hell. And only those Jews who convert to Christianity will be okay. And everyone -- all the rest of us so they're welcoming us now -- with open arms and saying, "Oh, we love the Jewish people" But they love the Jewish people literally to death because they they want see those of us who stay Jews burn in hell but not-- not right away. They don't imagine it will happen right away. So there's a staged process. And this is the first stage in the process that will eventually lead either to us converting totally to Christianity or burning in hell. So it's not a really great future for the Jews that those theological people have in mind.

BILL MOYERS: If what you say is so, and I think you probably agree with it, I read your book.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Yes. Yes.

BILL MOYERS: Why does this play in Israel?

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Well, there's-- this is the other--

BILL MOYERS: They are being used, right?

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Yes. This is the other terrible part about the role that Christian Zionists play. Because they've been aligned with the most right-wing elements in Israel and the most right-wing elements in the American Jewish community-- that have gathered together in the Israel lobby. And the Israel lobby includes AIPAC, the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee, and many other of the Israel-is-always-right organizations in the Jewish world have played the role of supporting the most reactionary policies in Israel. And that--

BILL MOYERS: Isn't this an act of survival?

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Well, they think it's survival. But, in fact, for a very large number of Jews today, both in Israel and in the United States, recognize that the policies that Israel has been following has actually been destructive for the long-range survival of Israel. And so they are an element, the Christian Zionists are really an important element in the Israel lobby today, pushing the United States towards support of the most conservative and unloving policies.

BILL MOYERS: As you watched the film, were you concerned that the thread that seemed to run throughout it, that connected the political wing of the movement and the theological wing of the movement, was the belief that a confrontation with Iran is not only inevitable but desirable? Did that hit you?

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: It's easy to make that connection and to see that. As an historian, I'm struck by the fact that in previous attempts to understand Bible prophecy Iran did not show up on anybody's radar screen. As history takes these unexpected turns the Bible teachers, the preachers, the dispensational theologians, they adjust the scenario to fit. In some ways, Iran is playing the role that the former Soviet Union used to play as the great evil empire in the world. In short, dispensationalists know how to change the subject, when it's necessary.

BILL MOYERS: But to them — to the religious folks, Iran is an agency for war. To the political folks, Iran is a threat to Israel for its national security reasons. Isn't this a combustible combination?

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Absolutely.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: It's bad for the world. It's bad for the Jews. It's bad for Israel.

And it's bad for the United States.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: This kind of a world view — as either they dominate us or we dominate them — has led us into this terrible-- quagmire in Iraq. And most Americans now believe that we made a terrible mistake going into that war. Now the president believes that he can do a different kind of war in Iran. But I think that he's not going to be successful in containing that war either, just as he failed in the Iraq War. So it's bad for the United States. It's bad for Israel because this will further enflame the Islamic world against Israel. Because the primary reason being given by Christian Zionists, by the Israel lobby for the need to take out Iran is protect Israel. So--

BILL MOYERS: Ahmadinejad himself has enflamed the, as you say, the worst instincts in the Muslim world, right?

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Yeah, he claims they're the best allies. Ahmadinejad is really one of the best allies of the Christian Right and and of the Jewish Right.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Well, Islam has its own view of prophecy of the end days. And the president of Iran certainly speaks to that and speaks the language of Koranic prophecy to his own followers. Many people in this country, many political analysts don't get it yet.

BILL MOYERS: Don't get what?

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: The fact that he is operating out of a particular view of what the future will be like and what role he can play in bringing about the return of the Mahdi, a kind of messianic figure who will turn the world Islamic.

BILL MOYERS: So you've got two apocalyptic world views heading toward a collision.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: That's right.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: And how do you negotiate two apocalyptic world views? How do you compromise? This is the danger that we're in.

BILL MOYERS: When both believe that they speak for God or God speaks through them.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Right?

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Right. The alternative is to create a different world view. And this is the problem that the United States and those of us who are liberals or progressives in the United States and in the Western world have not been able to articulate an alternative world view, in part because we're so largely secular and because we don't understand that there is some spiritual foundation to the yearnings of people all over the world for something other than global capitalism, for something other than the globalization of selfishness. And that is seen as what America has to offer the world, each one for herself or himself. We need an alternative. We need an alternative that can speak to the hunger that people have for a framework of meaning and purpose to their lives and the hunger that they have for loving relationships that are not based solely on looking out for number one.

BILL MOYERS: The hunger I don't deny. But as Dr. Weber just said how does a progressive world view, a more loving world view, compete with two apocalyptic faiths that believe God has set them on a course which can only be consummated in violence?

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Well, this is why I emphasize the fact that there are a lot of good Christian Zionists and a lot of good people in the religious right who are not primarily committed to the conservative agenda and to the support of global military interests of either the United States or Israel, but are actually coming from a different place. Their base can be split from their top if there is a reaffirmation of a loving world view.

BILL MOYERS: But there is no evidence, I mean, there are evangelicals who have actually

signed statements to the president saying "we don't agree with these people. We believe in a two state solution in Israel. We have empathy and sympathy for the Palestinians." But they don't have the clout that the--

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Yes. They're not organized. And when you're not organized in this kind of an environment, you end up bringing up the caboose. I mean, you're at the end of the train. It's important to recognize that only about a third of American evangelicals would identify with a dispensational world view. This is--

BILL MOYERS: The end times theology.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: That's right.

BILL MOYERS: A third--

BILL MOYERS: --what? Twenty--

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Maybe 20 million, 25 million. That leaves an awful lot of other evangelicals who are Bible believers, who have a very warm spot in their heart for Israel. Let's face it. Evangelicals grew up with maps of Israel on their Sunday school wall.

BILL MOYERS: Yeah, exactly. I did, too.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: And the whole--

BILL MOYERS: You love the Bible, you love Israel.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: That's right. And the whole story of Jesus and the whole story of his ancestors were in the Holy Land. This is sacred space. And evangelicals know that. And they tend to love Israel because of it. In other words, evangelicals love Israel not just because of a specific prophetic scenario but for all kinds of other reasons.

BILL MOYERS: That's a very important point to remember.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: So growing numbers of evangelicals are recognizing that very thing. Bill referred to a letter sent to the president this summer signed by 30 evangelical heavyweights, presidents of seminaries and leaders of denominations and very well-known authors and spiritual leaders. And their point was we don't want you to believe that groups like Hagee's speak for the vast majority of us. We recognize that sometimes the best friend, the best advice that friends of Israel can give is to cooperate, is not to just endorse everything that happens but to encourage justice and peacekeeping and so on. And so you have this one group of evangelical leaders who are speaking for, I think, a much larger group that is encouraging a different approach.

BILL MOYERS: I can't see that they are having any impact.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Not yet.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Not yet.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: No.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: History isn't over. And --

BILL MOYERS: It may be sooner than you think.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Well-- I'm hoping we have a few more years here. And I think in the 21st Century the growing wisdom of the American people and of all people is that our well being depends on the well being of everyone else on the planet, and I think that

the Israeli population increasingly are coming to understand that their well being depends on the well being of Palestinians and of the Arab world. That there's that fundamental interdependence.

BILL MOYERS: But if you lived in Israel and none of the governments around you recognized your right to exist, and if, in fact, you heard Ahmadinejad-- proclaiming the apocalyptic consummation of history on his terms, wouldn't you welcome the support of John Hagee and these people no matter what ultimately they think happens to the Jews? Wouldn't it be an immediate factor of survival?

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Well, I think it's a mistaken view of survival. In other words, yeah, they're --

BILL MOYERS: From your standpoint over here.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: They're coming in there and they're saying, "Right on, Israel, when you cut off food for the people in the Gaza Strip right now. Cut off water, cut off electricity, and just starve them out of their Hamas." But anybody with understanding of human dynamics knows that that's not going to lead to reconciliation. It's just going to lead to further anger and further willingness of people to give their lives in murderous assaults on Israel. So it's not really being helpful.

Now, yeah, there are a fair number of opportunists in Israel who say, "You know, we'll deal with the second coming of Jesus and being burnt in hell when that happens. Right now we're glad to have their support on the politics." But what I'm saying is the politics is the wrong politics. It's not helping Israel. It's actually pushing the most reactionary elements in Israel.

BILL MOYERS: Dr. Weber, there was a CNN/Time poll that said only 36 percent of all Americans believe the Bible is God's word. Only one third of all Americans believe the Bible is God's word and should be taken literally. But 59 percent say they believe that events predicted in the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Christian New Testament, will come to pass. How do you explain that?

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Paul Boyer, who is a now-retired historian from the University of Wisconsin, wrote a book called WHEN TIME SHALL BE NO MORE. And he studied this phenomenon, called prophecy belief in America. And he explained that the influence of this group, of this perspective, of dispensational perspective goes way beyond the confines of its own boundaries. He said if you view America in terms of this issue in concentric circles, you have this core maybe 20 million of really dedicated dispensationalists who give you chapter and verse, who can give you-- draw the battle maps of the future and everything.

Then outside that core is another group of evangelicals, many millions more who believe in the Bible, who believe that it has something to say about the future. They're just not exactly sure what it is. And therefore, they defer to the Bible teachers who seem to know. They listen to them. And a lot of the dispensational vocabulary filters out to that broader evangelical world of Armageddon and Rapture and the like.

And then more significantly, beyond that, you have a group of mainly secular people who don't give the Bible much mind at all but who, during times of apocalyptic threat will give the Bible teachers a listen. Because of the fear that is so -- I mean, this movement would not be strong if the newspapers every morning didn't seem to support their world view.

BILL MOYERS: You mean with all the news of calamity and--

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Calamity and disaster, threats, potential disasters, war. This is how they said it would look and this is how most people see the world today.

BILL MOYERS: It seems to be on the front page of THE NEW YORK TIMES playing out what they've read in the Bible.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: I think the dispensationalists are onto something. They have a

sense, they just have the wrong analysis of why it's all going to end.

BILL MOYERS: But what do you mean they're onto something?

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: They are onto the growing depression that people are feeling, a deep emotional depression in the United States -- a lack of any hopeful picture of what the world could be. And that failure is not a failure of dispensationalists, it's a failure of the mainstream political framework in this country that-- to address the major questions facing the world in the 21st century.

BILL MOYERS: Isn't that why John Hagee is providing political leadership? I mean, the fact is John Hagee is providing not only theological guidance, he's providing political leadership to these people, right?

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Yes, yes, he is. But if you listen carefully to his message, it is a message, in many ways, at war with itself. Because on the one hand, as you just pointed out, evangelicals at the core of evangelical religion is the belief that change is possible. Evangelicals believe in conversion. They think--

BILL MOYERS: Born again.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: They think that enemies can be made friends and that bad people can be made good through the grace of God. And so they preach that. And you hear in some of the language of Hagee's followers that we need to pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Then in the next-- in the next breath they say, "But we don't think it'll do any good."

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: No, and that we're going to make-- support those who want to make war for Jerusalem. And that--

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: That's right. So how does that fit?

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: -- But they also are very questionable from my standpoint in the way that they read the Bible. Because they're literalists when it comes to some issues and very much ignoring other issues. For example, they say that the Jewish people were promised the holy land from God through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They neglect to mention that the Arabs descended from, or believe they descended from one of the children of Abraham, Ishmael. And that that land was twice promised. It was promised to Jews and promised to Arabs. Why to two? So that we could become a model of how to reconcile. But we haven't done that yet and we need to do that.

BILL MOYERS: So is there a different way in your judgment these conservative Christians could help the people of Israel whom historically and biblically they were taught to love and to appreciate without supporting the right-wing elements in Israel that want to crush the Palestinians?

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Well, many evangelicals are calling for exactly that. They're looking for another way. And I-

BILL MOYERS: And they're not all like John Hagee. So many people think that all evangelicals are alike in the same way they think all Muslims are alike, right?

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: That's right. And there are variations within the evangelical community. What I hear on the one hand, we have certain fellow believers who view the future in very well-defined ways and who are absolutely convinced that there's nothing that anybody or anything can do about it. And yet we also have the clear teachings of Jesus about being peacemakers, about caring for the world, about loving your enemy. How do those two things go together? So there's that deep biblical tradition that evangelicals can draw on to find another way.

BILL MOYERS: Here it seems to me is the fundamental issue. You heard all of the talk in

the film about Islamofascism. People are genuinely concerned about terrorism and terrorist states. So how do we make a distinction between fighting terrorists and terrorist states without enflaming the religious passions? How do we do that?

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Well, I think it's important to recognize that dispensationalists are not the only ones who are worried about these issues. When you have the president of France and leaders in Germany who are warning Iran that there will be war if they do not stop what they're doing, these are not dispensationalist-inspired people. I mean, the world is--

BILL MOYERS: Neither is Norman Podhoretz and Bill Kristol and people like the neoconservatives in this country.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: That's right.

BILL MOYERS: --the neoconservatives in this country.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: That's right. And so the wind is blowing in a particular direction and it's very hard to redirect it. There is an evangelical past that is much more positive, much more world changing, much more embracing diversity and even tolerance in some ways than seems to be in the public eye today. And many evangelicals are beginning to rediscover who they are in that in their past. They're saying we can be about our father's business only if we take concern for people who are poor. The world that God has made is getting destroyed. We need to take care along those lines. And-

BILL MOYERS: But these people you heard had no sympathy for the Palestinians.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: No, absolutely not.

BILL MOYERS: They see the Palestinians as part of the problem, right?

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Yes.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Yes. It-- it-

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Yes.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: This very week the WASHINGTON POST revealed a poll that it had done that shows that a majority of Americans now favor cutting favor for the war in Iraq. That's a very big shift from where the majority of Americans were only five years ago in relationship to this war. Change is possible. Fundamental changes in world views are possible. And it is possible to create a different understanding of the Islamic world, one that doesn't put them all together in one evil category just as it's possible to understand that there are evangelicals who are very hurtful in their world view. And there are evangelicals who are very loving in their world view.

BILL MOYERS: So Timothy Weber, are evangelicals still Israel's best friend when you saw what you saw?

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Well, they certainly think they are Israel's best friend. But I think evangelicals are realizing that there's more than one way to be a friend to Israel. Whether in the long run the kind of support that-- groups like Hagee's group really brings to Israel, I tend to agree with the rabbi here, that this kind of support could really backfire. But when American evangelicals support those who want to rebuild a temple in Jerusalem by tearing down the Dome of the Rock-

BILL MOYERS: That's because the Bible seems to indicate that when the Jews come back to Israel, they will rebuild the destroyed temple-

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: That's right.

BILL MOYERS: --and it will be built upon the-- on the very place that-

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: That's right.

BILL MOYERS: --in the meantime the Muslims have built a sacred mosque.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: There this is not a friendly act, according to anybody.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: And they forget the Isaiah prophecy that "my house will be a house of prayer for all people."

BILL MOYERS: But this is combustible, isn't it? I mean, when both tenants want the same property.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Yes. And say that God gave that property to them. And that their own -- the ultimate vindication of their religion depends on that piece of ground, then compromise is very hard.

BILL MOYERS: And both of you seem to be saying that politics truly enflames religious passions when they become so intertwined, as we've seen, right?

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: That and the other way around as well. Religion enflames politics and politics enflames religion.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Politics was never separate from religion in the Bible. And I don't believe that there needs to be a separation between our highest ideals that come from the religious world and our commitment to implement them in the political world. It's only when we try to implement them in an exclusivist way that says, "You have to believe in my religion and my particular vision of God"-- that we run into deep trouble.

BILL MOYERS: Rabbi Michael Lerner and Dr. Timothy Weber, thank you both for being with me for this discussion on THE JOURNAL.

RABBI MICHAEL LERNER: Thank you for having us.

DR. TIMOTHY WEBER: Thank You.

BILL MOYERS: In a time of war and rumors of war, of violence and calls for vengeance — with so many people feeling helpless before unwelcome events — I want to recommend a book — one I could scarcely put down when I started it last weekend. This is it, AMISH GRACE, by Donald Kraybill, Steven Nolt, and David Weaver-Zercher.

Each of these men has written extensively on the people most of us know only by name or by the odd photograph - the Amish.

They may look all the same to outsiders — with quaint old-world practices brought over from Europe in the 1700s, and a distinctive way of life drawn from their reading of the Bible. But one year ago this week we learned from the Amish something profound about a people who refuse to be defined by the evil that assaults them. AMISH GRACE is that story.

The Amish often read the words of an old German hymn when they bury their dead.

In the small community of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, this time last year they had need of words that comfort and mourn...

Five little girls had been buried in their simple white dresses...

Five others were in critical condition, their survival uncertain...

Among people bound by strong ties of family, faith, and tradition, whose children do not watch violent movies, video games, or television, ordinary life had been upended by wrenching horror...

On a cloudless October morning. Under a blue sky that reminded some people there of 9/11. The school bell called the children in from play.

Their teacher, Emma, read from the Bible, the children stood and recited the Lord's Prayer in German, then sang hymns in German and in English.

'Death often comes quickly,' said one of the hymns.... . 'He who today is vigorous and ruddy, may tomorrow, or sooner, have passed away.'

At around 10:15, a local milk truck driver named Charles Roberts IV, entered the school house bearing a small arsenal and a grudge against god.

After ordering the girls to lie face down on the floor, he called his wife on the phone and told her he was angry at god for the death of their firstborn daughter, Elise, nine years earlier. In execution style, Roberts began firing his semi-automatic pistol into the little girls lying on the floor. As police crashed into the school, he shot himself dead.

The media descended on Nickel Mines and the story circled the globe. As the Amish mourned and buried their children they were showered with messages and gifts from all over the world.

But what proved most helpful, we learned, was something hard to describe - 'a common painful thread' that drew the families together. The authors of Amish grace say the community had been prepared by thick habits of 'mutual aid', rooted in the New Testament commandment 'to bear one another's burdens'"

Then, 'with a swiftness that startled the world,' the stricken amish did something remarkable — they forgave the killer, Charles Roberts, and reached out to his widow and children.

Three Amish men showed up one evening, to express their sorrow. Another called on the killer's father and for an hour held him in his arms. When Roberts himself was buried, next to his daughter, more than half the mourners at the cemetery were Amish. It was, one of them said, simply the right thing to do.

ANNOUNCER: "Have you already forgiven?"

AMISH GRANDFATHER: "In my heart, yes." **ANNOUNCER:** "How is that possible?"

AMISH GRANDFATHER: "Through God's help." **TV COVERAGE:** The Amish have forgiven the shooter...

BILL MOYERS: Amish forgiveness became the talk of the world. Not all of it sympathetic. One columnist called it 'undeserved forgiveness' because the amish were forgiving someone who hurt others.

But Amish grace is not cheap grace. The people and their ways may appear simple but they defy simplistic judgments. Their faith was born in suffering centuries ago, when their forebears called for a voluntary church free and separate from government and were martyred by the thousands at the hands of Protestants and Catholics alike. Grief is no stranger to the Amish, and healing has never been easy.

But one of the grieving fathers said, as they had released the killer, they had released themselves from anger and from bitterness. But not from pain.

A year after the killings in Pennsylvania, the old school has been torn down and replaced with one named 'New Hope'.

Three of the surviving five girls are back in class with the same teacher. On October 2 the school was closed and silent for the day, in remembrance.

On the anniversary of their loss, the community once again spoke to the larger world, in a statement saying that 'forgiveness is a journey...you need help from your community of faith and from God, and sometimes even from counselors, to make and hold on to a decision to not become a hostage to hostility.' Hostility, they said, 'destroys community.'

That's it for the JOURNAL. I'm Bill Moyers.

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