

# PREZ RELEASE SPECIAL EDITION September, 2001

## COULD IT BE? ? ?

America is facing a huge tragedy and frankly I cannot yet muster words to reflect clearly on the events of September 11. This time of the month I usually am writing my monthly Prez Release, but I want to offer to you what I believe to be a prophetic word of challenge to Christians here in the U. S., from a friend. He is an American who lives with his family in a restricted access nation dominated by Islam. I have been with him in his work. It is unlike any situation I have ever found myself in. He has given his entire adult life to the efforts of communicating the Good News in very challenging circumstances. I offer to you my friend's comments as a testimony to the fact that God is a redemptive God and expects His people to act with His character. Please read the following with open hearts and receive it with open ears. If there is any silver lining in this tragedy, the following challenge may very well define that silver lining.

Dear Byron,

Like you and all Americans I am shaking with grief, and some anger, over yesterday's horrific events. I'm writing to you, though, to point out that this may be an unprecedented, not-to-be-repeated evangelistic opportunity among Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans. Our God can bring good out of even the greatest evil. Let me explain:

When the Federal Building in Oklahoma City was bombed, all over America many racist hate crimes were committed against innocent Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans, and against foreign Arabs and Muslims living as guests in our country. This was underreported in the press because we were all so horrified by the Oklahoma City event itself. When it turned out that we were wrong in our assumption that Islamist militants were responsible, fortunately the hate crimes against Arabs and Muslims decreased.

We do not know yet who was responsible for yesterday's cowardly events, but it may well turn out that someone like Usama Bin Laden was responsible. If so, there is

every reason to expect that there will be even more racist attacks on innocent Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans this time.

Thus Arab-Americans and Muslims in America are facing a double terror at this time. Together with us all they are grieving over the innocent victims in New York, Washington and Pittsburgh. Many Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans worked in the World Trade Center, and doubtless they will be numbered among the victims in comparable proportions to the many other ethnic and religious groups that make up our American melting-pot. Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans have lost loved-ones, just as the rest of us have. So they are going through the same grief and fear that all other Americans are facing right now.

But in addition to that they are facing the additional terror of expected racist attacks by their fellow-Americans against themselves. At a time when American society as a whole is drawing together in national unity, they can expect to be excluded from that unity and even to be hated for no reason other than their ethnicity or religion. Imagine yourself, as you are processing your own grief today, if in addition to that you had good reason to expect imminent attacks from fellow-Americans on people of your ethnic background and on Bible-believing Christians in general. Imagine the horror.

So wherein lies the evangelistic opportunity? NOW is an unprecedentedly important moment for American Christians to express to their innocent Arab and Muslim neighbors how much we love them, and that we are ALL IN THIS TOGETHER. NOW is an unprecedentedly important moment for American Christians to ask their Arab and Muslim neighbors whether there is anything we can do for them to help reassure their personal security at this time.

Almost everyone who works in evangelism among Muslims will tell you that the chief human obstacle to the Gospel among Muslims is the deep chasm of “we-they” sentiment between Muslims and Christians. NOW is an unprecedentedly important opportunity for American Christians to bridge that chasm and give our Muslim neighbors a sense of our common humanity. One feature of Arab culture in particular, and of many other Islamic cultures, is that they will remember for many, many years to come who were the people who stood by them in their hour of need and fear. Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans will long remember whether their Christian neighbors reached out to them in love at this time or turned away from them as other non-Christian Americans will likely do.

If we show real love right now – if we make innocent Arab-Americans and Muslims feel that we are TOGETHER in this national tragedy – then we will touch their hearts in ways that will not soon be forgotten. They will tell other Muslims around the world of how they were touched by our love. And THAT will make much easier the job of every Christian who is involved in evangelism among Muslims, both in our country and around the world, for a long time to come.