

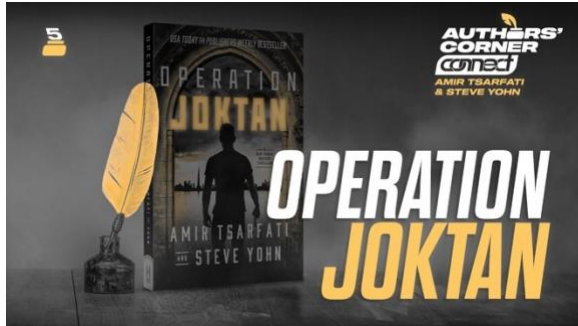


Amir Tsarfati

Pastor Steve Yohn

Authors' Corner: Operation Joktan

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AMIR: Shalom, everyone. I'm Amir Tsarfati from CONNECT in the Jezreel Valley in Galilee, Israel.

And this is once again another chapter of *Authors' Corner* with me today Pastor Steve Yohn from Parker, Colorado. Shalom, Steve. How are you, my

good friend?

STEVE: Doing great, doing great. Another beautiful morning here in Colorado. And I wish you could be here enjoying the chilly weather.

AMIR: Yeah, you know, I always, even last time we recorded this show, you guys had snow. And I told you how much I envy you guys. And it seems like—it's the same story today. But anyway, today we're going to talk about a very sweet part of our history together. Because it's your sweet spot. And it's my, at the time, crazy idea.



STEVE: [Laughter] Which I said, Amir, "I don't think so. I mean, you are a nonfiction guy, and you need to stay in your lane because people always say, you either do nonfiction or you do fiction, but you never do both." And I warned you. I warned you!

AMIR: You've warned me. And it's funny because, you know, as you said, I'm not a fiction guy. But for some strange reason, I knew that the best way to get to the hearts and the minds of people

that are not interested in Bible and Bible prophecy in particular, and yet super-interested in world events, the best way to connect the dots for them is through a novel that is a fiction novel and not anything else. Because let's face it, there's a whole segment, there's a whole, I guess, a whole genre that I think is a bit neglected. And that's the genre that is connecting the dots between current events and the Bible, but in a language that will actually speak to the nonbelievers as well as to the believers. And because for the most part, most books are preachy, it's all Bible verses. And it's wonderful, and it's great, but again, it's like preaching to the choir.

And my heart was to reach the unsaved with the same message, but sugarcoated or whatever you want to call it, with the things that they are interested in. And so, I've been thinking about how do I relay the reality of Ezekiel 38 and 39, the war that everybody is talking about even today, more so today than ever before, the Ezekiel Gog from the Land of Magog War. That war is very detailed and very specific in who is going to be part of it and when and how and all of that. And I just thought, "Why don't we just put it right there in front of them, all the stuff that has been happening and then connect the dots in a very fun and suspenseful way?" And I based the characters on people I know, and I based the story on true events also. So when I came to you with this idea and I heard from a fiction writer that you don't think it's a great idea, I was like, I think it is, but why don't we...

STEVE: ... [Laughs] I always say no first, you know that I always say no first.

AMIR: But remember, we had a meeting with Harvest [House publishers] and we pitched that idea after I convinced you, you were all in. And we sat there in that pancake place. And I think it was, if you're asking me, it was somewhere where we had a conference anyway. I'm not sure which city, maybe Nashville, I'm not sure where. But anyway, I remember that we sat there, and I don't think we saw excitement in the air, did we?

STEVE: No, certainly not at first. But what—See, my big concern is that if we’re going to write a thriller, what’s going to make it different? Because, you know, there are so many thrillers out there and I know I read them all. But what’s going to make our character different than Scott Harvath or Marcus Riker? All great stories by great writers. But what is going to be our niche?

And that’s when you mentioned the Mossad. And suddenly we’re talking about the Mossad. That to me, that’s what I finally understood. That’s when it made sense to me because suddenly we’re talking about something different, something unique. A niche that I haven’t seen any place else. Nowhere else do I see books taking place within the Mossad, doing the Mossad operations. And it was like, “Oh my goodness, this could be something fantastic!” And once you started talking about characters and we started fleshing those out, this just turned into something that I never imagined that it could be. It’s just, it was so fun. And it was so fun writing again, because it had been years. Probably about eight years since I’d written fiction. And to be able to go back into that genre, that was just a hoot, that was a blast.

AMIR: Yeah, and this is how *Operation Joktan* was born, and the rest is history. Because people may not know that, but the whole idea behind this series of *Operation Joktan* and then *By Way of Deception*, *Out of The Far North* and of course, *The Sick Man’s Rage*, all four of them are covering countries that will participate somehow in the Ezekiel War. The whole idea is to bring the geopolitical and the security issues of our region to the reader. So when we somehow mention Ezekiel 38, they already understand why. They already understand, they connect the dots, they know who does what and where and how.

And so, I wanted the War of Ezekiel to be understood by non-believers based on history, geography, and Bible. And this is what we did. And to think that we started the book in Cape Town in South Africa. And it also has an interesting twist because again, I did base some of my characters

on real people. Now they may not be people who did everything that the book says they did, but these are real people from real places. And in that case, Nicole was from Cape Town from South Africa, and she was a model. And so it's very—you know, I pitched that idea, and I think that you were okay with that at some point.

STEVE: Yeah, yeah. And *Operation Joktan* just kind of gave the lay of the land that helped set up for the Ezekiel 38, 39. It gave a picture of what was taking place at that time in the Middle East. Who were the good guys? Who are the enemies? Who did Israel get along with? What were the relationships even with the Gulf States? Honestly, I learned so much through the writing of this, of the relationship between Israel and the UAE; Israel and Qatar; Israel and Iran and Syria. And I know that a lot of other people have learned that too because I've had folks come up to me who said: "I never really understood Syria. But now I hear on the news, I hear the names of these different places. And it's like, I've heard that name. I know where that's at because I read that in one of the books." And *Joktan* really started to lay that out, of the relationships; who are the good guys and who are the bad guys?

AMIR: Yeah, and *Joktan*, for those who don't know, is the biblical name of that part of the region of the world that we wanted to touch on. And that's, of course, based on the book of Genesis, the children of Noah and, of course, their descendants and the part of the world that they conquered or kind of populating at the time. And so that was it. And I just think that we took an Israeli-born Jew, we're taking a backslidden-Gentile Christian, and we're taking a Mossad operation, Mossad agents and the Middle East. And we are basing it on true events, true operations. A lot of people do not know that.

STEVE: But not just events that have taken place. Yes, we included those. But a lot of our discussion was on what is coming up, what we see in the future. And that really, possibly more

than any other, we see in *Joktan* with the drone terrorism. That was not a thing at the time that we wrote this. But as we talked and you first brought it up, the idea of “What if drones get in the hands of terrorists? What is it that they can do with those?” And that’s what took us eventually to the UAE and to Dubai and the threat against the Burj Khalifa there.

AMIR: Yes. That’s not the first time that I’m wondering out loud what would happen if terrorists would do this or that. And then right after that, they actually did that. It happened to me on 9/11. You know, I was there a day before in New York City asking the same thing about the Twin Towers, which we were looking at then, and what happened the next day.

But anyway, so here we are talking about a swarm of drones. We’re talking about Burj Khalifa. We’re talking about Dubai. We’re talking about that part of the Arabian Peninsula. And we’re basically telling the world that there’s history and that Israel is actually not automatically against anything that is Muslim. In fact, we make it very clear that there is a solid ground for the Abraham Accords. And we can see that in action even today with the reelection of President Trump and the soon maybe addition of Saudi Arabia to this whole thing. It’s as relevant maybe even more than before. So *Operation Joktan* I think is a book that cannot grow old because it will actually, if anything, it will be understood by you even better *now* than ever before in light of the war in Ukraine, and the war in Syria, and the war with Israel, with Hamas and Hezbollah. Because much of the warfare that we were exposed to in this book is now being implemented in the recent wars.

STEVE: Yeah. And the other thing with the book is, I got to say, it’s just fun. I mean, it is just a fun, thrill ride, crazy ride of a book. I think you had been to Dubai a few times before we wrote that. I had never been. That’s why I often say that Google Earth is my best friend as a writer.

AMIR: But then I corrected it.

STEVE: Then you corrected it, exactly.

AMIR: After.

STEVE: But I got it. I did “Yas Island” pretty well.

AMIR: Yes, you do. You sure did.

STEVE: Because now in Abu Dhabi. And I remember it was a couple of years after I was in Dubai with you and with some of your family. I went with one of your sons and some other driver. I think your wife and your other son were down there and they went to a different direction. But I went to the racetrack down there.

AMIR: In Yas Island.

STEVE: Yes, down on Yas Island, where both the Katagi’s and Musser’s, the Wes Katagi and Musser’s, I went to and walked around there. And I was so excited about getting out on that track and being able to walk around it. And we went there, and we weren’t allowed in. And I was so frustrated with that. But as we’re driving around Yas Island, I could see all the other areas where their action took place. I thought, you know, for Google Earth, it’s not too bad. Not too bad.

AMIR: Not too shabby.

STEVE: You’re right.

AMIR: So yeah, and it’s interesting because we’re talking about an intelligence agency. One of the best, if not the best in the world, especially in light of the pagers-plot. Everybody gains new respect to the Mossad. But we needed to gather our own intelligence. And because, you know, Steve, they might be brilliant. They might be doing amazing things. But the Lord shared with the world, and yet we choose to believe it, the end from the beginning. We actually, you and I, we know what’s going to happen more than the chief of the Mossad, more than the Israeli prime minister, more than any person who is leading an intelligence community, an intelligence organization anywhere, MI6 or whatever you call it. Anywhere around the world. And it’s, by the

way, the portion of every Bible believer, if he wants, what we did, any believer that is exposed to the Bible and knows what God is planning, all they needed to do is through this book, gather the pieces and draw the line between the dots. But it's not like we are super smart. I mean, if you really think about it, the common believer anywhere around the world, if he wants and if he reads the Bible and he believes in it, he knows the end as well, he knows exactly what's going to happen.

All we did is we painted it with the colors, with statistics and facts and names and places. So it's easier for them to understand. But we did not reinvent the wheel here. It's, we're not... The fiction part in those, in that series is not the big picture. The fiction part is just the smaller details. But the big picture is not fiction at all. And this is the message that we have to the world. The message is that we know what's going to happen. If you know it's going to happen, what are you doing about it? How do you live your life knowing that this is going to happen? So this is the mission I think that we have. And this is why I don't care; you know, a lot of people criticize us, for (a) writing books... I mean, how many people are telling you, "Why do I need to read your books when I have the Bible?" And what is your answer?

STEVE: Yeah, [Laughter] I've seen that so many times. And it's, well, you know what, why do you go to church on a Sunday? Why don't you just read your Bible? If you have the Word of God, why do you need to listen to anyone else? Why do you need to read anything else? Well, it's because God uses people. God uses people to expound the Word. And sometimes people expound the Word verbally. Sometimes people expound the Word in written form. There's no difference. There's no difference between hearing a sermon and reading a book. And I don't get that when people say, "I have the Bible. I don't need to read anything else." Well, then that means that you know it all already. Well, we all, I have been a pastor. I was a pastor for a decade, and I was in ministry for three decades before that. And I still need to listen to sermons. I still need to hear what

God sends through other people into my ears. And that's like sometimes you hear it through a sermon, sometimes reading a book. And then the books are ones that you can take. And then you can give it to a friend and say, "Hey, you know, I read something in here that I think maybe you need to hear." [Gesture: Holding book *Operation Joktan*] And then you can give them that book and it just passes the message on.

AMIR: Yeah. And unlike my teaching books, when it's all based on my teachings, here in this series, we're co-authors because so much of you is here. It's not just me. I may have had the idea, and I may be sitting with you about all the main story and characters, but you are so much in it as a fiction writer, as a gifted fiction writer. And so this is a different genre for us also together to work on. And it's a different also, you know, it's a different, I guess, mechanism in which we work together because this is not teachings that you've heard me teaching and then you just put it in a written format. This is like something that cannot come out to this world without both of us. It's not solely based on one person here.

STEVE: And again, the goal was to take with this series, to take it through to the Ezekiel 38 war. And that is pretty much what we did with this first series. But this is not the end. This is... We just, with *Sick Man's Rage*, we completed our first series, but it's not the end as those of you who have read the book know. And we just met last month—again back in Santa Monica—to talk through where do we go from here? And where we go from here is a place that I am so excited about because it's like nothing that you've read before. Because there is a lot more that takes place once Ezekiel 38 happens. And what happens in Israel from that point on? What happens in the world from that point on? That is what we're going to explore. That's what we talked about. And I am so excited about that. The first book of that series is going to come out again, a Nir Tavor series, but that will come out May of 2026.

AMIR: Exactly. And I'm also looking forward to continue. But again, it's always wonderful to remember the first [book], just when we looked at the first teaching books, *The Last Hour*. This is *Operation Joktan*, it's the first fiction of a series that continues as we move on. And I had the most amazing time of working on these with you. And to be honest, Steve, this is, I mean, we've been reading the comments that people left on Amazon and other places. And these are all verified people who purchased the book. It's not just people who tried to schmooze. It's people who got the book and read it. And it's phenomenal to read the reviews and again, to God be the glory [STEVE: Amen] because you've never done anything like that before. I've *definitely* never done anything like this before. And we have seen the good hand of God upon this project. And we're so thankful that the book writing became a very major part of Behold Israel's ministries. And we're looking forward to much more and again, should the Lord tarry. But of course, I surely prefer to be with Him right now.

STEVE: Yeah, that's right.

AMIR: Not write books.

STEVE: I'm okay with our next book not being published because we're gone.

AMIR: Absolutely.

STEVE: That's okay with me.

AMIR: Absolutely. Absolutely. And every time we write something isn't that interesting? Both the teaching and the fiction, it's with the knowledge that it might be the last one, and so we want people to read what's in it when we're gone, and find the truth while they do that.

STEVE: Exactly. That's right.

AMIR: So, Steve, once again, we covered another book. This is another episode of *Authors' Corner*. And I'm looking forward to the next one. And until then, I want to thank you. Say hello

to your family for me. And I want to thank everyone who were watching this chapter of *Authors' Corner* about *Operation Joktan*. In the lower third of the screen, you'll find a way to get it. Until then, I want to thank all of you. God bless you and Shalom from Galilee, Israel and from Parker, Colorado. Thank you. God bless you and Shalom.

* Scripture is taken from the New King James Version unless noted otherwise.

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