

Is For
Good Men
To Do
Nothing

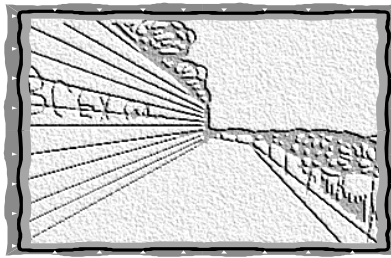
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Seeds of Freedom
Xlibris

Excerpt from Chapter 8 of
Is For Good Men To do Nothing
By Chris Verrill



Bethlehem Prison

This morning at some absurd hour I heard someone ringing the front desk bell trying to get the attendant's attention. They were loud enough and forceful enough to wake me up. I'm one floor up and on the opposite side of the hotel which is located in the Old City of Jerusalem. It's a small hotel and the sound carries easily through the atrium, but still, whoever was making this racket wasn't going to go away. I groggily rolled over to check my portable alarm clock. It was 5:40 am.

Two or three minutes later I got a knock on my door. A forceful no nonsense knock.

You know, that should have scared me. But for some reason it didn't. Perhaps I just didn't have the good sense to be scared. Perhaps I was still half asleep.

"Security. They need to talk to you," came the voice from the hall.

I responded. I don't know what I said, but some verbalization to let them know I was awake. I was coming. They shouldn't break down the door. I scrambled to get dressed and, much more calmly than I should have been, opened my hotel room door.

As soon as I opened the door a clean shaven, muscular man dressed in plainclothes walked in like he owned the place. A second similar looking man stood guarding the doorway with my Palestinian hotel manager standing behind

him. The manager, who was only half awake himself, looked a mixture of fear and annoyance.

The man standing in the doorway clearly blocked my exit. Not like I was thinking of leaving. But had I wanted to, that option was not available to me. The man standing in my hotel room identified himself as Israeli security police and asked to see my ID. I handed the soldier my passport. I don't know for sure if he was a soldier or not, but I was getting that impression. He asked where I was from. I told him. He thumbed through my passport. He thumbed through it again. Not finding the Israeli visa, he got a little agitated. He asked where that was. My Israeli visa is stamped on a separate piece of paper tucked into the back of my passport. I showed it to him. Because I'm going to Pakistan later, I don't want an Israeli visa in my passport—because the Pakistanis won't let me in if they find evidence that I've been to Israel. Israel accommodated this by giving me a visa on a separate piece of paper.

While he looked it over, the hotel manager standing outside in the hall shrugged and gave me a look as if to apologize or perhaps say, "This is life." Upon seeing my Israeli visa, the soldiers promptly left. They then knocked on the door of the next room.

Wow. I guess the tumult of the Middle East has visited me up close.

I closed my door and went back to sleep.

When I woke up, I made my way to Bethlehem. This simple journey was not so simple and provided more opportunities for interaction with Israeli security. The day trip was wonderful, but nowhere near easy.

First the good part. The Church of the Nativity was a very special place indeed. Although I am not a very religious person, I am a deeply spiritual person. This church was out of the ordinary. The inside was grand yet simple. I don't know if that makes sense. But it was so simple in its elegance, it was grand in its impact. Moreover, I got to go down into the caves and tunnels where Jesus was born. I stood at the exact site of his birth and then walked eight feet over and sat in the little alcove where he was laid in the manger. That's a once in a lifetime treat. I must say, that church was probably the best touristy thing I've done in Israel.

While here I bought Christmas tree ornaments for my family. They're very simple carved wood ornaments; very kitschy. But they're made in Bethlehem, and that's where I purchased them, so that makes them special. I mailed them from the Bethlehem post office. I'm told that given security concerns it will take three to five months for them to arrive. Well, at least they'll be there in time for Christmas. Hopefully.

The downside of Bethlehem is the getting there. Bethlehem is in Occupied Palestine. I had to take a service taxi to the border. A service taxi is a group taxi where everyone shares the fare. A good idea—if you can get one. Normally service taxis are easy to find. Or you can take a tour. But with tourism so depressed, tours aren't running and service taxis are only running often enough to serve residents—which isn't very often. So, I took the service taxi to the border of Occupied Palestine.

Incidentally, Occupied Palestine should more accurately be called Occupied Palestines. With an S. Plural. There are about seven cities blocked off. These

cities are not connected to each other. There isn't one area called Palestine. At least not any more. There used to be. But Israel has continued to build cities (the Jewish settlements) in between the Palestinian cities. The nice roads connect the new Israeli communities and the Palestinians are kept prisoners in their own cities. Palestinians can't simply move from one city to another or to Israel. They can only do so after completing extensive, unreasonable and sometimes impossible paperwork. It occurs to me before WWII, the Germans did this to the Jews. Herded them all into their own designated "areas" and told them to live there. Forced them to keep paperwork and identification with them at all times. It was wrong then. It's wrong now.

So anyway, I take a service taxi from Jerusalem, but I can only take it as far as the checkpoint station at the border. Most cars aren't allowed through; unless you have certain paperwork, which a very special taxi might have, but most do not. From there, I walk through barricades and into Bethlehem in Occupied Palestine. On that side, I catch another service taxi and take that to downtown Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity on Manger Square.

In the taxi, much to my good fortune, I met a French seminary student who was doing volunteer work in Bethlehem. He showed me around the church and kept the land sharks at bay. He and I and an out-of-work tour guide acquaintance of his talked politics for a while. He's out of work because tourism is gone. Instead of 5,000 tourists a day, now there are 50; one percent of what there used to be. I saw lots of closed shops attesting to this. Given the hassles of getting here, can you blame the tourists for staying away? The unemployed tour guide hoped for peace, but with all the Israeli settlements being built in Palestine, he no longer thought a solution of two independent nations was possible. He said a solution needed to emphasize human rights treating everyone equally and that it was wrong to confine people to this four square mile prison—one known to the rest of the world as the birthplace of Jesus.

I caught a taxi back to the border checkpoint. There was no service taxi in this direction because there weren't any tourists and not enough locals to generate one. It dropped me off at the border and I was told to wait until they came to get me. I asked how long it would take and was told a few minutes. I asked how much and they said five sheqalims, which was correct.

During this "holding time" I was a sitting target for the land sharks and had one of them practically begging for me to buy anything for any amount so he could feed his family. I refused. I made a donation to a local NGO the other day, so I think I'm doing my part to help. Another taxi driver offered to take me to a different checkpoint so I could "cross faster" and it would only cost me 100 sheqalims—twenty times the correct fare. I again inquired of the manager how long it would take before I could cross and was told a few minutes.

At this point, I noticed three college age women just walking towards the checkpoint—and I realized I'd been had. There was no need to wait. This guy was no "manager." These land sharks kept me in the "waiting area" just to con me.

I got out of there. I started walking after the college women. While heading towards the checkpoint, and towards Israeli security with guns, the land sharks dropped off one by one. Eventually only one member of my land shark entourage remained.

“These people bad people,” the last land shark said in a very hushed tone, referring to the other land sharks. Then he proceeded to plead for a “donation.” I kept walking. By the time the Israeli guards came into view, he had disappeared, too.

I had to show my passport to the military guard to get out of occupied Bethlehem and into Israel. Or more accurately, into the Israeli dominated non-prison part of Occupied Palestine. There were no taxis at all on the other side, but the college women helped me out, and together we found one to take us to Jerusalem.

You know, I completely defend the idea of a viable Palestinian state. But when these folks abuse tourists, they do little to help their own cause. While I felt safe in Bethlehem, I was frustrated and angry at the con artist attitude. That said, the economy of this place wouldn't be gone (tourism down 99 percent is tragic) if Israel would learn how to make peace. Both heads of this beast are to blame.

Although I am beginning to really think the greater part of this problem is Israel's. Seventy-five percent the blame is Israeli and 25 percent is Palestinian. Yes, the violent Intifada of Hamas and Islamic Jihad is horrible and morally wrong (and politically counterproductive). The Israelis have real security concerns and, as an American, I am going to do everything I can to defend and safeguard the Israeli people and defend the democratic state of Israel.

That said however, Israel has gone overboard. Keeping Palestinians prisoners in small cities, without a reasonable way of getting between them, is wrong. Building a wall that divides Palestine into small unviable pieces is wrong. It doesn't help the Israeli cause. It hurts it. By treating the Palestinians like prisoners, they're only making matters worse. They're shooting themselves in the foot.

And all of this stupid violence takes place at Jesus' front door.

After an adventurous afternoon and a frightening morning I finally got back to my hotel, complete with an apologetic manager. As I lay down to go to sleep, the fact that the security police had knocked on my door at 5:40 am this morning started to get to me. I'd been okay all day. Perhaps I was distracted by different security concerns. But when I got back to my room, my mind started racing.

After I arrived in Jerusalem, a colleague put me in touch with some locals who I have met with. These people are involved in the Israel/Palestine issues and have provided me with a good on the ground education. My colleague has also asked me to go to Jenin in the West Bank and evaluate potential kindergarten schools to be rebuilt by a local NGO with funding from a UK foundation. I responded that I would and contacted the person she suggested as a guide.

In addition to my trek through Bethlehem prison and my 5:40 am knock, my prospective guide offered some insight that frightened me just a little bit more. Frightened is an over statement. Let's just say she elevated my concern.

“I don't know if you can even get into the town where the schools are, not easy these days,” the prospective guide responded. “The whole trip will probably take hours as you change from one van to the other and have to stop for numerous checkpoints. Pro-Palestinian individuals are stopped, questioned, can be jailed and deported, as you probably know. Be careful. My e-mail is censored.”

Not only did I get that email, but upon mentioning my early morning wake-up call, another acquaintance advised me to “keep a low profile.” The result of all this is, I am slightly nervous.

One thing I have decided to do, which is why I am at this internet café at 10 pm, is to make sure this story and my entire manuscript are preserved online instead of on the disc I carry with me. So, I’m here doing a little housekeeping. Given the way the border inspectors go through my belongings, I am surprised they didn’t read it then.

I don’t think He bargained for any of this.

Chris Verrill is the author of the international travel biography Is For Good Men To Do Nothing, now available for order at your local bookstore or online at Amazon and over 200 other online booksellers.



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Publisher

Is For Good Men To Do Nothing is published by Seeds of Freedom and Xlibris in strategic partnership with Random House.

How To Purchase

Order at your local bookstore or online at Amazon, Borders, Barnes and Noble, and over 200 other booksellers.

About the Author

Do I really need an About the Author section? I mean, weren't you subjected to me enough in the book itself? Oh, so you didn't read the book. I see. Well, in that case, the author is an amazingly brilliant, devilishly handsome multimillionaire. I am a non-profit director, e-commerce pioneer, and global humanitarian. I was born in California in 1964 and graduated from UC Davis with a great degree that has nothing to do with international volunteerism. I'm single, never married, no kids, no pets, one dying plant. How else could I take off for a year long adventure? I don't know where I live, but in my heart, I will always call Pacifica home. On the back cover, that's me in the Khurasan Refugee Camp shaking hands with the little boy. I am available for lectures, panel discussions, and children's parties.



Summary

Is For Good Men To Do Nothing Why Did September 11 Happen?

On September 11, 2001, like everyone, the author awoke to a different world. In addition to taking up a collection at his Rotary club meeting that morning, he

What motivated the terrorists?

decided he wanted to do more. What caused this tragedy? What motivated the terrorists? These questions

sent him on a journey. Not simply a physical journey to the Middle East and beyond, but a journey of discovery.

The Western world wrung its collective hands in response to a new survivalist fear of traveling following that fateful fall morning. Suicide bombers breathed their last in the West Bank. SARS contaminated the air. War ravaged Iraq. Or war

“Americans go home,”

said a university student in India.

“And take me with you.”

liberated Iraq, depending on your perspective. In as lighthearted a way as was possible under the circumstances, the author sets

out to explore these troubled hot spots and figure out why America continues to be sometimes loved and sometimes hated. Sometimes by the very same people. “Americans go home,” said a university student in India. “And take me with you.”

Is For Good Men To Do Nothing chronicles the author’s trek from the USA to Afghanistan, and 27 countries along the way, on a quest to try and figure out why this tragedy occurred; and maybe even do something about it. Along the way he is interrogated by Israeli security, enjoys the breathtaking views of Liechtenstein, stomachs the poverty of Ethiopia, gets abducted by an angry bus driver in Greece,

**Interviews former Mujahedeen
fighters in Afghanistan**

meets with UN officials in New York and Geneva, gets his pocket picked in Rome, says goodbye to his aging grandfather on Maui, talks politics in Kuwait, visits the

last of the white rhinos in Tanzania, crosses from Pakistan into India in a motorcade under full military escort, and finally interviews former Mujahedeen fighters in Afghanistan. All the while trying to make a small difference in the world by creating a vocational education program to aid Afghan refugees. International politics with a human touch—and a human mission.

Praise for *Is For Good Men to do Nothing*

“A balanced reflection upon the events and the aftermath of September 11th and the Iraq conflict.”

—**Mark Sykes**

“Constructively critical of the Bush administration, Verrill doesn’t just complain, he suggests solutions.”

—**Jennifer Gusman**

“A natural ability to conjure up vivid images with the written word.”

—**Eric Jackson**

“This is just a tremendous read from a human chronicler of an historic venture and adventure who happens to be a Rotarian—that is, a humanitarian in the trenches—who decided that his personal life paled in comparison to what he might do in the real world after 9-11 in America. And then he went and did it. This book is a testimonial, a monument, a recognition of the power of a single person to make a change.”

—**Steve Wright**

“Instead of taking a walk in the woods, Chris Verrill travels to the world’s hot spots. He’s the next Bill Bryson.”

—**Linda Monden**

“Witty, colorful, always entertaining. It’s *The New Yorker* magazine meets *National Geographic*.”

—**Heidi Davis**

“*Is For Good Men To Do Nothing* will awaken the spirit of travel in all those who read it.”

—**Courtland Grove**

“From April to December I had a lot of time on my hands. But I still didn’t read this book. My spider hole lighting wasn’t very good.”

—**Saddam Hussein**