

UNDERSTANDING THE BIG PICTURE OF THE BIBLE

WEEK 7 - WHAT'S GOD UP TO?

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. On the 6th day, God created man and told man that he would have dominion; man would rule over all the earth. Scripture tells us that it was “very good”. Enter Satan who offered Eve a pleasant proposition – to eat of the forbidden tree. Adam and Eve both ate of the forbidden fruit and sin entered the world. God, because He is God, judged sin! He MUST because He is holy! In the midst of judgment, the Redeemer was promised – because God is merciful. God is in the redeeming business. As soon as sin entered the world, God provided man with a way back to Himself. What is God up to? The same thing that He’s always been up to: offering forgiveness of sin through Jesus and promising the redeemed eternal life! What is God up to? God is up to BEING GOD!

When God cursed Satan – the conflict began. We see the battle of the ages throughout Scripture: God vs. Satan. The conflict continues and the conflict increases as God is up to setting the stage for the finale. We are in end times. And we see the world exploding!

Why do we see so much turmoil particularly in the Middle East? God is protecting Israel. God has chosen Israel for His purposes. God has guaranteed Israel’s survival. Therefore, Israel remains in existence today – and will remain so. God chose Israel to accomplish His purposes. God chose Israel as the instrument of blessing for the world. And so God has placed Israel in the center of history and in the center of Bible prophecy! Do you think Satan is thrilled at this? Satan hates God. God chose Israel to accomplish His purposes – His plan. So – Satan hates Israel. Did you know that Israel will initiate the Second Coming of Jesus? Zechariah 12:10ff tells us that when God pours out His Spirit on the third of the Jewish people who are left at the end of the Tribulation, they will mourn for Jesus – and Jesus will return. At Jesus’ Second Coming, when He establishes the Kingdom of God on earth, Satan will be bound. Do you think Satan is looking forward to this? NO! Thus the battle rages!

Israel, the size of NJ, is alive today. Israel has been surrounded by enemy nations – nations that have desired to annihilate Israel – to wipe them off the map. CONSIDER: any attack to do away with Israel is an assault against God Who has chosen Israel to accomplish His purposes. Nations have attacked Israel and engaged them in war. In the War of Independence in 1948, in the Sinai Campaign in 1956, in the Six Day War in 1967, in the Yom Kippur in 1973 God fought for Israel and against all odds – Israel survived! In July and August of this year we saw stunning victories as Israel DEFENDED itself against rockets launched from Gaza by the terrorist group, Hamas. . . as God wrought miracles during the battles on Israel’s behalf. And the majority of the world has come against Israel accusing Israel of war crimes as Israel defends herself. Ted Cruz, Senator from Texas, was recently boo’ed at a Christian event when he defended Israel and the Jewish people! The Christian event was organized by “In Defense of Christians” – a group that seeks to raise awareness of persecuted minority communities in the Middle East, particularly Christians. Israel is not popular in many circles.

God has placed Jerusalem in the eye of the storm – so that God can be glorified. God’s name is in Jerusalem – II Chron. 6:6 - I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name may be there. Jesus will rule and reign from Jerusalem for 1,000 years (Isa. 2; Zech. 14; Rev. 20). Is it any wonder why God would tell us to pray for the peace of Jerusalem (Psa. 122:6)? Jerusalem is where God’s plan of redemption – of salvation – is anchored! And so all eyes in the world are on Israel – on Jerusalem! And we see God work out His plan – as the conflict continues!

The Bible describes future scenes that are all set in Jerusalem. Together these prophecies should help us to understand what lies ahead for Jerusalem in God’s plan. The prophet Zechariah focuses on events leading up to the Second Coming of Jesus. Jerusalem is ground zero for these events.

Zech. 12:2-3 - Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. ³ *And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.*

What is this cup of drunkenness in Zech. 12:2? Jerusalem is pictured as a large basin from which the nations will figuratively drink only to find themselves intoxicated, disoriented – not thinking clearly. Aren’t we seeing that happening? Nations have told Israel to step down from defending themselves!

And those who would heave Israel away (Zech. 12:3) – what does that mean? I’m suggesting that it’s talking about those who fail to see God’s plan for Israel – who might wish to annihilate Israel – to see Israel thrown into the sea. What is God’s response?

Zech. 2:8 - For thus says the LORD of hosts: “He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye.

Joel 3:2 - I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land.

Zech. 12:8 - In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
NOTE: Zech. 12:8 is speaking of the war of Armageddon at the end of the Tribulation. Yet, we are seeing this intoxicating effect on nations today.

In Dan. 9:27 we read that the seven-year period leading up to the Second Coming of Christ – the Tribulation - will begin when a coming ruler “will make a covenant/a peace treaty with many for seven years (one week).” Who are the “many”? I’m suggesting that a covenant/peace treaty will be made between Israel and other nations. Who is that coming ruler? The antichrist. We know from the book of Daniel that the antichrist will break that peace treaty after 3.5 years and will go after the Jewish people and Christians with a vengeance never before seen (Rev. 12:13-17).

In II Thess. 2:4 we’re told about a third Temple. Israel will be allowed to rebuild her Temple in Jerusalem. They have been preparing to do so for years. And it is in this Temple that the antichrist will set himself up to be worshipped by those left on earth. II

Thess. 2:3-4 tells us that . . . *the man of sin will be revealed.* This is the antichrist, *the son of perdition,⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.*

Much conflict surrounds Israel! Jerusalem is the largest threshing floor noted in the Bible. King David was told by God to build an altar on a specific threshing floor (I Chron. 21:18ff) (owned by Ornan the Jebusite). This threshing floor became Jerusalem. During threshing the grain (the good part of the wheat) is separated from the chaff (the useless part). The threshing process could be as mild as tossing the wheat up into the air with a winnowing fork and letting the wind off the Mediterranean carry the chaff away – causing the grain (good part of the wheat) to fall to the ground. The threshing process could dictate that the separation of the grain from the chaff is carried out through beating or trampling on the wheat. The Hebrew word for “thresh” is “to trample” which comes from one of the threshing practices of using oxen to trample the grain. Threshing in Scripture is indicative of tribulation, of judgment in Scripture. Jerusalem had been used as a threshing floor in OT times. Jerusalem continues to be trampled upon today. Jerusalem has indeed been in the eye of the storm – but always under God’s protection! This is God’s plan.

How do we understand the current turmoil? ISIS. . . coalition airstrikes. . . no boots on the ground. . . ISIS is gaining more ground. . . ISIS in Syria is getting closer to the northern border of Israel. Hezbollah set off an explosion along the border between Israel and Lebanon that wounded two IDF/Israeli Defense Force soldiers. Netanyahu has been reported as stating, Israel has "proven that we will respond strongly against any attempts to harm us." Is Israel, then, going to put up with any of these terrorist groups or nations that come against her?

Psalm 83 - a prayer asking God to frustrate a conspiracy against Israel. The Psalmist is crying out against a multiple nation confederacy.

Psa. 83:1-5 - *Do not keep silent, O God! Do not hold Your peace, and do not be still, O God!*² *For behold, Your enemies make a tumult; and those who hate You have lifted up their head.*³ *They have taken crafty counsel against Your people, and consulted together against Your sheltered ones.*⁴ *They have said, “Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation, That the name of Israel may be remembered no more. For they have consulted together with one consent; they form a confederacy against You:*

Psalm 83 addresses the formation of a confederacy, predominately Arab nations, who seek the utter destruction of the nation Israel. Again, any attack upon God’s chosen people is an assault against Israel’s covenant keeping God. The Psalmist is asking God to frustrate this conspiracy against Israel. Bible scholars have noted that at no period in Israel’s history has such a confederation of nations amassed against Israel.

Psa. 83:13-18 - *O my God, make them like the whirling dust, like the chaff before the wind!*¹⁴ *As the fire burns the woods, and as the flame sets the mountains on fire,*¹⁵ *So pursue them with Your tempest, and frighten them with Your storm.*¹⁶ *Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek Your name, O LORD.*¹⁷ *Let them be confounded and dismayed*

forever; yes, let them be put to shame and perish,¹⁸ That they may know that You, whose name alone is the LORD, are the Most High over all the earth.

Considering the continued efforts to wipe Israel off the earth, and given God's protection of Israel, I'm wondering if we might see a Middle East war resulting in Arab countries surrounding Israel suffering destruction on a grand scale – with populations being decimated, economies destroyed, and military power being wiped out? I dare say that we might see the map of the Middle East CHANGE with Israel controlling much more land and perhaps many Arab oil fields as well.

At the same time, we need to pray that these nations come to know God through Jesus!

Within this scenario – consider the aftermath of such a war. The world would be reeling and raging from the fallout of an Arab-Israeli war – a war in which ISRAEL is the victor!

The war of Gog and Magog - Scripture uses this title for two such wars – occurring at different times. We're going to look at the first war of Gog and Magog which we find in Eze. 38 and 39. Because the timing of end times events is speculative, I'm going to share with you my view. You need to study it out for yourselves.

Re: the War of Gog and Magog, I'm suggesting that the main participants of this war, Russia and Iran, will form an alliance and bring on board several other nations following a devastating Arab-Israeli war - after the Arab nations surrounding Israel have been negatively impacted – after Israel has perhaps gained control over multiple Arab oil fields - perhaps. Scripture tells us that Russia will be lustng over the wealth that Israel has gained. Could this "wealth" stem from the spoils of war (oil fields) after winning the victory in an Arab-Israeli conflict?

Russia will militarily join with Iran and they will form and lead a new coalition. The goal of this coalition will not only be the obvious hatred driven motives to slaughter the Jews, but will also be the taking of a great wealth which will be in Israel. Perhaps oil.

Eze. 38:1-6 outlines the alliance of nations. We see Russia, Iran, Ethiopia, Libya, Turkey, Armenia, and perhaps Germany and Austria.

Is there a notable omission in this alliance of nations? Not one of the immediately surrounding Arab nations – immediately surrounding Israel - is listed as a participant in this campaign. Why? Perhaps because they've been crippled by the recent Arab-Israeli War. NOTE: The invading nations within the Gog and Magog alliance come from farther away:

Gog – title of the leader (like a Pharaoh or Czar)

Magog - Josephus wrote that the Scythians settled north of the Baltic Sea in what is now Russia and the former Soviet republics

Rosh - Russia

Persia – Iran

Cush - Sudan, Ethiopia, and Possibly Eritrea

Put - Libya, Algeria, and Tunisia

Gomer, Meshech, and Tubal - Turkey (and possibly Germany and Austria)

Togarmah - Turkey, Armenia, Turkish-speaking people of Asia Minor & Central Asia

Eze. 38:10-12 - God is speaking to Gog (a title for the ruler of Magog). Magog is thought to be modern day Russia (see notation re: the Scythians above) - *Thus says the Lord GOD: “On that day it shall come to pass that thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan:* ¹¹ *You will say, ‘I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates’—* ¹² *to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land.*

Russia's motive in invading Israel is to take Israel's wealth.

How are we seeing Israel in this passage? A land of unwalled villages – Israel – a land at rest – a land living securely – all of them living without walls and having no bars or gates.

Is that Israel today? They are back in the land after being gathered from the nations. Dwelling safely? “Rest” can speak to being secure. It can speak to having confidence. Israel is secure in that they are a confident nation militarily. However, there are currently walls up in Israel which protect Israeli populations against suicide bombers. Sirens go off when rockets are launched from Gaza and Israeli citizens have 15 seconds to find a bomb shelter. BUT - living without walls and dwelling “safely” might very well be the way of life in Israel following an Arab-Israeli war based on Psa. 83 – in which Israel scores VICTORY!

Eze. 38:3-6 - *Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.* ⁴ *I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords.* ⁵ *Persia, Ethiopia and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet;* ⁶ *Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you.*

Why is God bringing about this invasion?

Eze. 38:18-23 - *And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel,” says the Lord GOD, “that My fury will show in My face.* ¹⁹ *For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: ‘Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel,* ²⁰ *so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.’* (appears to be the largest earthquake in human history. The affect of this shaking will be felt in some way by every nation on this planet.) ²¹ *I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains,” says the Lord GOD. “Every man’s sword will be against his brother (an internal ambush).* ²² *And I will bring him (Gog) to judgment with*

pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. ²³ ***Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD.*** ”

The Lord clearly tells us that the nations will know and understand that this has happened by God’s hand. Many will know that God is the Lord! Eze. 38:20 - *The earth shall shake at My presence.* When the world witnesses that God has defended Israel, there will be, I believe, many who will search their souls and come to know the Lord!

How often have we thought, “Come Lord Jesus! Take us to be with you. But, what about our friends and relatives who don’t know You?” GOD IS MERCIFUL – and He doesn’t desire that any should perish. II Peter 3:9 – *God . . . is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.* Many will come to know Jesus in the midst of judgments and catastrophes that are rampant during end times. Many will not. II Thess. 2:9-12 – God will send strong delusion – that they should believe the lie – since they didn’t believe the truth. Rev. 6:15-17; Rev. 16:21 – blaspheming God in the Tribulation.

Through the War of Gog and Magog, the world will witness GOD defending ISRAEL! What a seemingly perfect time for the antichrist to step onto the scene and solve all the problems by brokering a seven-year peace treaty with “many” (Dan. 9:27) – between Israel and the surrounding nations.

Rev. 6:2 – the first seal Jesus opens on the scroll (the title deed to the land/earth) – rider with no arrows in his bow! And at that time the seven-year Tribulation will begin. The peace treaty initiated by the antichrist will launch the seven-year Tribulation (Dan. 9:27 tells us that the peace treaty begins a 7 year period).

I’m suggesting that the War of Gog and Magog - that we find in Eze. 38 and 39 - happens AFTER the Rapture of the Church but BEFORE the Tribulation.

How is this comforting to us as the Church comprised of Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus?

Jesus told His disciples at the last Passover Seder He would share with them the night before His crucifixion in the Upper Room: *Let not your heart be troubled; . . .* ² *In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.* ³ *And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also* (John 14:1-3). What we are reading in this passage is the Rapture of the Church – the catching away of the Church – the Church meeting Jesus in the air - which I’m suggesting occurs before the Tribulation. You’ll also find the Rapture in I Thess. 4:16-18 - *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.* ¹⁷ *Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.* ¹⁸ *Therefore comfort one another with these words*

COMFORT ONE ANOTHER WITH THESE WORDS. If the Rapture occurs in the middle of the Tribulation or at the end of the Tribulation – that wouldn't be so much a comfort would it?

Jesus' coming is imminent – “upon us.” NOTHING MORE has to happen before Jesus returns in the Rapture. We're told to watch and wait and to look for JESUS – NOT the antichrist!

What of an Arab-Israeli War? This might perhaps be a birth pang that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24. Birth pang – the beginning of sorrows, of travail. Conditions that we're witnessing in the world today might very well be leading up to GOD making Israel's enemies like the whirling dust, like the chaff before the wind – GOD severely crippling Israel's surrounding Arab neighbors!

Take comfort in I Thess. 5:9 - *For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ*

The Tribulation is the outpouring of God's wrath on the world – to test the world. The Tribulation is for the purpose of the purging of Israel and the judgment of the nations.

Rom. 8:1 - *There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus*

If you believe that the Church will go through part of the Tribulation or through the entire Tribulation, please tell me this – what is the purpose of the Church in the Tribulation?

Witnessing? God is going to seal 144,000 Jewish male virgins from 12 tribes – to serve Him (Rev. 7; Rev. 14). Two witnesses (could be Moses and Elijah; Enoch & Elijah; Zerubbabel might be in the mix).

NOW God is saving individual Jewish people and Gentile people – one at a time. This is where we need to focus. Lost people are FEARFUL with all that is going on in the world. Share Jesus with them!

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is indeed in the eye of the storm! But take comfort in God's plan. Jesus is returning to Jerusalem.

AND GOD promises to make Jerusalem a PRAISE IN THE EARTH! (Isa. 62:7)

Take comfort in knowing Who our God is. He is FAITHFUL! He will deliver on His promises. Jesus has told us that He will come again and receive us – His followers – unto Himself – that we may be where He is - in heaven during the Tribulation – while the world is being tested. And when the seven years of Tribulation are ended, the saints, the redeemed, will return to earth with Him.

WHAT IS GOD UP TO?

Rev. 19:11-16 - *Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.¹² His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had^[e] a name written that no one knew except Himself.¹³ He was clothed with a robe dipped in*

blood, and His name is called The Word of God. ¹⁴ *And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean,* ¹⁵ *followed Him on white horses.* ¹⁵ *Now out of His mouth goes a sharp*^[blue] *sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.* ¹⁶ *And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

This is Whom we worship and serve. And in HIM we REJOICE! AMEN!

QUESTIONS:

What is your view of end times? Why?

How will you live – as a believer in/follower of Jesus – in light of what Scripture teaches about end times?

What is your “take home” from this lesson?

HOMEWORK:

Map out your view of end times with Scripture references.

Is God leading you to share with someone/some people re: salvation through Jesus?

Read week 8 handout when you receive it.