

World War 3?

3-Year Bible Reading Plan

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Well, tonight is one of those nights. Tonight is one of those nights where we go to a passage of scripture that there are more questions than there are answers, and there's more legend than there is fact, the book of Ezekiel 38 and 39.

Now I've been joking about Ezekiel these last few weeks about if you're going to go through a Bible reading plan, you have to go through Ezekiel. I mean, you can't just skip one of the 66 books of the Bible in spite of the fact that it is one of the more difficult books of the Bible, and if you're going to read Ezekiel, you have to read chapters 38 and 39.

Now allow me to kind of give you the 30,000 foot view and then we're going to come back to these incredible chapters. Previously, chapters 1 through 25-26, is primarily God's, shall we say, not just judgment but his statements regarding Israel, their rebellion, why they find themselves in the captivity that they're in. Beginning in chapter 26, we have the judgment of the nations. The Lord calls out everybody. He leaves nobody behind whether it be Egypt or the Philistines, whoever it is. He basically says that, "I'm not just calling out my own people, I'm calling out all of creation." By the time you get to chapter 36 and 37, you begin to see what we spoke of this morning, the Lord saying, "I'm not just going to accuse you or proclaim judgment, I'm going to provide a means of escape, a new heart, a new purpose, a new desire. I'm going to bring life to your dead bones." When you get to chapter 40, I purposely skipped 38 and 39, all of a sudden there are the dimensions and the measurements of a new temple.

Now I'm going to warn you in advance, this week's Bible reading plan is going to sound like you're reading a blueprint. I mean, it's measurements and it's locations and it's gates. You're going to have to say a very special prayer when you read this week, you're going to say, "Lord, I'm not seeing much here. Help me get something out of this because you've got something that is certain cubits by a certain measurement," and all these great measurements of this temple that we'll speak of next week.

So as you see it kind of as the big picture, there in chapter 38 and 39, actually the last half of 37, 38 and 39, we have this famous occurrence of what we collectively call Gog and Magog. Now when we come to Gog and Magog, it initially brings to our mind or our

thoughts great warfare, great calamity, great destruction, and rightfully so for that's what you see, and as we're going to discuss in a moment, Gog and Magog technically are a geographical location. But for our study tonight, what we need to understand is the events that we're about to study are either representative of three different, separate, specific events or a combination thereof of the three. Do you notice how specifically vague I'm being tonight? This is one of those sections in the Bible that I'll write it with an ink pen but I'm going to be hesitant to put it in concrete because there is so much discussion, so much debate, and let me share with you why. Let me give you the three main approaches to these chapters, then we're going to go into these chapters and then see where it leads us.

There is one idea that chapters 38 and 39 of what we know as Ezekiel is what we might collectively call World War III. Now again, if this were 100 years ago, we would not refer to it as World War III because we hadn't had World War II as of yet, and there end up could be World War IV and V, so don't hold me to that numerical value, it is the fact that this is a major world conflict that everybody is involved in that predates what we might call the tribulation time period, those famous seven years that Jesus alluded to not only in Matthew 24 but Revelation 6 through 19. Why would that precede that event? Because chapter 40 is about a temple, and in Revelation 11 during that great tribulation, there is a temple that is prominent and prosperous even in the midst of the tribulation of which halfway through whom we know as the Antichrist defiles. So idea or theory number 1 is that we're about to read about this historic world war that actually preempts or precedes that horrific time period known as the tribulation.

Theory or idea number 2 is that what we're about to read is actually a great world conflict at the end of the tribulation, after the seven years have culminated and preceding what we might know as the famous battle of Armageddon. Why would that fit in the chronology? Well, when you read Ezekiel 40-46, it's a little different picture than the temple experience in Revelation 11, in fact, even the tribes and the respective names are just a touch bit different. So some say, "Well, this isn't an event leading up to the tribulation, this is an event at the end of the tribulation that is leading to temple worship that will take place in that famous 1,000 year reign of Christ that we refer to as the millennium."

And yes, there's even a third option. The third option is that this is actually describing from an earthly perspective that which happens in the middle of Revelation 20. Remember in the first six verses of Revelation 20, Satan is bound for 1,000 years, Jesus reigns on the earth for 1,000 years, but at the end it says Satan is loosed, he goes out and he deceives the nations for a little bit, and it says that they came from Gog and Magog. So therefore there are some that say what we're about to read is actually a description of that final war conflict that takes place immediately before the final judgment. The problem with that would be, well, then why would a temple be described in that manner because when you get to Revelation 21 and 22, there's a new heaven, there's a new earth, there's a new Jerusalem, but there's not a temple because it says Jesus is therein.

So therefore, again, we've been debating these issues for thousands of years and hopefully tonight will bring somewhat of clarity to it. I've done my best to just be as

simple as I can be for my own sake, not yours, in walking through the end of chapter 37, 38 and 39. We're going to begin at the end of chapter 37. What are the promises that God gives not only his people but the entire creative order leading up to this great war that's in chapter 38, and then chapter 39 is primarily the residuals or the aftereffect of this great conflict, whatever it may be.

So let's go to chapter 37. I'm going to begin in verse 21 through 24. It says,

21 And say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: 22 And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: 23 Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwellingplaces, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. 24 And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them.

What do we discover that God has promised? There will once again be unity. Those two nations, he's referring to the divided kingdom, that you had the 10 tribes in the north, the two tribes in the south, the Assyrians take the north into captivity, the Babylonians take the south into captivity, and there's this great division that's been happening even up to Ezekiel's day. He says that unity once again shall return to Israel. They shall be one body. By the way, you're going to notice a trend or a thread of truth tonight that everything the world is promising you is actually what God has promised, the world just tries to put their own personal spin on it.

So there's unity. The second thing in verse 23 is that there's purity. They will no longer worship their idols. The things of this earth that so encapsulate them and entice them will be no more. Now Israel always had an idolatry problem because of those that were not a part of the faith that they embraced in their lives and they adopted their idolatry, they allowed it to come into their lives through relationships and other means, and so no longer will there be any idolatry.

So just those two first points, unity among Israel and no idolatry, says that this is a time period like none other, this is an existence like none other. There has not been a time period since Genesis 12 where the Israelites were established as the people of God that we've had these two things at the same time. They had unity but unfortunately they had idolatry, and there were times they didn't have idolatry but they did not have unity, but here what he's saying is after all this happens, unity, no idolatry, third, this is interesting, the leadership. Now I don't know about you but when I read verse 24, you just want to

go, "Huh?" Notice what it says, "And David my servant shall be king over them." You know David's been dead 500 years. David will be king over them.

Now as you read throughout not only the rest of Ezekiel where it talks about the Prince that will be participating in activities, but when you get to Revelation 12 and it talks about this individual that shall reign, there's a very intriguing thought there, that what we know or whom we know as David and his role with Israel has not drawn to a completion. Now I know what you're thinking, that means that David who is now deceased would actually have to be raised back for this to occur. You know what we just read in the first part of this chapter, he will take the dead bones and he will breathe his Spirit into them. So whenever this all takes place, David again is a critical piece in it.

Last but not least, even though it's the first verse we read, I wanted to save it to the end. The land. Notice what it says in verse 21, "I will gather them on every side. I will bring them into their own land." I think you and I struggle in our culture and in our Western civilization with how important the land of Israel is to God because in our world, I don't know about you but the joke is that everything's for sale, the question is what's the price. But when it comes to God's dirt, it's not for sale and what we discover here is he says, "When I bring them in unity and a lack of idolatry and when David is king over them, they will be in their own land forever."

So therefore when we go back to those chronologies that I gave you or possibilities, it begins to kind of ebb and flow to navigating maybe past just a future world war because you've got David raised, sitting on a throne, the land that will never be anybody else's, there's no defilement and everybody's getting along. It sounds like a pretty peaceful experience, does it not? But before we can have peace in the midst, unfortunately there's got to be a war. Chapter 38, what I've simple described as the coming war. What will this look like? Who are the participants therein? And in chapter 39, what will be the consequences or, shall we say, the residue?

Now I'm going to kind of bounce around chapter 38 because if we were just to go verse by verse, thought by thought, we would be here for at least six more weeks so we're just going to hit some high points here. The first thing I want you to notice is in verse 15. It says,

15 And thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts, thou, and many people with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company, and a mighty army:

Now several things about this verse. The primary thing is the aspect of the location. When we talk about the battle of Gog and Magog, that's what we have here in Ezekiel 38, that's what we see in various places in scripture, understand that Gog and Magog just from a strict geographical perspective is what we would call modern-day Turkey and Russia. Now here's something you may not have realized. You can go home and look on a map, search Google or you may even have a map in the back of your Bible, it probably won't have what I'm about to address, that if you go to your map and you go to the city of

Jerusalem and you go due north, it's very interesting that due north of Jerusalem is the city of Moscow. When we think of modern-day Russia, we think of this vast land that is so broad and wide, but the center point of authority is actually on the very western border and when it says they will come from the north, you realize that an invasion from that part of the world that could possibly be centered in that specific location, it is due south straight to Jerusalem. By the way, you know what's in between that pathway before you get to Jerusalem? You guessed it, the little valley known as Jezreel or Armageddon. It's just a due south trip.

Now the other thing you'll notice, not only do they come from the north but it says they come riding upon horses, a great company, a mighty army. You know, it's interesting that the means of warfare seems somewhat what we might call primitive, but yet if you've done any type of study of end time events, there is so much destruction, there is so much damage that you get the idea that humanity resorts to its most elementary principles of conflict with one another. Quite possible that the sophistication that we know when it comes to warfare today will no longer be relevant at this moment because we have so self-destructed and/or possibly based on chronology, received the judgment of God.

So the location of this great conflict, it originates in the north, makes its way toward what we know as Jerusalem or the Promised Land. What's interesting also are the leaders that are involved. I'm going to go back to verse 1, I'm going to read verses 1 through 3 of chapter 38. It says,

1 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, 2 Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, 3 And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal:

Isn't that interesting that the Lord calls Gog and Magog a physical geographical place but it also, the Lord refers to their leaders by the same name as the land by which they possess. Now this is where we could chase the proverbial rabbit into a hole that we may not be able to get out of. Why? Because in the book of Daniel which, by the way, parallels the book of Ezekiel, do you remember that when Daniel is praying for 21 days, he is begging God to answer his prayer and the angel shows up after 21 days and he says, "Woo, I'm sorry for my delay. I have been fighting with the Prince of Persia." Persia was a physical location but this angel describes a supernatural spiritual entity that was its leader that he was entangled with. And then he says, "And after the Prince of Persia, I will engage with the Prince of Greece," which we know would be the next world power.

So when we talk about Gog and Magog, this war has described from at least its origination, its location of coming from the north down into what we call the Promised or the Holy Land, its leadership is more than just what we might call the leaders of sovereign states. You get the idea that this is a supernaturally directed and articulated battle and conflict because the name of the leadership, Gog and Magog, is described as beyond even those that we might collectively today call a head of state.

The third aspect about this war is the environment that we find it in. Look in verse 11. This is, to me, intriguing.

11 And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates,

It's interesting that this great war that takes place with great carnage as we're about to see and great aftereffects that's led by these entities "from the north," the walls aren't up. There's no means of deterring those who might mean ill against them, and yet from humanity's inception, at least post-sinful humanity, one of the first things we do when we build a city is build a wall, do we not? We have to protect ourselves from that which is on the outside. We want to put a defense that is up. And so the idea is, and this is where it gets real intriguing, is that this war comes on the heels of or on the end of a time period where great peace has been promoted and prospered throughout, so much so that the people of God, the Israeli people have taken their defenses down and said, "There is no threat to us outside of us." You know, it is interesting and, by the way, you'll notice I'm kind of trying to narrow in my specific chronological view here, that whom we know as that Antichrist according to Daniel 9, he establishes a covenant, an agreement with the Jewish people, a time of peace, a time of prosperity, a time of everybody that's getting along, very descriptive of the environment here where there is no need for a wall, there is no need for any defense mechanisms. It's a time of peace and then this battle comes in.

Finally, the purpose of this war. Verse 16,

6 And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes.

Why is what we know as the battle of Gog and Magog, why is it allowed? Why is it permitted? God allows it so that the "heathen" who initiate the war can see the hand and the power of God who fights contrary to them. The purpose of it is to show a lost, rebellious, rejecting world that there is a God who is ultimately in charge and in control. You know when you get to the end of that great tribulational passage there in the book of Revelation, you know it says the Antichrist gathers all the nations of the world, all of them going contrary to, and what does the Lord demonstrate? That he is the Lord.

So in summary, what we discover is that this great conflict is one that is initiated, I would say, by a spiritual leadership over a physical land in the northern part over what we know as the Middle East, comes down into Jerusalem with the desire to take it out in spite of its lack of defenses, and the Lord shows up miraculously, supernaturally and defends not just his people and his land but fights and gains victory. Gog and Magog. As we draw to the "third" or three sections tonight, let's look at what happens after Gog and Magog. This is where we get to chapter 39. This is after the war and before the temple worship. What occurs following this war?

Well, the first result that we see is there is a specific ceasing of events or activities. Verse 7 of chapter 39 says,

7 So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the heathen shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.

When this war is over, when the battle has taken place, the Lord makes it very clear that the defilement, that the polluting of his creation not just from a physical but from a spiritual perspective will not take place anymore. The conclusion, the victory that he gains will cease the spiritual defilement.

It's this next section that, to be quite honest with you, is just mind-numbing. What we see is the Lord having humanity both bury and burn the bodies that lost their life during the great war. Beginning in verse 9,

9 And they that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the handstaves, and the spears, and they shall burn them with fire seven years: 10 So that they shall take no wood out of the field, neither cut down any out of the forests; for they shall burn the weapons with fire: and they shall spoil those that spoiled them, and rob those that robbed them, saith the Lord GOD. 11 And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will give unto Gog a place there of graves in Israel, the valley of the passengers on the east of the sea: and it shall stop the noses of the passengers: and there shall they bury Gog and all his multitude: and they shall call it The valley of Hamongog. 12 And seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may cleanse the land. 13 Yea, all the people of the land shall bury them; and it shall be to them a renown the day that I shall be glorified, saith the Lord GOD.

So there are two time periods that are spoken of here. All the weapons that those who came from the north utilized to invade and retaliate, all of those weapons are burned, they are destroyed because there's no need of it. There's the idea that there is no more war, there is no more conflict because the Lord has established his place there. It will take then seven years to burn all the weapons but it will take seven months to bury all the dead. Now when you begin to think about the magnitude of that, it is mind-numbing, and as you begin to look at the possible chronology and how all this fits in, it becomes difficult at best, but I find it intriguing that it is the Lord that has his people burn the weapons and bury the bodies as they not only celebrate his victory but they walk in his glory.

Next we have a very interesting parallel in chapter 39, verses 19 and 20. It says,

19 And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of my sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. 20 Thus ye shall be filled at

my table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, saith the Lord GOD.

You say, "What's the parallel here?" In the book of Revelation at the end of what we know as the tribulation, the Lord says that the fowls and the birds of the air will have a feast among themselves of the carcasses of those that rebelled against him. And so what you begin to see is that after this war you have a time that is coming of purity, you have a time where there will be no more defilement, you have an incredible amount of lives that were lost and weapons that were burned, and even the creative order, the fowls of the air get in on what's taking place. There's an interesting parallel at the end of the tribulation in the book of Revelation where it says the fowl of the air make feast on the carcasses of those who waged war against the Lord.

Here's the conclusion. Look in verse 23,

23 And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me, therefore hid I my face from them, and gave them into the hand of their enemies: so fell they all by the sword.

I think that this verse helps at least myself a whole lot with the chronology. The heathen will know that Israel went into captivity. Now in a few weeks, we're going to walk through the book of Daniel in our Bible reading plan and when you get to chapter 9, there's a very famous passage that it talks about, it's Daniel's 70 weeks representative of 490 years where the Lord commences his judgment on his people for not trusting and rebelling against him. What we're studying in Ezekiel, this Babylonian captivity, you do realize that's part of it, right? That's part of that time period, but what's important is what we call Daniel's 70th week. There is a seven year time period that has yet to come for God's judgment, in fact, Jesus Christ in Matthew 24 referred to it when he talked about the abomination of desolation, that the prophet Daniel, he spoke of the great tribulation that is yet to come. Why is that important? Because here in verse 23, the heathen will know why my people went into captivity. In that 70th week, that tribulational time period, remember that was the second of the chronological options, he says at the end of this war, they will know why they went into captivity. Twofold reason. 1. Punishment for their rebellion against God, but number 2, so the Lord would show himself victorious over the heathen.

Speaking of judgment, when you get to verse 27, it says,

27 When I have brought them again from the people, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations;

The Lord says that when he is a part of this and when he brings us all together, that he will stand in judgment in the midst of the nations. You know, it's interesting in Matthew 25, Jesus is speaking of that time where he physically returns, that physical second

coming. We know about the battle of Armageddon and all that, it says that when he descends and he touches the earth, it says that all the nations will be gathered to him, and he said to those who are on his right hand, go into the kingdom of everlasting prepared for you, those on the left, into the fires of hell prepared for the devil and his angels. We call it the judgment of nations. It takes place in Matthew 25:41. You say, "Why is that important?" Because one of the aftereffects of this war is a description of the judgment that Jesus described would take place when he comes physically at what we know his second coming.

And in finality, continue in verse 28,

28 Then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there. 29 Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD.

In finality, the 2 ½ chapters that comprise the end of Ezekiel 37 through the end of Ezekiel 39 are some of the most difficult sections that we've got in all the Bible, but I want to read that last verse again, "Neither will I hide my face any more from them." The chronology is difficult, the specifics of who's involved and when and where and how at times are not only tedious but it requires much study not to have conflict, but the finality is, "I will hide my face no more from them." When this event takes place and the Lord descends among his people, there is never a description of anymore departure, there is never a description of anymore divide, there is unity of the people of God, there is a renouncing of the idolatry of the world, those that initiated the battle have been buried, their weapons have been burned, and the Lord shall dwell with them forever and ever. Amen.

Now I'm not here to discount the fact that there might be a coming world conflict that eerily looks a whole lot like this, but when seen in its totality, I believe it is a pretty good description of the events preceding and including what we know as the actual physical return of Jesus Christ. So in a very difficult and possibly topic of debate tonight, I want to close with a very simple rhetorical question: which side do you want to be on? Can I just over-simplify it? Which side do you want to be on? Do you want to be on the world's side who consistently fights against the Lord? Or do you want to be on the Lord's side who though it may not appear so but ultimately gains victory? We may not know all the details, we may not know all the specifics but we know whose side we can be on.

Tonight, before we close, I want to share one of my favorite stories in all of the world. Some of you have heard this before. There was a very mature young lady in a former congregation that I had the opportunity to serve. She had horrific hearing loss. She wore hearing aids but to be quite honest with you, they didn't do any good. She had to read lips. I know she's struggling during this pandemic because she has to read lips. She just cannot audibly hear. One day, I don't know what possessed me to do this, but I just decided after church one day to have a conversation with her. Now when you had a

conversation, I mean, you had to get right in her face, you had to be very pronounced. And I asked her some very strategic questions. I said, "Were you able to sing any of the songs we sung today?" No. I said, "Were you able to make out anything that I preached?" She said, "Not much." I said, "Can I ask a question? Why are you here?" Do you know what her answer was? "I just want the Lord to know whose side I'm on."

I share that story with you because you're going to leave tonight and you may say, "I don't understand anything we talked about. I don't get any of that stuff. I'm confused." But one thing I want you to leave with is whose side are you on.