

Iran the Coming Crisis

by Mark Hirschcock

Mark Hitchcock discusses the looming crisis in Iran, its historical context, and its implications for biblical prophecy and global security.

Duration: 1:16:05

Scripture: Matthew 16:27, Matthew 24:44, Romans 3:22, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, 1 John 1:9, Revelation 22:20

Topics: "Radical Islam"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the speeches given by Ahmadinejad, the former president of Iran, at the United Nations and a conference in Iran. Ahmadinejad claimed that he felt the hand of God and that none of the leaders blinked for 27 or 28 minutes during his speech at the UN. He also spoke at a conference with a banner that said 'a world without Zionism,' expressing his desire for a world without Israel and the Jewish people. The preacher emphasizes the importance of confessing to the Lord, serving in ministry, treating family members with love, and being an ambassador for Jesus Christ. The sermon also references a biblical passage from Ezekiel about a future invasion of Israel.

Transcript

Heavenly Father, what a privilege it is to come in your son's name. Knowing that you've given us a blessed hope, that we are filled with hope in this desperate time. The world is sick and the world knows it.

So we pray that your word would now enter our hearts to enliven us, that we might be busy about the Master's business. So Lord, you do your work within our heart. We pray that you would bless our guest speaker.

And we pray that you would use him to the full, as you would anoint him with your Holy Spirit. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Our guest speaker hails from Sooner Country. For those of you that don't know that, that's Edmond, Oklahoma, in that area. He is a pastor of Faith Bible Church.

And our guest speaker has a very interesting background in the fact that he began his career as a lawyer. But he got a promotion. He was four years with the Criminal Court of Appeals in Oklahoma.

And then he heard the call of God, got his degrees from Dallas Theological. And has been pastoring Faith Bible Church in Edmond for about 15 years. He has a wonderful wife, Cheryl, and two sons, Justin and Samuel.

And the Lord has given him a passion for the Lord's soon return. So he's written 14 books. And the Lord's given him a real keen insight to the things of the end.

So, at this time, I'm going to ask Pastor Mark Hitchcock to come and share the word. Well, it is a great privilege to be with you here tonight. It's a great honor.

I'm thankful to the Lord for this opportunity. And I just want to thank all of you for taking time out to be here tonight. It's a real blessing to me.

And I ask the Lord's blessing upon each one of you for coming out tonight in this time of study of the Word of God together. When you're a person who studies Bible prophecy and writes a lot about Bible prophecy, people send you all kinds of stuff via email. You know, they send you when the Lord's going to come back and all their calculations and all kinds of things.

But a while back, I got something very worthwhile. A friend of mine sent me an email. It's called the Top Ten Ways to Know if You're Obsessed with Prophecy.

It's one of these kind of top ten lists. So I thought I'd share that with you tonight to see if you're obsessed with Bible prophecy. Number ten is you use the left-behind books as devotional reading.

Number nine, you get goosebumps when you hear a trumpet. Number eight, you believe the term Church Fathers refers to Hal Lindsey and Tim LaHaye. Number seven, you believe there's an original Greek and Hebrew text with Scofield's notes.

Number six, you can name more signs of the times than you can commandments. Number five, you refuse a tax refund check because the amount comes to \$666. Number four, barcode scanners make you nervous.

Number three, you talk your church into adapting the 60s pop song, Up, Up and Away, as a Christian hymn. My favorite one, number two, you never buy green bananas. And number one way you know if you're obsessed with Bible prophecy is you always leave the top down on your convertible in case the rapture happens.

Well, I'm not obsessed with Bible prophecy, but I do believe that it's critical for us to understand the prophetic word, especially in times like these in which we live. Let's face it, people nowadays are a lot more interested in Bible prophecy than they've ever been before, as they're trying to make sense out of what's happening over there in the Middle East, and especially with this looming crisis in Iran. According to a recent Newsweek poll, 17% of the people in America believe that the world will end in their lifetime.

That's not just Christians, that's everybody. About one out of five people believe the world is going to end in their lifetime. A lot of people have this impending sense that the world is getting near closing time.

And this crisis with Iran that we see unfolding before our eyes, I believe is the greatest crisis that the world has ever faced. That's a pretty bold statement to make, I realize that, but I believe it's a greater crisis than Nazi Germany, that it's greater than Soviet Communism, because for the first time in history, the world

faces the real threat that Islamic extremists will get their hands on nuclear weapons, that we will see the first atomic Ayatollah, if you will. Now the six nations, the five nations on the United Nations Security Council, plus Germany, a lot of you have been keeping up with the news.

You know that they've given Iran until August 31st to kind of stand down in this enrichment of uranium. It's interesting, this took place several months ago, but Iran said that they were going to give their answer on August 22nd. Now that's interesting, here we are tonight, and I'm here speaking on this topic, and this is the day today, August 22nd, and a lot of people had wondered if this date was symbolic, or people have been talking about this being doomsday.

Bernard Lewis, a Princeton scholar, an expert in the Middle East, had said that this day, August 22nd, is the commemoration of the alleged midnight flight of Muhammad when he left Mecca, went to Jerusalem, and leaped to heaven from the Temple Mount. That this is the commemoration of that today. And so people were wondering what in the world is going to happen with this taking place that's loaded with symbolism.

Well I knew that Iran was going to turn down this offer because just a few days ago they initiated war games, were firing off and testing missiles. I mean, not exactly a conciliatory act. And of course today we heard the answer, and the answer is that they're refusing to stop enriching uranium.

But they want to talk. They want dialogue. And what this points to is it's the age-old talk-and-build strategy.

That you just keep talking, and you keep talking long enough, and you keep building, and eventually you don't have to talk anymore because you have the weapon. And so that's what they're doing. And just think about the Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, having his trigger finger on a thermonuclear warhead.

The man who has repeatedly said that Israel must be wiped off the map. Now the only good news I can find in this statement is at least he recognizes now that Israel is on the map. I mean, up to this time, no Arab nations or Iran have Israel on the map.

So that's a start at least. He's recognizing that they're on the map. But just picture Israel in some future conflict being hit, not with Katyusha rockets that have been supplied by Iran, but being hit with nuclear warheads.

And that's exactly what's ahead if this crisis is not averted. Now to help us understand this looming showdown with Iran, what I want to do in our time this evening is answer three important questions. The first one is, what is this Iran crisis? I just want to describe what's going on for us.

Secondly, I want to look at how this fits in with Bible prophecy. So why don't you go ahead and turn in your Bible to Ezekiel chapter 38 and 39. That's going to take us a little bit to get there, but we will get there.

Don't despair. Lose hope. And then the third question I want to answer tonight is, how should we respond to this? How should we apply this to our lives today? Now what is the Iran crisis? The current crisis in Iran has been simmering for about 30 years.

Iran has been at war with the United States and with Israel since the Islamic revolution there back in 1979. A lot of you here remember the Islamic revolution back in 1979 when the Ayatollah Khomeini, you remember, they overthrew the Shah of Iran and ran him out of the country. And since that time, it's been

the desire of Iran to be on the vanguard of a global Islamic revolution.

And really the modern jihadist terror that we see today really has its modern roots, not its ancient roots, but its modern roots in the Islamic revolution in Iran. A lot of you here as well remember the U.S. hostage crisis. The 52 hostages held there in Iran for 444 days.

A lot of those hostages are saying now that the current president of Iran, Ahmadinejad, was one of the main ringleaders in the hostage crisis and was one of the main interrogators. Now of course Iran denies this and he denies it, but I tend to believe people who were there for 444 days being interrogated and going through this, that they wouldn't forget a person that they saw time and time again. We know that Ahmadinejad was a disciple of the Ayatollah Khomeini.

He was a follower. And so I do believe that he was a part of that Iran hostage crisis. That's back when the Ayatollah Khomeini first began to call the United States the Great Satan.

And we've been called that ever since that time. When the late 1980s, a man named A.Q. Khan, who is a Pakistani scientist, he led the Pakistani nuclear program. And A.Q. Khan developed what later became known as the A.Q. Khan Network, and he sold nuclear technology to Libya, to North Korea, and also to Iran.

And so we know today that North Korea already has nuclear weapons. Now Libya, thankfully, has given up their nuclear quest, at least temporarily, but Iran now has the technology. And beginning in the late 1980s, what started is what I like to call a game of nuclear hide-and-seek, or nuclear cat and mouse, where you have the International Atomic Energy Agency kind of trying to find out what Iran was up to, and Iran was hiding this and acting like they didn't have a nuclear program.

But finally, they had to admit it in 2003. There was just too much evidence. They had been found out.

And so they agreed to suspend the enrichment of uranium back in 2003. But the crisis that we see today really kicked into high gear in June of 2005, when Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who'd been the mayor of Tehran, the capital of Iran, he was elected to be the president of the country, and he took office in August of 2005. Now, the international debut for Ahmadinejad was a speech at the United Nations in September.

Right after he took office, they asked him to come speak to the United Nations. Now, normally when a person makes their debut at the UN as a world leader like that, people kind of expect just a pretty mild talk and kind of in conciliatory-type tones. Well, Ahmadinejad gets up to speak, and he says that while he was speaking that he felt the hand of God come and entrance all of the leaders who were gathered there, and that none of them blinked for 27 or 28 minutes.

Now, later on, some of the delegates there said, if we didn't blink for 27 or 28 minutes, it's because we couldn't believe what we were hearing. I mean, they're standing there just wide-eyed listening to this man speak. But he says nobody blinked for 27 or 28 minutes.

And his followers, after the speech, said that they saw an aura of light about him or a glow of light around him. And he later said himself that he felt it, that the hand of God was there at work among these delegates. Now, I believe that some supernatural hand may very well have been at work there, but it wasn't God's hand.

At the end of his speech, he closed with a prayer, and his prayer was that God, that Allah would send the Mahdi, the Messiah figure, that we're going to talk about in a few moments, the great repository of truth to bring peace and justice to the earth. So he closes with this messianic, end-of-days, apocalyptic view that he has. Now, since that time, Ahmadinejad has made the headlines again and again, and a lot of you have probably heard many of his statements.

They're vicious, anti-Semitic, anti-American statements, basically threatening genocide of the Jewish people. In fact, Angela Merkel, the chancellor of Germany, has said that Ahmadinejad is the new Hitler. And many have said that Iran is the new Nazi Germany, and these jihadists are the new Nazi stormtroopers.

But here are some of the recent verbal salvos that he's thrown out. He says, we don't shy away from declaring that Islam is ready to rule the world. He says, the Jews invented a myth that Jews were massacred.

And he's referring to the Holocaust. So he says that the Holocaust was a myth. And he says, if people in Europe feel so sorry for the Jews, then why don't they let them come live there? You know, why do they have to live in the land of Israel? He also says, we cannot say, or he says, we say that this fake regime, that's referring to Israel, cannot logically continue to live.

He says, no doubt the new wave of attacks in Palestine, these terrorist attacks that are going on there, will soon wipe off this disgraceful blot from the face of the Islamic world. So his statement for Israel is just a disgraceful blot on the Islamic world. One of the more interesting speeches he's given was on October the 26th of 2005.

They had a meeting in Iran called A World Without Zionism. So basically, the theme of this conference was a world without the nation of Israel, without the Jewish people. And he spoke to 4,000 students, brainwashing these students in Iran.

And there's a huge banner behind him that says A World Without Zionism. And here's what he said at that conference. He said, they asked, is it possible for us to witness a world without America and without Zionism? So notice we get thrown in.

He's saying, look, is it possible to imagine a world where there's no America and there's no Jews? But you had best know that this slogan and this goal are altogether attainable and surely can be achieved. This regime that is occupying Jerusalem must be wiped from the map. Now, this language about wiping Israel from the map is nothing new.

The Ayatollah Khomeini said these very things back in the 70s and in the early 80s. He's just simply repeating what he's learned from the Ayatollah Khomeini. He also said this.

He says, whether you like it or not, the Zionist regime is on the road to being eliminated. In April of 2006, just a few months ago, he says, Palestine will soon be freed. He called Israel a constant threat.

He called them a permanent threat to the Middle East. He says the Middle East will soon, notice he says it soon, will soon be liberated. And he says Israel is heading towards annihilation.

One of my favorite statements he just made a few weeks ago is that Israel pushed the button of its own destruction by attacking Lebanon. I thought it was Hezbollah that attacked Israel, but now it's Israel that

attacked Lebanon, which they did, of course, but they did it in retaliation for this terrorist attack. Now, this would all be bad enough, but the story actually gets worse if that's possible.

Ahmadinejad holds to a Shiite Islamic view of the end of time. Now, most of us have heard a lot about Islam. We've probably learned more about it than we would like to in the news.

With what's going on in Iraq, we've learned about that there's a Shiite sect and a Sunni sect, the two main sects in Islam. And in Shiite Islam, there's the idea that the successors in the leadership and the authority are the descendants of Muhammad. And in Sunni, that's not necessarily so.

So it's an issue of authority within their religion. And Ahmadinejad is a Shiite Muslim. The nation of Iran is 90% Shiite.

Iraq is 60% Shiite. Also, Hezbollah is a Shiite organization. And Ahmadinejad, being a Shiite Muslim, holds to their view of the end times.

They have an elaborate end times scheme. They believe in what's called the Twelfth Imam. Now, an Imam is a descendant, a direct bloodline descendant of Muhammad.

And they believe that this Twelfth Imam was the twelfth descendant of the prophet Muhammad. And so they call themselves Twelvers, the sect that they're a part of. Another word for this Twelfth Imam, or they call him the Hidden Imam, is the Mahdi.

The word Mahdi in Arabic means the rightly guided one. And they believe that he's the last and the legitimate line of successors to the prophet Muhammad. Now, here's where it starts really getting kind of mystical.

They believe that in 878 A.D., that this twelfth descendant of Muhammad, when he was five years of age, a little boy, that he went into hiding, he went into the cave at the mosque at Samarra in Iraq, and then he disappeared there, he went into hiding. And they believe that he kept communicating with the world until 941 A.D. And then he stopped all communication. And they believe now that he will appear in the end times.

And they think that he's going to emerge from a well in a mosque, the Jamkharan Mosque, that's in Iran. It's kind of interesting, he disappears to a mosque in Iraq, but he's hiding now in a well down in Iran. And he's going to come up out of this well, out of hiding, in the end times, to rule the world.

Ahmadinejad, when he became mayor of Tehran, one of the first things he did was had a huge thoroughfare built down through the middle of the city that cost \$20 million. When he became president of Iran, one of the first things he did was allocate \$17 million to this Jamkharan Mosque to restore it and to update it. There are all kinds of mystical reports about what he's done, that before he appointed his cabinet and his leaders, which all hold his view, that he wrote their names down on a piece of paper and that he dropped it down into this well to get the approval of the Mahdi who's hiding there.

But in their view, in Shiite Islam, in the end times, they believe that the Mahdi, the hidden Imam, this 12th Imam, that he's going to come and appear in a situation where there's worldwide chaos and worldwide bloodshed and war. Now, a person who believes that is not exactly the kind of person that you want to have nuclear weapons. They also believe that this Mahdi is going to come, and here's where it really gets interesting, I think, that he's going to rule the world for seven years.

Now, those of us who hold our view of Bible prophecy, the number seven years kind of rings a bell for us, because in Daniel 9.27 it says that the Antichrist will come and he'll make a covenant with the nation of Israel for seven years. It's going to be broken at the midpoint. But there's a lot of different ideas about this Mahdi and who he is, that they say that he will be an unparalleled political, military, religious leader, that he'll be revealed after a great time of suffering and turmoil on the earth, that he establishes justice throughout the whole world, that he leads a revolution to establish a new world order.

They think he'll make a seven-year peace treaty with a Jew of priestly lineage. They believe that he will conquer Israel for Islam and lead the final battle against the Jews. They also believe that he will cause Islam to be the only religion on earth.

They also say that he's going to discover some biblical manuscripts that are going to convince the Jews to convert to Islam. Also that the Ark of the Covenant is going to be found somewhere up around the Sea of Galilee and brought down to Jerusalem, that he has power from Allah over the wind and the rain and the crops, that he'll possess great wealth, that his face will shine like a star, and that he's going to be loved by all. So they see this Mahdi coming back, and they see him coming back to rule the world in peace for seven years.

And I've wondered in my own mind if this idea of a great ruler coming for seven years and bringing peace might make some people in that movement much more likely to accept a person like this Antichrist. I wonder what's up as he makes a covenant with the nation of Israel for seven years. Now Ahmadinejad, the president of Iran, believes that the Mahdi is going to come back, he says, in the next two years.

And he believes that he can actually hasten or accelerate the coming of the Mahdi. And he sees that as his divine destiny. So to kind of put it in Bible terms, he sees himself as kind of the John the Baptist of the Mahdi.

He's kind of the forerunner, or the one who's going to pave the way for his coming. Ahmadinejad has said that the primary mission of his regime is to pave the way for the glorious reappearance of the Imam Mahdi. Now this is the man who's on a quest, an undeterrable quest, for nuclear weapons.

Now back on January the 9th of this year, the plot really thickened, because Iran removed the seals from their nuclear reactor at Natanz and said they were going to begin enriching uranium again. And on April the 9th, they started doing that. They began to enrich uranium, and they said it's their inalienable right.

A man with Ahmadinejad's view can never be allowed to possess nuclear weapons. For him, worldwide chaos and bloodshed and conflict is like putting out the welcome mat for the Mahdi to come back. That's what he believes.

Now of course, Iran in this whole crisis has been saying that their nuclear program is only for nuclear power. Donald Rumsfeld, I think, summarized it pretty well when he said, Iran needs nuclear energy like it needs more sand. I mean, they're the number three or four producer of oil in the world.

If you put oil and natural gas together, many believe they're number two in the world. And they found plans. They've discovered plans that they have that can only be used to construct nuclear weapons.

So everybody in the world, really, that doesn't have their head in the sand knows that that's the intentions that they have. And different people have different numbers for how long it's going to take them to get nuclear weapons. Some say, well, they won't have it until 2010.

Others say 2008. But when they're really pressed, no one really knows for sure because these places they have, they're deep down under the ground. I mean, not to mention the fact that they could buy one from North Korea.

When North Korea fired off these missiles recently that landed in the Sea of Japan, they had delegates from Iran that they had invited there to witness this. So they could buy one from North Korea. Now, the U.S. and Israel have clearly said that we will not allow Iran or Ahmadinejad to possess nuclear weapons.

Several months ago, there was a whole special on Fox News about the Iran crisis. And one of the most interesting facts about that was they had a brief interview with General Dan Halutz, who is the leader, the chief of staff over there of the Israeli Defense Force. And they asked Dan Halutz, they said, how far will Israel go to keep Iran from getting nuclear weapons? And without batting an eye, he said 2,000 kilometers.

That's the distance from Israel to Iran. That's how far they'll go. And that's all he would say about it.

The big question in this whole crisis is what will Israel and what will the United States do? Will the U.S. or will Israel launch some kind of a preemptive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities? This past April, I heard Ehud Olmert, the prime minister of Israel, say that he had had a meeting with President Bush and that he and President Bush agreed that they had about a one-year window of opportunity to do something, that in one year's time that they believed Iran would reach a point of no return. And this was in this last April. So it seems to me that the United States and Iran, who say we won't, the United States and Israel, who say we won't let Iran get a nuclear weapon, have something in mind between now and next April or May.

Now, it's going to be a lot more difficult to take out Iran's nuclear program than it was in Iraq. You remember back in 1981, the Israelis shocked the world by going to Isarak and taking out Iraq's nuclear facility. The problem is Iran is a lot farther away than Iraq.

To have planes fly that far, they're possibly needing refueling, getting them back. Also, Iran has really a nuclear megaplex. They have eight different nuclear sites.

So it's a lot more difficult a problem. Now, I think that Israel's recent retaliation against Hezbollah may have been in preparation for what they know is an inevitable attack against Iran. The terrorists around Israel have come in several times and taken hostages, kidnapped soldiers or people from Israel.

Why is it this time that Israel retaliated in such fury? Well, part of it could be they just had it and this was the right time. But think about this for a moment. If Israel knows in their mind that within the next year they're going to have to go take on Iran, the last thing you want is Hezbollah sitting up there at your northern border.

So I think it's very possible, knowing what they're going to have to do later, they decided, look, we've got to go in and clear this area out, push these people back 15 to 20 miles, get that peacekeeping force in there so that when we go hit Iran, they can't make a call to Hezbollah and tell them, you know, go get them from the north. And then Israel would be fighting on two fronts. So I think this is part of Israel's strategy, knowing what they're going to have to do in the future.

But just imagine what Iran and what the nations around Israel would do if Israel hits Iran, if they take out these nuclear facilities. Now, one of the important questions to ask at this point is, why is Iran acting right now? Why did they choose this time? Let me give you three reasons why I think they've seized this as the window of opportunity. First of all, we have the Iraq war.

We went in there with the idea that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. They haven't found those. And we've lost credibility in the world.

We've been kind of embarrassed because of that. And our military is very overextended. And Iran is using Iraq as a place to fuel terror.

And so they see us kind of overextended. They see us kind of weakened in the international community. And I think they see this as a perfect time to act.

A second reason is oil. One of the main reasons that Iran feels shielded right now is because of oil. Did you know that this year, 2006, in the world, we began using 1,000 barrels of oil a second? We hit that mark this year.

We drain an Olympic-sized swimming pool every 15 seconds. And we empty 5,500 Olympic swimming pools every day. Iran is either, depending on what statistics you look at, either the third or fourth leading exporter of oil in the world.

If they were to take their 2.5 to 5 million barrels a day off the market, now, we don't buy any oil from Iran right now. But other countries do. If they take that off the market, those other countries have to find somewhere else to buy it.

And the margins between supply and demand cannot make up for them taking their oil off the market. Here's another thing. If you look at a map of Iran, they lie right there on the Strait of Hormuz, a very narrow little strait of water that leads out from the Persian Gulf, the only way out.

20% of the world's oil every day goes through that little narrow strait, the Strait of Hormuz. And Iran has said that they could put mines there, they could torpedo a couple supertankers and sink them in the channels there, and they could cut off 20% of the world's oil supply. They know, Iran does, that the oil is not going to last forever.

It's a finite resource. So they know if they're going to act, I believe, that they have a window of opportunity in which to act. And part of the hesitance of our government, I think, and other governments, to act against this crisis with greater urgency is a hesitancy because of oil.

The leaders of Saudi Arabia say that if the United States hits Iran and takes out their nuclear facilities, that for some period of time, oil will go from \$70 a barrel to \$210 a barrel. Now, our leaders hear that and they think that's committing political suicide to do this. But all it's doing is just putting the problem off longer and longer.

I mean, really, you look at nations like Iran, to use a statement, they have us literally over a barrel, don't they? I mean, they have us over a barrel. They use oil as their shield. So we've got the Iraq War, we've got the oil blackmail, and the third thing is Iran knows that they have Russia and China sitting there on the UN Security Council.

I mean, Russia consistently doesn't vote for any sanctions that have any real teeth in them. China gets a lot of their oil from Iran, and they're not going to vote for any real difficult sanctions either. They tend to block these.

So they know that because of the Iraq War, because of the oil situation, because of Russia and China as UN Security Council members, I think they're emboldened right now. They see this as their window of opportunity, and they're seizing it, and they're beginning to act. The Middle East crisis that we just saw, this 36-day war between Israel and Hezbollah, where the dust is kind of settling right now, was instigated by Iran.

Hamas and Hezbollah, the two attacks they had against Israel had the exact same M.O., or modus operandi. They both came in, took soldiers hostage. They were coordinated, and I think they were coordinated by Iran as a diversion or a smokescreen to take world focus off of their nuclear program, and it worked for a period of time.

Hezbollah is just simply a proxy of Iran. They were founded by Iran in 1982. They're financed by Iran.

I read recently that they think they may be getting \$50 million a month from Iran. The weapons that they have, these rockets they have, are coming in from Iran. To use kind of a Vietnam-era illustration, there's a Ho Chi Minh Trail from Iran through Syria into Lebanon to Hezbollah, where they're being funded.

And Iran's goal is to create this Shiite crescent from Iran through Iraq to Syria and down into Lebanon. When we connect the dots, Iran's fingerprints are all over this recent Middle East crisis. And if Iran gets nuclear weapons, it can launch an attack.

It could pass off these weapons to terrorists like Hezbollah. I mean, they could even just take the nuclear material, the nuclear byproducts, and make dirty bombs, and those could be set off in the Middle East or set off in Western cities. I mean, there's a myriad of doomsday scenarios that one can think of.

This Middle East crisis that we just saw recently, I believe, is just the first stage of Iran's bid for regional supremacy and ultimately global supremacy for Islam and the great war that they want to have against Israel. Now, I told you we'd get to Ezekiel 38 and 39. The second question I want to answer is how does this all relate to Bible prophecy? Let me begin reading in Ezekiel 38 and verse 1. The word of the Lord came to me saying, Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshach, and Tubal, and prophesy against him.

And say, Thus says the Lord God, Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshach, and Tubal. And I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and put with them, all of them with shield and helmet, Gomer and all its troops, Beth Togarmah from the remote parts of the north, with all its troops, many peoples with you.

Be prepared and prepare yourself, you and all your companies that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them. After many days you will be summoned, in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had been a continual waste, but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them. And you will go up, you will come like a storm, you will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you.

Thus says the Lord God, notice again, this is the word of God, it will come about on that day, that thoughts will come into your mind, you will devise an evil plan, and you will say, I will go up against the land of unwalled villages, I will go up against those who are at rest and live securely, all of them living without

walls and having no bars or gates. Now what we see in this passage, the first thing that we see is a description of who is going to be involved in this massive coalition of nations that's going to invade Israel in the end times. And we see that in verses 1 to 7. Now you'll notice these names are ancient places, ancient geographical locations that existed in about 570 B.C. when Ezekiel is writing this.

You're not going to find Rosh or Meshach or Tubal or any of those places on a map today. They were ancient geographical locations in the days of Ezekiel. And the names of those places may have changed many times throughout the centuries.

But we can go back in 570 B.C. and find out where were these places. And it will be those same geographical locations, by whatever name they're known, that will participate in this invasion in the end times. And you'll notice it begins with this word Gog.

Now Gog is the leader of this invasion. Now I don't know if his name will be Gog. The word Gog means high or exalted.

It's a title. It probably refers to his arrogance, his view of himself. But it says this Gog is of the land of Magog.

And Magog is the land of the ancient Scythians who inhabited Central Asia. You remember when the Soviet Union was still in power, there were five republics of the Soviet Union. I like to call it kind of the underbelly of the old Soviet Union.

There were these nations like Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. These five former republics of the Soviet Union are now sovereign nations. Sixty million Muslims live in this area of Central Asia, the ancient land of Magog.

And it says here that Gog of the land of Magog will be the prince of Rosh and Meshach and Tubal. Now I believe that Rosh here is the nation of Russia. And I'm not going to go into all the reasons for that.

It's not just because the two names sound alike, but there's good evidence that Rosh is Russia. In fact, the great Hebrew scholar Gesenius says back in the 1800s here that Rosh is undoubtedly the Russians. Now some of the translations you have may say the chief prince of Meshach and Tubal and not have the word Rosh there.

Some translations take it just as an adjective. It means the head or the chief, but I've got the new American standard and I think it correctly translates Rosh here as a proper name, as a proper place, as a location. Now what we've seen since Vladimir Putin took office in Russia is what I like to call back to the USSR.

He's basically taking Russia on a very steady path back to totalitarianism, back to dictatorship. He's a former member of the KGB, all of his cabinet, former KGB members. He's taking the nation back to totalitarianism.

That's what we see taking place right now and I believe that's setting the stage for these events to take place. Notice it also mentions here Meshach and Tubal. Also down in verse 6 are Gomer and Beth Togarmah.

Now I think all four of those nations are modern day Turkey. Meshach, Tubal, Gomer and Beth Togarmah. Now in the past people have identified these as different places, but when you go back in ancient times and see where they were, it's really not that difficult to see that they're in what today is Turkey.

Now a lot of people say, well isn't Turkey trying to get in the EU? I mean why would they be involved in something like this? As Turkey is trying to get involved in the EU, they're basically being rebuffed. They're being turned back. And more and more right now, Turkey is beginning to align themselves with Russia and with these other Islamic nations.

They're beginning to turn back. I read in the Weekly Standard a couple of months ago that one of the number one selling books in Istanbul, Turkey is Mein Kampf. Hitler's book, My Story, where he lays out what he wants to do to the Jewish people.

And one other aside is a big part of the peacekeeping force there in southern Lebanon, many are saying may be troops from Turkey, which could be bringing them down already to be near Israel. We also see here, and of course the mention in verse 5 of Persia, that is Iran. The word Persia occurs 35 times in the Old Testament, and Persia became Iran in March of 1935.

And Iran became the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. There's no doubt here that this is a mention of the nation of Iran. And then notice the next nation is Ethiopia.

Now literally in Hebrew it's Kush, which was the nation just south of Egypt, which actually is modern day Sudan. It's not modern Ethiopia, it's modern Sudan, which is a hard line, it's a hardened radical Islamic nation, and that's where Osama Bin Laden was hiding out in the late 1990s. The next nation is Put, which was the nation to the west of Egypt, which is modern day Libya.

Of course we all know about Muammar Gaddafi, and he took over in 1969 again a radical Islamic nation. So we see these nations that are written down here. Think about this.

These names were written down 2,600 years ago, and yet they read like today's headlines. Russia, Iran, Libya, the nation of Sudan, Turkey. These are the places that are here, and prophecy proves the inspiration of the Bible.

Past prophecies that have been given have literally come true, and we can see these nations listed here, written down as Ezekiel was inspired by the Holy Spirit 2,600 years ago. One of the interesting things we see as well is that Iran and Russia are forming an alliance with one another. Russia sold Iran the nuclear reactor they have at Bashir.

They sold it to them for \$800 million. Now why they would ever do that, other than for the money, I have no idea. But they did, they sold them that reactor.

Just this last November, Russia agreed to sell Iran a billion dollars worth of their most technically advanced missiles. Also, you remember that Russia has been offering to take Iran's uranium and enrich it for them, and then give it back to them so that the world will be able to watch what's taking place and know what's happening with their uranium. But it just shows this relationship and this alliance forming between Rosh and between Persia, these two nations mentioned here within a few verses of each other, written 2,600 years ago.

Mortimer Zuckerman, the editor of U.S. News & World Report, a while back was talking about Russia and their new involvement in the Middle East and their alliance with these nations. And he interviewed an American diplomat, and this American diplomat said that he thought Russia's alliances with these nations, especially with Iran, could be the hooks and the jaws that bring Russia down into this conflagration. Now, if you notice when I read Ezekiel 38 verse 4 earlier, what does it say? I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out.

It's as if there's initially kind of a reluctance. They're kind of reluctantly involved, but they ultimately come and are involved in this. And I think the alliances that Russia is developing with these other nations in the Middle East, especially nations like Iran, could be the hooks in the jaws that ultimately bring them in reluctantly at the beginning to be involved in these events that are predicted for the end times.

Now, the next thing we see in Ezekiel 38 as we go through it here in verse 8 is the timing of this invasion. When's it going to happen? Now, this is the biggest point of disagreement about this passage among conservative scholars, among those who study Bible prophecy. People put this all different times in the end times.

But you notice verse 8 says, But its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them. Now, the general time is easy to pin down because it says it will be in the latter years. Down further on down in Ezekiel, it says in the same chapter in verse 16 that it will come about in the last days.

So this is going to happen in the latter years before the coming of the Messiah. But can we pin it down any more than that or get more specific? Well, obviously this invasion has to take place when Israel is a nation. Now, if you read the chapter right before Ezekiel 38, Ezekiel 37, it talks about the regathering of the nation of Israel, their rebirth in the end times.

They're coming back together again like these dry bones being joined together with the sinew and the muscle and the skin being placed upon them. Picture the regathering of Israel. This year, for the very first time since 135 A.D., there are now more Jews in Israel than any other place on the earth.

There are 5.3 million Jews in Israel. Now there are more Jews in Israel than there are in the United States, according to experts. They keep going back there.

It's like they're being drawn by the divine hand of God back to this place to set the stage for the end times. But you'll notice here that not only do they have to be regathered to their land, but they have to be at rest. Look at the end of verse 8. They are living securely, all of them.

Look down at verse 11. They are at rest and living securely. Down in verse 14, when my people of Israel are living securely.

Now if you've read the Left Behind series, as I guess about 62 million people have, according to the Left Behind series, this Russian invasion of Israel, this Russian Islamic invasion, is going to occur before the rapture takes place. It happens, this invasion does, and then the rapture occurs after that. So some people believe this invasion will occur actually before the rapture even takes place.

Now my difficulty with that view, and that view could be right, but my problem with that view is it's hard for me to imagine before the rapture that Israel is going to be living at peace, that they're going to be living securely in their land. The only two times I know of in the future, the Bible teaches that Israel will be at rest, one will be in the millennial kingdom, when Jesus comes back to rule and reign. Well it won't be then,

because there's no war then.

The only other time I know about is during the first half of the tribulation period, when the Antichrist has made his covenant with Israel, guaranteeing their peace and their security, before he breaks that covenant with Israel at the midpoint. One of these days the rapture is going to take place, and sometime, I believe, not long after that, the Antichrist will come and make this treaty of peace with the nation of Israel. And it seems to me that during that first three and a half year period of the tribulation is the most likely time for this invasion to take place.

And what we see today with Israel giving over their security to peacekeeping forces, giving their security into the hands of others, could be a first step or a prelude to their willingness to turn over their security to western nations. And what will happen is when this peace treaty is signed, Israel is going to be lulled in to a sense of false security. And these nations are going to swoop down upon them in a Pearl Harbor-like attack to try to wipe out the Jewish people once and for all.

Now what's going to happen when this takes place, when this invasion occurs? Look at verse 9. And you will go up, you will come like a storm, you will be like a cloud covering the land. Talking about this invading force. You and all your troops and many peoples with you.

They're going to unleash this all-out attack against Israel to come and cover the land like a cloud and come like a storm. A few months ago I was watching a program and I heard them give a quote by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the president of Iran, and here's what he said. He said, the Zionist regime, talking about Israel, the Zionist regime is a dried, rotten tree that must be eliminated by one storm.

Now when I heard that statement, the first thing I thought of is Ezekiel 38 and verse 9. I went and read this passage and it says, you will go up, you will come like a storm, you will be like a cloud covering the land. Now I don't think he knew he was quoting the Bible, but the only way that I think Israel could be eliminated by one storm, what he has in mind is a nuclear attack against Israel. What other storm could eliminate the entire nation? Now the rest of this passage, of Ezekiel 38 and 39, basically goes on to describe how God is going to decimate these invaders.

They're going to pour into the land of Israel, and you remember in Israel in 1967 there was the six-day war. This is going to be the one-hour war. As these nations come for the last time finally to eradicate and to wipe out the Jewish people, and as they come into the land, God says, my fury will mount up in my zeal and my blazing wrath.

God sends an earthquake. He sends fire and brimstone from heaven. In all the chaos, the troops start fighting and killing each other.

It would be the greatest case of death by friendly fire in world history. They start killing one another, and then it says God will send plagues upon them, and will kill them. They're going to be decimated and wiped out there in the land of Israel.

And I'll leave you to read the rest of that, the rest of the account of this for yourself, but it's one of the most dramatic prophecies in all the Bible. God will come there to wipe the Jewish people off the face of the earth, and the only thing He's going to get in Israel, the only piece of land is a grave, as they bury the dead there. One of the things that's going to happen as a result of this is, just think about this for a moment, if during the first half of the tribulation period, when the Antichrist has a covenant with Israel, if all these

nations, Russia and these Islamic nations, come against Israel, it's going to really be an attack against the Antichrist, isn't it, in the West? So it's going to be an attack not only to wipe out Israel, but to draw the West into an open confrontation and clash of civilizations.

And when these nations are wiped out and destroyed, there's going to be one big power vacuum left in the world. And who's going to fill that power vacuum? The Antichrist. Have you ever wondered how the Antichrist is going to come on the scene at the middle of the tribulation and declare himself God, and that the world would worship him, with all the Muslims that are in the world who are going to say, we're never going to do that.

If their armies have been decimated and wiped out, he can come forward and he can take control of the world at that time. So I see Ezekiel 38 and 39 as the setup for the Antichrist to come on the scene and to take control of the world. One thing that's fascinating to me about Ezekiel 38 and 39 and this Gog and Magog invasion, is did you know Gog and Magog is mentioned twice in the Koran? The number four sign of the times in Islamic eschatology or Islamic view of the end times is the Gog and Magog invasion.

They see a great invasion of Israel, that Jesus is going to come back and wipe the invaders out to deliver the Islamic people who were there. And God's going to send great plagues on them. They'll get big boils on their neck.

And it goes into all this description. It's basically just taking the story of the Bible and just turning it around. It's just a counterfeit of the true story that's in the Scriptures.

And to me, it's going to be a terrible twist of irony that those who believe that Gog and Magog is going to take place to deliver them will be the very ones who are involved in this, who are destroyed by the hand of God when they come into the land of Israel. You know, one of the questions I get asked when I'm on secular stations is, how do you know all this stuff's going to really come true? In fact, I was on a station in Canada, a totally secular station. They knew nothing about prophecy.

And a guy who was an atheist called in. He said up front, he says, now I'm an atheist. He said, but I will have to say with all that's been happening in the world lately, I have read through Revelation twice here recently.

Well, that's kind of interesting. He had some good questions. But he asked a very good question.

He said, why should I believe this? How do we know that Jesus is going to come back? And the answer to that is, we have a pattern of the fulfillment of prophecy in the Old Testament, don't we? The Bible predicts Jesus would be born of a virgin. He was born of a virgin. It predicts that he would be born in Bethlehem.

He was born in Bethlehem. It predicts in Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22, he'd be crucified. He'd be betrayed, according to Zechariah, for 30 pieces of silver.

The Bible has a track record of all these predictions of the first coming of the Messiah that were filled, literally fulfilled. And for some reason, people say when we come to the second coming prophecies, well, they're not going to literally be fulfilled, they're just symbolic. We have a pattern of fulfillment.

These prophecies will literally be fulfilled. Now, it's interesting, we have this backdrop here of the Persian Empire. The Bible talks a lot about ancient Persia.

Persia is mentioned 35 times in the Old Testament. Did you know through the prophet Daniel that Daniel predicted there'd be Babylon? Then there would be the Medo-Persian Empire. They'd be overtaken by Greece and then by Rome.

And you know those prophecies came exactly true. In fact, one of the greatest Persian rulers of all time, Cyrus the Great, in Isaiah 45, God called Cyrus the Great by name 150 years before he rose to power. A great Persian ruler.

And people say, well, how do you know this is really going to be fulfilled here about Persia and about Iran in the future? Because we have the track record of the past prophecies that God has given about ancient Persia that have been literally fulfilled. The record that we have in the Bible is a reliable record. God is not asking us to believe it as a blind act of faith.

There's a pattern of literal fulfillment that God has given to us. When I look at our world today, I believe that the stage is set for this invasion. Now, when I got here tonight and saw the stage set for this play that's beginning, I thought, you know, God's hand is really in this of what we're doing here tonight.

Because this fits in perfectly with my view of the end times, the idea of stage setting. That the events of the end times cannot occur in a vacuum. Just like everyone's not going to show up here tomorrow night for the play, and a minute before it starts, they run up here and start putting everything in place.

They have put the props in place. I'm sure afterwards tonight and tomorrow they'll be putting more things up here. And when you go to a play in a theater, a lot of times there's a big curtain that's drawn.

And when you're sitting out there, you can hear things happening behind the curtain, but you can't see exactly what's taking place. But all of the props and the players have to be in place before the curtain goes up. And I believe that what we see today is the stage being set for the events of the end times.

And someday the curtain will go up at the rapture, and all of the players and all of the props will be in place for the events of the end times to begin to unfold exactly as God has predicted. And when we look at the world today, we see Israel regathered to their nation. One of the greatest miracles in human history.

The regathering of the Jewish people to their nation. We see a worldwide outcry for peace. I mean, there is a desperate yearning in our world for peace.

The world today is a more dangerous place than it's ever been. The West wants the uninterrupted flow of oil. There's almost a worldwide cadence, if you will, crying out for peace.

Setting the stage for an anti-Christ to arise out of Europe, which is really the main seat of diplomacy today internationally, to come on the scene and to bring this peace treaty that has to be in place for these events to occur. All of the nations in Ezekiel 38 are identifiable nations today with both the will and the desire to invade and to destroy and to attack Israel. And chief among them that I've been talking about here tonight is the modern rise of the nation of Iran, beginning with the Islamic revolution in 1979.

Plus, we see all of these nations presently forming alliances with one another. So what I believe we see today are many of the major players of the end time moving into place, taking their place to fulfill their role someday when the curtain goes up and the end times begin. Now that leaves us with the question, how should we respond to this? What should we do? You know, none of us know how much time we have personally or prophetically.

Personally, we don't know how long we'll live. We don't know when we'll be finished with our ministry here on this earth. And we don't know how much time we have prophetically, because the Bible tells us, I believe, that the Lord Jesus could come back at any time.

So not knowing how much time we have, let me mention just a couple of key responses tonight for us. First of all, make sure that you know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior. Don't get up and leave here tonight without having made a decision for Jesus Christ as your Savior.

One of my favorite verses in the Bible is 2 Corinthians 5:21. It says that God made Him who knew no sin, that is Jesus, to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. God took all of my sins and He put them on Jesus when He died on the cross. And when I trust in Jesus Christ as my Savior, the Bible says God not only wipes the slate clean and brings me from my great deficit up to zero, but He actually gives me the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

In my bank account and my ledger in heaven, credited to my account is the very righteousness of Jesus Christ. God sees me through the righteousness of Jesus Christ. God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us that we can become the righteousness of God in Him.

It's unbelievable that God would do that for sinful creatures, that He would come and clothe us in the very righteousness of Jesus Christ. Here in just a few moments, a brother is going to come and give you the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as your Savior. To just say, Lord, I admit that I'm a sinner.

I know that I can't save myself. I have to have a Savior. And I know that Jesus Christ is the Savior that I need.

And I accept Him to be my Savior from sin. For those of us who know the Lord, we need to be living in light of His coming. We need to let the imminent return of Christ motivate us to surrender our lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

One of the things that I would challenge all of you here to begin to do in your life is sometime each day, preferably in the morning, just pause for a moment and let this thought percolate down into your mind for just a moment. And that is to make this statement to yourself, perhaps today. Today might be the day that Jesus Christ comes back.

And I can promise you, if you do that, there are things that you would normally do that day that you won't do. There's things that you might say that day that you wouldn't say, or places you might go that you won't go. If the imminent return of Jesus Christ really grips our lives, the idea of Maranatha, our Lord come, that Jesus could come back at any moment of time.

It gives us in our life a sense of urgency. A sense that we can no longer just go along with kind of business as usual. To examine our life and say, what is there in my life that I need to get rid of? What is there that I need to confess to the Lord? What ministry is there that I need to get involved in to use my time and my treasure and my talents that God has given to me in His service? How am I treating the people in my family? Am I loving my wife, my husband, my children? Am I treating them the way God would have me to do? What about my witness? Do I really see myself each day as an ambassador for Jesus Christ? There ought to be a sense of urgency about our lives.

And my prayer is that God will give us that urgency. Back in 1938, there was a monstrous hurricane that hit the east coast of the United States. And a man named William Manchester told a lot of stories that

came out of this great event.

And one of my favorite ones he tells goes like this. He says, among the striking stories that later came to light was the experience of a Long Islander who had bought a barometer a few days earlier in a New York store and it arrived in the morning post September 21st. And to his annoyance, the needle pointed below 29 where the dial read hurricanes and tornadoes.

He shook it and he banged it against the wall, but the needle wouldn't budge. Indignant, he repacked it. He drove to the post office and he mailed it back.

And while he was gone, his house blew away. Now, sadly, there are a lot of people like that. And you may be here tonight and you may be hearing this storm warning.

And you may be thinking in your mind and wanting to take the barometer and bang it against the wall and repack it and send it back. But my encouragement to you is hear the word of the Lord. Look at what's going on in our world today, the confluence of events that we see, the exhilaration of events as we have globalism in our world.

And may God help us to heed the storm warnings that we see around us. And may each one of us here be found in faith and be found faithful when our Lord Jesus Christ comes for us. Let's pray together.

Our Father, we do come before you tonight. And Father, we pray for anyone who may be here this evening who has never trusted in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior from sin. I pray that by the power of your Holy Spirit, that even right now that you'd be drawing them to yourself, drawing them to Jesus Christ, the one who has made sin for them, they can be made the righteousness of God in Him.

And Father, we thank you for your word that you've given to us. You tell us that the prophetic word that you've given to us is like a light that's shining in a dark place whereunto we do well to take heed. Father, this world today is a dark place.

We thank you for the light of the prophetic word, the light that we have the privilege to hold forth to this world. It shows us the way and it gives us hope. And Father, I pray for each one of these dear people who've come out here tonight to study the word of God together, for all of us, that we would be like men and women who are waiting for His Master when He returns.

We ask these things in the dear name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Thank you, Pastor Mark.

We want to give everyone an opportunity that would want to come forward to make things right with the Lord. First of all, for anyone here this evening that might not know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, we want to give you that opportunity. There's going to be men of the church that will be here to pray with you, to lead you in that confession of faith.

As we've heard such things before us, what manner of men ought we to be? We see in Revelation 22, the Lord over and over three times says, I am coming quickly. So whether it's for salvation or just to make things right, we're now going to ask the men of the church to come forward and whoever would hear the spirit call, please come forward. You have risen from the dead, and O my Lord, hear my knee shall bow, and my tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Why don't we stand and make it easier for them to get up. You're my Lord. Yes, You're my Lord.

You have risen from the dead, and You're my Lord. Hear my knee shall bow, and my tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Perhaps you're a believer and just after hearing what you've heard tonight, you just need prayer to focus in on what the Lord wants you to be, what He wants to be in you.

Hear that person as we continue to worship. Make your way forward. Take advantage of these men who are here to pray for you, to pray with you, to support you in that step, that deeper step in Him will give you strength for the days ahead.

Jesus, draw me close, close in all to You. Let the world around me fade away. Jesus, draw me close, close in all to You.

Cause I desire to worship a nobody. Jesus, draw me, Jesus, draw me close, close in all to You. Let the world, let the world around me fade away.

Jesus, draw me close, close in all to You. Cause I desire to worship a nobody. I desire to worship a nobody.

Jesus, draw me, Jesus, draw me close, close in all to You. Let the world around me fade away. Jesus, draw me close, close in all to You.

Cause I desire to worship a nobody. No shadow of turning with Thee. Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not.

As Thou hast been, Thou forever will be. Great is Thy faithfulness. Great is Thy faithfulness.

Morning by morning, mercies I see. All I have needed, Thy hand hath provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

Morning to sleep, and a peace that endures. Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide. Strength for today, bright hope for tomorrow.

Blessings all mine, to Thou let me shine. Great is Thy faithfulness. Great is Thy faithfulness.

Morning by morning, new mercies I see. All I have needed, Thy hand hath provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me.

Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me. We can go forth possessing our blessed hope. So as we go forth, let us enjoy this great life that Christ has given us.

Pastor Mark Hitchcock will be out in the foyer if anyone would want to have him sign a book. He'll be out there to do that. We want you to be encouraged in the Lord.

We have great things before us. Remember next week on Tuesday night is going to be Dr. Thomas Ice. He'll be sharing about pre-tribulational rapture.

So may the God of peace guard your hearts and minds. Please, anyone would want to come forward, this is your opportunity. God bless you.

Go forth in peace.

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