

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

War in the Gulf: A Biblical Perspective, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 90-49

As you know, last week I began a special series entitled *The Biblical Perspective on the War in the Gulf*, and I'm going to continue that series this morning. And then, because so much has come to light through the pages of Scripture and in the events of what is occurring, I want to carry on that series beyond today.

For today, just a very obvious reminder that psychologists, psychiatrists and counselors of all kinds are having currently a run on their services, because people are experiencing heightened fear and anxieties and confusion over the scary chaos that is occurring in the Middle East. There is a certain frightening uncertainty about everything that has come in just the last few days, few weeks.

The course of the direction of the world seems to be changing dramatically. In fact, just when we thought we were getting over the unnerving threat of Russian aggression, when we were finally over the issue of fearing that the Russians would drop a nuclear bomb on us, the worldwide collapse of Communism and perestroika in Russia made us believe that that particular threat was no longer in existence, and we were beginning to feel comfortable and rest, and enjoy maybe a little bit of safety and sanity, all of a sudden a new source of terror developed, and it feels like we might be on the brink of World War III, and, indeed, that is a real possibility.

The chaos that is occurring now in the Middle East has certainly ripped up the comfort of many people, who have traded in their soap operas and sitcoms for some heavy doses of real death and destruction, and their false emotions for some real emotions. The world seems to be so totally unpredictable, so utterly insecure, so very threatening.

We know that, as Christians, Jesus said that the kickoff signal for the end time would be wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation and kingdom against kingdom, and the Bible also is very clear that the final world war, the final massive holocaust, will occur in the Middle East. It will be a massive war of the world that will end with Christ's return in glory to set up His kingdom.

In fact, that war is called, in Revelation 16:14, the war of the great day of God, the Almighty. It will be a war with many nations. It will be a war fought on many fronts. It will be a war fought by many men. But it will be God's war. It will be the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

And so the question comes before us, the fact that history has moved so rapidly to the Middle East, and the fact that war has broken out on such a massive scale and threatens to implicate and involve more and more nations all the time, are we really seeing the setup for the last war, the war of the end, the final battle? Is it possible that this is the beginning of the end?

Before we can answer that question properly, we need to understand a few other issues. And so I'm endeavoring to unfold those issues to you which will lay a foundation for answering that very important question. The first question that we asked last time was the question, why does war happen? Why is there war at all, when man, so long on the earth and so sophisticated in his technology, psychology, sociology and theology, should've advanced beyond the point where he massacres one another?

Why is there war? We noted that there are basically three components in war. One is evil aggression. James 4 says, "You lust, you have not, so you make war." The other is just protection. Romans 13 says that the government bears a sword, and the sword is to protect the innocent and to punish the evil. And so there are wars of protection and self-defense, wars which act to the benefit of society, when they are fought against an evil influence or an evil aggressor.

And the third component we noted in war is divine judgment. Since "the wages of sin is death," the New Testament says, and "the soul that sinneth, it shall die," the Old Testament says, God often uses war as His weapon to execute His judgment, to bring about death.

And all of this complex of factors, evil aggression, just protection and divine judgment, work and operate in all wars, over which God is perfectly sovereign, almighty, powerful and in absolute control. When we see in a war like the one we're watching now sin and lust and passion for self-glory and self-gratification and evil aggression lead to vicious attacks, we understand that that's the human heart at work.

When we see the just protection and defense of the victim by those nations which still understand their God-appointed purpose, we say, well, that's God's design for government at work. But in and through it all inexorably at work is the judgment of God, God bringing about death as judgment on sin. And so war happens for those reasons.

Secondly, and this is where we left off, we asked the question, can war be moral or just? And I said to you last time, from the viewpoint of reason, the answer is yes. From the viewpoint of sense, common sense, the answer is yes. There must be built into human society the role of protector.

So we said there is a just war, and a just war could have this kind of definition. It would have to have a just cause. That means defense and protection. It would have to have a just intent, peace and safety and freedom, not conquering and devastation and destruction. It would have to be as a last

resort, after all negotiation possibilities have been exhausted.

It would have to have limited objectives, peace and safety, not the slaughter and massacre of the whole population. And it would have to have limited means. That is, its force would be limited to its objectives.

And even the matter of reason tells us that there are times when a war is just, a war of defense and protection, a war that removes some kind of malignancy from human culture that threatens its very existence. But, beyond that, beyond reason, let's go to Revelation, and I want to pick up that second point for a moment this morning and say, from the standpoint of the Scripture, does God, in the Bible, give governments the right to make war?

Does God, in the Bible, give governments the right to make war? Or is the use of military force in restraining, resisting and even punishing violence entrusted to human government? Does government have a right to move in and restrain and resist and punish violence?

Now, the answer to that leads us to a very simple, direct, Biblical theology of war. Let me give you several points. Point number one, the Lord forbids murder. The Lord allows war. That's true in Scripture. All throughout Scripture, from that old Hebrew command, "You shall not kill," God forbids murder, the Hebrew word ratsach. God forbids that.

But the Lord does allow war. Milchama is the Hebrew word. God does not forbid war. God even said, Proverbs 20 and verse 18, "Prepare plans by consultation and make war by wise guidance." God never says that about murder. He doesn't say, "Plan your murders well." But He does say, "Plan your wars well."

In Proverbs 24:6, He says, "For by wise guidance, you will wage war, and in abundance of counselors, there is victory." Again, God says, "If you're going to go to war, make sure that you carefully assess it."

In the New Testament, Jesus followed up by saying, "A man doesn't go to war unless he counts the cost," the assumption being there that there are times and seasons when war is a fitting thing. As Ecclesiastes 3:8 says, "there is a time for peace and there is a time for war."

Go to Hebrews 11 for just a moment, and I'm going to be moving rapidly this morning. You're going to need to hold on as we will cover many fascinating truths. In Hebrews 11:32, here we have the heroes of faith. Here we have the hall of fame of the Old Testament. The people who were the most decorated, the most spiritually heroic are given us in Hebrews 11.

And I want you to notice verse 32. As the writer of Hebrews exalts the heroes of the faith, he says, "Time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David." And you will note that those individuals were engaged in wars and battles. "And also of Samuel and the prophets," and then he says this about them, "who by faith conquered kingdoms." That indicates war.

"Performed acts of righteousness, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight." Here you have a list of warriors, a list of soldiers, who are the great heroes of the faith. God identified those who fought in wars as heroes, and so God, while forbidding murder and forbidding personal vengeance, does not forbid war.

Second point, the Lord instituted the death sentence and gave its power to government. God knows and has set into human society from the very beginning that man will be dangerous and must be controlled, and the ultimate weapon of control is death. And there are times when men, to be controlled, must be killed. And, also, in order to demonstrate the sanctity and the sacredness of human life, one who sheds blood must shed his blood.

In Genesis 9, we find this principle initially given. Verse 6, "Whoever sheds man's blood," Genesis 9:6, "by man his blood shall be shed, for in the image of God He made man." Man is so significant, as made in the image of God, that if you take a man's life, your life must be taken. Your life must be taken.

Not to do that is a sin. Not to avenge the death by a death is to go against the Word of God. Look at Numbers 35:33 for a rather graphic illustration of this. Numbers 35:33, "So you shall not pollute the land in which you are." Now, how could they pollute their land? "For blood pollutes the land."

What do you mean? When people are killed in your land, their blood pollutes it. "And no expiation or no covering, no cleansing can be made for the land for the blood that is shed on it except by the blood of him who shed it." Very clear. Your land will be polluted by blood until you take the life of the one who shed that blood in the first place.

God instituted a death sentence and gave the power of its execution to government, not to an individual avenger, but to the government. Many Old Testament texts show that God enjoined His people to take action against an evil aggressor. Many Old Testament passages, you remember, show how God commanded Israel to act as an instrument of judgment on an evil nation.

Sometimes it was in defense, as that nation came against Israel. But other times God just said, "Go and destroy that nation because they are a bloodthirsty people. Not only that, they are against God, they are idolatrous, they are adulterous, they are a malignancy on human society. They need to be removed."

And Israel very often acted as the weapon of God's judgment against other nations, to enact a judgment which they deserved even as the prior generation deserved the flood which drowned them all. And so Israel was used by God often as the executioner of the godless wicked who polluted the earth and threatened the good. That was a common Old Testament picture. God even promised to lead them into battle as a man of war, He called Himself, and their commander in chief.

You say, "Yes, we know about that in the Old Testament." We know there were wars and that God commanded them and that God used Israel as a weapon of judgment and so forth in the Old Testament. But some would say that the New Testament changes all of that. And all the people who are pacifists will come and say that the New Testament calls for a complete different attitude, and there is no allowance or tolerance for war of any kind in the New Testament.

But the New Testament does not say that. And so we need to understand that the principle that the Lord has designed a death sentence and given the power of execution to the government is true in the New as it was in the Old. Let me show you that very clearly.

Look at Matthew, chapter 26, Matthew, chapter 26, and verse 52. Jesus in the Garden here, the soldiers are coming to take Him captive. Peter pulls out the sword to defend Him. Peter is taking upon himself personal vengeance, and he is going to murder the first guy in line, who happens to be the servant of the high priest. Peter tries to cut off his head, he ducks and loses his ear, as you know.

In verse 52, Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its place." Put your sword away, Peter. "For all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword." Jesus is affirming a principle. If you take a life, you give your life. He is upholding that Old Testament standard.

The New Testament never, ever lessens the standard of capital punishment for one who takes a life. Jesus said, "Peter, if you take a life, you will give your life." That is a divine principle, ordained by God, and Jesus would uphold it, and He did uphold it.

In Acts, would you look at chapter 25 for a moment? Toward the end of the book of Acts, we find the Apostle Paul is a prisoner in a situation not unlike that of our Lord in terms of being a prisoner of the Romans. And in chapter 25 of Acts, the Apostle Paul is pleading for a hearing before Caesar. In verse 10, Paul said, "I'm standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. Try me in a court before Caesar. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know," he says to Festus.

But notice verse 11. "If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die." What a statement. If I have committed a crime that is worthy of death, then give me death. I deserve it. And here the Apostle Paul upholds the authority's right to execute him. They

have the power of death. It has been given them by God.

You say, "Well, that's capital punishment. That's in an individual case." War is, in a sense, capital punishment extended to the level of the crime. The greater the crime, the broader the crime, the more far-reaching the crime, the greater the execution threat that government should bring to bear upon it.

But the New Testament never, ever speaks against war and being a soldier, either. Let me show you. Go back to Luke 3, Luke chapter 3. This is a fascinating look at John the Baptist, who came and preached repentance. He preached for people to turn from their sins and prepare their hearts by faith in God for the coming of Messiah.

And when he was preaching, it says that "people believed on him," and verse 7 says, "Many were going out to be baptized." It was a baptism of ceremonial outward cleansing to speak of the fact that they were saying in their hearts, "We want to be clean and we want to receive the Messiah, we want to repent of our sins." And so he was baptizing them.

In verse 8, he says, "You need to bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance." Now, you need to demonstrate the reality of your repentance in your life. Now, we want to know how. Go to verse 10. "And the multitudes were questioning him, saying, 'Then what shall we do?'" How do we do it? How do we show the attitude of repentance?

And he gives them some practical things. "Let the man who has two tunics share with him who has none, and let him who has food do likewise." Let's see it in your love. Let's see it in your love. Let's see it in your humility. Let's see it in your generosity. Let's see it in your unselfishness. Let's see it in your willingness to share. That's the kind of fruit that'll evidence your repentance.

And then in verse 12, "Some tax collectors were there, and they had come also to repent and be baptized, and they said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?'" Now, if he had been against taxation, he might've said, "Get out of the tax business, my friend. Get out of that business." But he doesn't. He says, "Collect no more than what you have been ordered to." Just be fair. Just take exactly what you're supposed to take and don't gouge anybody. That's how you can show the genuineness of your repentance.

Then in verse 14 here's the key. "And some soldiers were questioning him, and the soldiers said, 'And what about us? What shall we do?'" And he didn't say to them, "Get out of the army. Take off that uniform. Stop warring and battling. Stop carrying a sword." He didn't say that. He said, "Don't take money from anyone by force," which they could easily do. "Don't accuse anyone falsely. And be content with your wages."

That's a very significant passage. There you have the affirmation that being a soldier is okay. Being a soldier is fine. Now, it would've been questionable if it had said some murderers came to him and said, "What shall we do?", and he said to them, "Don't kill anybody unless you think they really deserve it." No, no, no.

Jesus and God in the Old Testament forbid murder. But in terms of being in the army and being in the police and keeping peace and maintaining society by the threat of the sword, that is legitimate. So he says, "Just don't use your power to get money by force. Don't falsely accuse anybody. And you be content with your wages."

Now, what is happening here is implicitly John the Baptist and the Scripture is affirming being a soldier. It's just there, and it's assumed, on the basis of everything else the Bible teaches, that it doesn't even need an explanation.

Go to Acts, chapter 10. As the church moves into the Gentile world, the first Gentile convert is a man named Cornelius. Interestingly enough, Cornelius, by profession, was a soldier. And he was a Roman soldier. And he was a soldier in an occupying army, an army that was occupying the land of Palestine.

He was stationed at Caesarea, which was the location of the Roman army. His name was Cornelius. He was a centurion of what was called the Italian Battalion, or cohort. He was a leader over at least 100 men. He was a very significant soldier. Verse 2, "a devout man, one who feared God with all his household, gave many alms to the Jewish people and prayed to God continually." He was a God-fearing Gentile Roman soldier.

You remember that the Holy Spirit came to Peter, of course, in a wonderful vision, and he was instructed to go and meet Cornelius and give him the gospel. And what a tremendous, tremendous thing occurred. Verse 22, "They said, 'Cornelius, a centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man, well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you.'"

The Spirit of God had dispatched an angel and put this whole scenario together. Peter was going to evangelize Cornelius, this soldier, this righteous, God-fearing man, and he did. And you know, of course, the result was that he believed, and a wonderful story of his conversion is told. And then down in verse 48, at the end of the chapter, he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.

This whole entire story takes up 48 verses of the tenth chapter. It is apparent all the way through that this man is a soldier. There is not one word to him given that says he should in any way, shape or

form change his career or his life work, his livelihood, his profession, what he does.

Again, a very strong implicit argument that being a soldier is not, in and of itself, wrong, because government must maintain its authority for the preservation of society, and it must bear a sword. It must wield the power of death in order to restrain the evildoer, whether he be an individual or a nation of people moving against society in a destructive way.

There are other passages that we must note. I Peter 2, verse 13-15, and here is an explicit statement about government's authority. I Peter 2, it says, "Submit yourselves," in verse 13, "for the Lord's sake, to every human institution, whether to a king, as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him," here it is, "for the punishment of evildoers." Government is sent for the punishment of evildoers. That is the principle here.

Police, soldiers, the same. By the way, in ancient times, police and soldiers were the same. They were the same persons, the same force. In whatever quantity, whether one policeman or an army of them, they are sent for the punishment of evildoers, and they punish with a sword, which means there is death implied.

In fact, may I say this is the primary duty of civil government, the primary duty of civil government. It is to protect the ones who are doing good and punish the evildoers who seek to harm the others. That is the primary duty of civil government.

Now, civil government has gotten into all kinds of other things, and usurped the role of the individual and the role of the church and the role of people helping people in society, and has overburdened itself financially with all kinds of things that people are to be doing themselves for other people, and does not have the resources to provide the protection it should have, and that is its primary duty.

Let me put it to you simply. The greatest need in our city is to strengthen the police force. That is government's primary duty. Money used for other things in our government should be reallocated to strengthen the police force. Why? Because government has that as a primary responsibility.

And people in our city, in certain sections of our city, live in constant fear for their lives because there is not the kind of force that can protect them. And that is government's task. Protect the people and punish the wicked.

In Romans, chapter 13, we find similarly, as I noted for you last time, that in verse 4 it says that government is a minister of God to you for good. Government is a mercy. The death penalty is a mercy. The police are a mercy from God. The armies are a mercy from God to protect.

And it says, "If you do what is evil, be afraid, for it doesn't bear the sword for nothing, for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath upon the one who practices evil." That is government's primary responsibility, to punish those who do evil.

And when government doesn't do that, then evil runs amok, and people's lives are in danger, and society begins to disintegrate and collapse. The granting of government the power of the sword to kill is a mercy from God, or evil men would destroy everyone.

And, by the way, without the powerful obstacle of human government to halt the selfish, malignant passions of men, it would better to live with animals in the wilderness than in human society. It would be safer, were it not for government restraint. And when these restraints don't operate, man shows the depths of his depravity and no one is safe.

Read the last chapters of the Book of Judges if you want to read the horror of what happens when there's no authority in existence and they start chopping up bodies and shipping them all around. Unbelievable scenario. Or read in literature the book, "The Lord of the Flies." Or just take a good, hard look at the inner cities of America, where the criminals way outnumber the protective capability of the police forces.

God knows that government must bear the sword and not bear it for nothing, but bear it to bring about swift death to those who will destroy society. The whip, the noose, the guillotine, the firing squad, the gas chamber, the electric chair, as well as the gun, the rifle, the cannon, the bomb and the missile, those all stand behind the stability of a civilized society.

Man's worst enemy is man, from the jungle to the high-rise, and it's always been that way. It's always been that way. So government is given the power to kill as a necessity for the preservation of society. And war is simply using the sword on a scale required by the crime. That's all.

Frankly, nothing shows more clearly the moral bankruptcy and lostness of our society than its breakdown in concern for the protection of life by the swift use of the sword against evil aggressors. There is just war. The war of protection, yes, and defense, and the war of punishment against a malignant society.

Now, somebody says, "Look, so many die. How can it be a just war? So many die. That's not just." Yes, it is. "The wages of sin is death." We should remember that. And all people without Jesus Christ deserve death. And all will someday die and perish without Him.

The issue is not "so many die" that it's not just. No. The issue is so many do not die that it's not just. It's merciful. The fact that we're not all dead is mercy, isn't it? We all deserve to die. So many do not die. That's not just, because they deserve to die.

The wages of sin is death. And when many die in a war, that is justice. And when many survive, that is mercy, for they all, without Christ, deserve to die. Yes, there is a just war, for protection, preservation, punishment of evildoers.

A third question faces us, and to this I want to give our attention, and you listen very carefully. We're going to go rapidly. Given this background, how are we to understand the Gulf War? How are we to understand the Gulf War? Should we be afraid?

We see wars everywhere, whites killing whites in Ireland, blacks killing blacks in South Africa, browns killing browns in the Philippines, teenagers killing teenagers in the U.S., Russians killing Russians in Russia, all showing the depravity of the human heart, the failure of human systems to cope with the escalating wickedness of man, war all over the place. But nothing has hit us like this war in the Middle East.

And we feel like we don't know whether our government is really doing what it ought to do that's right, because we're so confused. You say, what's confused us? Well, we have a government that believes in keeping law and order with police and armies, while at the same time it believes in legislating against morality and virtue. Right?

It's schizoid. On the one hand, our culture is busy feeding the perverted lusts of the worst of men, and then on the other hand trying to develop systems to stop them. In one courtroom, we're trying to get a sentence on a murder. In the next one, we're trying to make sure that the rights of a pornographer aren't violated.

So we pollute the whole moral stream, and then when man runs amok, we don't have the system to control him. So in the schizoid that is American stupidity at that point, we are seeing the chaos before our eyes in our own country. And so when our government tries to act in a moral, virtuous, just and protective way, it seems a little bit out of character.

All over the world, the turmoil indicates that the Biblical view of man as an incurable sinner is accurate. The radical wretchedness of the human heart is showing itself, and, as Paul said in II Timothy 3:13, he's getting worse and worse, and man has to be controlled and sometimes killed. And in our world today we make it harder to control him because we don't have any moral standards.

But specifically, then, how are we to understand the Middle East war? I don't want to oversimplify, because there's a very complex, complicated history in the Middle East, but I'm going to give you a clear track to follow from the beginning to the end of this trouble that I think you'll understand.

And we have to start back, believe it or not, in Genesis, in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. Just listen for a minute. When God created man and woman, He placed them in a place called the Fertile Crescent, the Mesopotamian Valley, the land of the Tigris and Euphrates River.

There He gave them a garden called the Garden of Eden, the original paradise, according to Genesis, chapter 2. It was that place where God put Adam and Eve and where it says God walked with them and talked with them in the cool of the day.

It was there where God put the tree of life. It was there where God put the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was there where God gave to Adam the marvelous responsibility of caring for that beautiful garden and of naming all the animals. And that place today is called Iraq, a long way from the Garden of Eden, and a long way from the place where God walked and talked in the cool of the day with Adam and Eve.

It was after the fall of man that in that area, sinful, wicked men, fallen into idolatry, decided to build a ziggurat, which is a temple that ascends into the sky to their god, to touch the hem of the garment of their false deity. That became known as the Tower of Babel.

And it was that violent idolatry and sin against the true God that caused God to scatter all the languages into that populace, and so they couldn't speak to each other or understand each other, and that's what proliferated the languages of the world. That later became Babylon.

And it was Babylon that spawned all of the filthy religions that have corrupted human culture since that very beginning. All of the mysterious religions of Babylon became the false religions of the world. They all came out of that same place, where Eden once was.

It is also the place where Noah lived, the place where Noah preached, where Noah built his boat and where it first rained, as God broke up the waters of the deep and the waters in the heavens and drowned the entire population of the earth, with the exception of eight souls. It was in that piece of land, all the way from the Mediterranean Coast to the depths of the Babylonian Valley, that God promised to the children of Abraham, His covenant people, that land.

Abraham, you remember, was a Semitic man. That is, he was a child of Shem. Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. Out of Shem came the Semites. Abraham was one of them. Abraham, interestingly enough, came from a city called Ur of the Chaldees. Where was that? Interesting. Where was it?

I was recently made aware of a personnel intelligence report that was given to the people in the armed services at Nellis Air Force Base, those in the F117-A program in Nevada at Nellis, making comparisons between modern-day Middle Eastern countries and ancient countries. And out of that

report came this. Iraq is ancient Babylon. Kuwait is ancient Ur of the Chaldees. We're right back where we started, folks. Right back where we started.

The Bible said history began in that area. The Bible says history will end in that area. Now, the key people in that area are the Jews, the people of Israel, the people that came out of the loins of Abraham through Sarah. Let's go back to Genesis 12 and see how this comes about, and how it leads us to where we are today.

In Genesis, chapter 12, "the Lord said to Abram," the Lord called this very unique man because God's sovereign purpose designed to do it, he said, "Go forth from your country, from Ur of the Chaldees, from your relatives, from your father's house, to the land which I will show you. And I will make you a great nation. I will bless you, make your name great. And so you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Now, that is known as the Abrahamic covenant. Down in verse 7, "The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'To your descendants I will give this land.'" This land. This great land. You're going to have a race come out of your loins, and I'm going to give them this land.

Go over to chapter 15 of Genesis, verse 18. "On the day the Lord made a covenant with Abram saying this, 'To your descendants I have given this land.'" What land? "From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, river of Euphrates." All the way from the Nile all the way sweeping from the Nile up through Saudi Arabia, up all through that area, clear to the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, far to the north, to the mountains of Lebanon, to the coast of the Mediterranean.

"The land of the Kenite, the Kenizzite, the Kadmonite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Rephaim, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Girgashite and the Jebusite. All their land I give to you." You say, "Why did God want to dispossess those people?" They were pagan, they were idolatrous, they were godless, they were committing adultery, they were a malignancy on human society, they were polluting the world.

And God says, "I'm giving you the land, and you are to be my weapon of judgment to go in there and wipe those people out and take the land." And this would be a just conquering, even as God was just to drown the world in Noah's day because of their wickedness. Only this time it wouldn't be water. It would be the sword of God coming through Israel that would be the weapon of their judgment.

So by divine right that whole region belongs to the Jews, all of it. All of it belongs to the Jews. And they cling to that right ferociously, don't they? Already existing, by the way, now, here's where it gets interesting, already existing in the area at the time of Abraham were lots of people. I just read you a whole list of them. I read you there at least nine or ten different nations. They were already there.

Now, they're really kind of nomadic people, moving around in that area, but that was their land. And so it wouldn't be easy to just move in and take it all, because it was already populated. And because it was the most wonderful land on the face of the earth, they wouldn't want to give it up very easily.

You can add to that, if you go back to chapter 10 of Genesis, there is a table of the nations. And listed in chapter 10, don't need to look it up, is Mizraim, which is Egypt, ancient Aram, which is Syria, and Asshur, which is Assyria. So you had not only the ten different peoples named in chapter 15, but you had Egypt, Syria and Assyria already occupying that area.

All of these tribes and all of these nations were idolatrous rejecters of the true God who would turn their back on the God of their father, Noah, and his son, Shem. They were Semitic people who had rejected the true God. They were set into idolatry, adultery and wickedness, and they were therefore set on a collision course with Israel, bearing the sword of God to wipe them out. It was a just judgment coming on their idolatry.

Now, as I said, the Middle East region is the richest land on the face of the earth, from the Mediterranean Sea on the west, which gives you access to tremendous trade and all the bounty of the Mediterranean Sea, to the mountains of Lebanon on the north, with its valuable timber. Magnificent, gorgeous mountains filled with timber populated that area. You remember when Solomon built his temple he sent north to Lebanon to get the cedars to build the temple. Tremendous resources in terms of timber.

All the way to the fertile plain of the Jordan Valley, which is the most productive piece of land on the face of the earth, equaled only by the San Joaquin Valley of the United States for producing food. All the way to the incredible wealth of the Dead Sea, the greatest mineral wealth in the world. All the way to the black gold of oil that lies very shallow below the sand of the Babylon Valley.

God gave it all to them. All of it. The idolatrous and sinful people of the region were to be wiped out, and they could possess the land. This promise of God to give them the land is called the Palestinian covenant, and it's detailed even further in the book of Deuteronomy.

But God put a condition in it. He said, "In order to conquer the land and take it, you're going to have to be obedient to me. You'll have to be a godly, obedient people or you're not going to be successful." And, of course, as you and I well know in studying the Old Testament, they were not godly and they were not successful.

They fell into idolatry, they fell into disobedience, and, as a result, when they engaged themselves in battle with all these people, sometimes they won and sometimes they lost. And the conflict went on and on and on and on and on. And sometimes their defeats were major, significant defeats. In the

case of the Babylonian captivity, they were actually hauled away in three deportations by Nebuchadnezzar, and they were gone for 70 years and more.

So it wasn't easy, and it wasn't easy not because they didn't have a right to it, not because they don't now have a right to it, but because of their unbelief and rejection and idolatry and adultery, immorality. So there they were, the people of God, given the opportunity to take this land, to be God's weapon of justice and judgment against the wicked nations who would pollute them and destroy God's truth.

They were hated then by all of these people, the Kenite, the Kenizzite, the Kadmonite, the Hittite, Perizzite, Rephaim, Amorite, Canaanite, Gergashite, Jebusite, Egyptians, Assyrians, Syrians and other nomadic tribes. They were all after them. And the only way they could ever survive it would be by God's protection. And the only way they could ever conquer it would be by holiness.

Now, as if it wasn't bad enough to have all those people ganged up against you, Abraham added to the trouble. Go to Genesis 16. God said to Abraham, "You're going to have a child." Abraham was 100 years old and had no children, never. Sarah was 90 and never had a child either, and they thought it wouldn't work. So they thought they'd help God.

Verse 1, "Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children, and she had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar." Here's another Semite, but not one of the covenant people. Here's an Egyptian, Hagar.

"Sarai said to Abram, now, behold, the Lord has prevented me from bearing children. Please go in to my maid. Perhaps I shall obtain children through her. And Abram listened to the voice of Sarai." Now, there's some things your maid can do for you, folks, and there's some things she can't.

"After Abram had lived ten years in the land of Canaan," God's already put him in the land, Canaan, which is where Palestine is today, and he's ready...out of his loins is going to come the people that are going to conquer all that that's east of that. But Abram is so concerned, he caves in to this whole deal.

"Abram's wife, Sarai, took Hagar, the Egyptian, her maid, gave her to her husband, Abram, as his wife." Tried to legitimize it by doing polygamy here. "He went into Hagar. She conceived, and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. And Sarai said to Abram, 'May the wrong done me be upon you, and I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived I was despised in her sight.'"

In other words, Sarah's mad because what it amounts to is Hagar is going, "Nananananana, you couldn't have a baby, I could." That's the basic deal here. So she's saying, "Look what you did. You made my maid mock me."

"Abram said to Sarai, 'Behold, your maid is in your power. Do to her what is good in your sight.'" Do whatever you want to her. Get back at her. Foolish. "So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence."

So this woman is running off. "Now, the angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by a spring on the way to Shur." The angel comes, the angel of the Lord, and finds her, and he says, "'Hagar, Sarai's maid, where have you come from, and where are you going?' She said, 'I am fleeing from the presence of my mistress, Sarai.'

"And the angel of the Lord said to her, 'Return to your mistress and submit yourself to her authority.' Moreover, the angel of the Lord said to her, 'I will greatly multiply your descendants so that they shall be too many to count.'" You know who they are? Arabs. More. Not only the ten that are mentioned in 15, not only the three nations that are mentioned in Genesis 10.

Now, all the Hagarites, I Chronicles, chapter 5, verse 10, verses 19-22, talks about the Hagarites, came out of Hagar, became the Arab people through Ishmael. Abraham's foolish, foolish act of distrust compounded his problems. You will be very interested to know, won't you, that Mohammed, Mohammed, when he established Islam in the Middle East, claimed for the whole world the direct descent from, guess who? Ishmael.

So, chapter 17, verse 20, "'as for Ishmael, this child that was born from Hagar, I have heard you. Behold, I will bless him. I'll make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly. He shall become the father of 12 princes, and I will make him a great nation.'" Oh, my. For your information, there are a lot more of Ishmaelites in the world than there are Israelites.

Out of Ishmael came the Hagarites, who are part of the enemy. The Edomites, the Moabites, the Ammonites, though not coming directly from Ishmael, were related to him through Hagar. And so this people begins to proliferate.

Look at Genesis, chapter 36. And you remember Genesis 36 tells us about a man by the name of Esau. Esau really had the birthright. He was first born. But Jacob supplanted him, and out of the two sons of Isaac, the true son, the son of covenant, came Jacob and Esau. Esau was cast out, and Jacob was chosen.

And verse 1 says, "the record of the generations of Esau," that is Edom. And down in verse 8 it says, "Esau is Edom." What happened? Esau moved away from the true religion of Isaac and the true religion of his father Abraham, and he picked up the daughters of Canaan.

It says "Adah the daughter of Elon the Hittite, and Oholibamah the daughter of Anah and the granddaughter of Zibeon the Hivite." In other words, he started moving in and mingling with the pagans. And so he was set apart, and he produced more of the Arabic people, more people to battle.

So now you have the original three nations in the list of nations in Genesis 10. You have all of the tribal people in Genesis 15. You have all of the children that came out of the loins of Hagar and Ishmael. And then you have all of the descendants that come from Edom and Esau. More people to fight.

And the region today is filled with people whose primary role seems to be to fight against Israel. David Lamb, in the LA Times, November 25, 1990, wrote, "The Middle East is the world's deadliest neighborhood. It has 17 Arab countries and a Persian republic populated by 231 million Muslims, as well as a small Christian minority and one Jewish state with a population of less than five million." 231 million to five.

"It has known few days of true peace in this century, none since Israel was born to a rattle of gunfire 42 years ago. Lurching from crisis to moments of ill-conceived optimism and back into crisis, it has spent more on weapons, fought more wars and suffered more casualties than any other part of the Third World." And all he's talking about is the last 42 years, and we're talking about since the beginning.

Always there has been war there, because always the right to the land has been held by Israel, and they have ferociously demanded it, and the other people have fought them off and withstood them and tried to obliterate them. And Israel has been unsuccessful in taking the land because of her apostasy and unbelief. Therein lies the root of the conflict.

Now, God wanted to remove these wicked, idolatrous, adulterous people. When He led Israel out of Egypt after 400 years of captivity, he showed what He would do. In one great act, God just wiped out the Egyptian culture, didn't He?

First thing He did was just massacre all the firstborn in Egypt, after a whole, long list of plagues. Then He drowned the entire Egyptian army. And God was saying, "We're on the way. Let's take the rest."

No sooner were they out of the land, Moses went up to get the law, and Aaron led them in the worship of what? A golden calf. And then God slew them. And God's sword of judgment turned on them. And some of them were massacred.

And God said, "Because of your sin and wickedness, you're going to all die in the wilderness. You're not even going into the Promised Land." And they did. Forty years they wandered in the wilderness

of Kadesh Barnea, until they were dead.

And then God got a new generation, and in Deuteronomy, chapter 3, that new generation started their march again, and they conquered all of the tribes across the Jordan. Read Deuteronomy 3. And they had conquered all those people across the Jordan, and they were ready to move across the Jordan into Canaan, and they were standing there.

Deuteronomy 4, Moses gives them a speech, and he says to them, "If you're holy, you'll win. If you're sinful, you'll lose." That's it. "This is a conditional covenant. The land is yours if you obey God. If you don't, you're not going to win it."

And God says, "When you're pure," Deuteronomy 20, "I'm your weapon." There they were, feeling, "We have just conquered. We've seen Egypt destroyed. We've seen the tribes across the Jordan wiped out. Here we go into Canaan." And no sooner had they gone into Canaan, they hit Jericho, the walls fell, a tremendous victory.

And no sooner had they experienced that victory, they went to Ai and they lost. And they were terribly defeated. Why? Because a man named Achan had sinned in the camp, and God was saying, "If there's sin in the camp there's going to be tragedy."

And they never got their act together. Sometimes they won. Sometimes they lost. And the battles went on and on, century after century after century after century, all the way up until the modern time, and they're still going on.

And Israel has a right to the land, but they never gain the right of possession because they never have come to the true knowledge of God, and never lived in obedience to Him. Their possession of the land is conditioned upon their obedience to God.

And so what we see today is an apostate Israel being continually defeated by enemies who have no right to the land they're in. It really belongs to Israel. And I'm not saying this in any way antagonistically toward Arab nations. I'm just saying this is the scenario laid out in the Word of God. And an unbelieving and apostate Jew or Gentile or Arab all falls into the same ultimate category of God's judgment.

Look at Psalm 106, because I want to show you several Psalms which put this in perspective. Psalm 106, verse 40. Well, you can go back to verse 34. What happened was, they went into the land, and, verse 34, first thing that happened was they didn't destroy the peoples as the Lord commanded them. See that? God told them to wipe them out. They didn't do it.

Instead, "they mingled with the nations. They learned their practices. They served their idols. It became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and daughters to the demons and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and their daughters when they sacrificed them to the idols of Canaan. The land was polluted with the blood. Thus, they became unclean in their practices and played the harlot in their deeds."

What a heartbreak. They were given that whole land. Beloved, it's a simple thing. You look at it today, there's nobody to blame but what? But themselves. Verse 40 says, "Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against His people. He abhorred his inheritance. He gave them into the hand of the nations. And those who hated them ruled over them."

That's how it is today. Their enemies, who oppress them, they were subdued under their power. Many times He would deliver them. They, however, were rebellious in their counsel, so they sank down in their iniquity. Every time God would deliver them, they'd fall back into sin. He'd deliver them, they'd fall back into sin. He'd deliver them, they'd fall back into sin.

"Nevertheless, He looked upon their distress when He heard their cry," verse 44. "He remembered the covenant for their sake, and, relenting, according to the greatness of his lovingkindness, He also made them objects of compassion in the presence of all their captors." He protected them even when they were in captivity, and He always brought them back because of His covenant.

And that's the way it's been. They sin. They fall into the power of the nations. He delivers them. They sin. They fall again into the power of the nations. He delivers them. Out of His compassion and His covenant He continues to do it. He continues to do it. Really incredible.

They will never be totally defeated. Isn't it interesting? There are no Kenites, Kenizzites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, Girgashites, but there are Israelites. All those other peoples have literally been lost in the blur of the Arab world. They don't know where their original sources are, in terms of life, genetics. But the Jews do. They've been kept pure, because God has a purpose for them.

And any nation that threatens the existence of Israel will come under the judgment of God. They may be victorious for a while, but the day will come when God will release their grasp on Israel and set them loose again, because He will always preserve His people.

Look at Psalm 121, Psalm 121. Here, the Lord is designated by a marvelous title down in verse 4. Verse 1 says, "I will lift up my eyes to the mountains, from whence shall my help come. My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not allow your foot to slip. He who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep." God is always awake and always on guard.

"The Lord is your keeper. The Lord is your shade on your right hand. The sun will not smite you by day nor the moon by night. The Lord will protect you from all evil. He will keep your soul. The Lord will guard your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever." God promises to guard Israel. And whoever curses Israel ultimately is going to be cursed, whoever blesses, ultimately blessed.

Look at Psalm 125. "Those who trust in the Lord are as Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever. As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people from this time forth and forever." God will forever protect His people, forever protect His people.

Look at Psalm 129. "Let Israel now say," verse 1, "let Israel now say, 'Many times they have persecuted me from my youth up, yet they have not prevailed against me. The plowers plowed upon my back. They lengthened their furrows.' The Lord is righteous. He has cut in two the cords of the wicked.

"May all who hate Zion be put to shame and turned backward. May they become like grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up, with which the reaper doesn't fill his hand, or the binder of sheaves his bosom, nor do those who pass by say, 'The blessing of the Lord be upon you. We bless you in the name of the Lord.'" In other words, may those people who come against Israel be cursed. May they be overthrown. May they be defeated. And they will be.

Look at Isaiah 43, fascinating text. Isaiah 43. Listen to this. Verse 1, "But now, thus says the Lord, your creator, oh, Jacob, and He who formed you, oh, Israel, 'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine. When you pass through the waters, I'll be with you, and through the rivers, they will not overflow you.

"When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I have given Egypt as your ransom, Cush and Seba in your place. Since you are precious in my sight, since you are honored and I love you, I will give other men in your place, and other peoples in exchange for your life. Do not fear, for I am with you.

"I will bring your offspring from the East and gather you from the West. I will say to the North, "Give them up," and to the South, "Do not hold them back." Bring my sons from afar, and my daughters from the ends of the earth, and everyone who is called by name and whom I have created for my glory, whom I have formed, even whom I have made."

God says, "Look, I'm going to collect you from all over the world." And we're living in a time when we've begun to see the precursor to that happening, as the Jews are moving back into that place.

Since 1948, they've reconstituted their nation. They have an identity, a homeland. And God has shown us a preview of the gathering that will come in the end.

So the conflict goes way, way back, between Arabs who today can't even understand why they hate the Jews so badly, descendants to all of those people from ancient times, who are a heterogeneous mingling of nomadic peoples. As it says in the 17th chapter of Genesis, "When Ishmael is born, he will be a wild donkey of a man." We have seen a whole people who seem wild and uncontrolled.

These people have collected as the enemies of Israel for millennia and millennia and millennia. Thus, their attitude runs deeply, very deeply. 231 million of them set against less than five million Jews, who have a right to have it all.

But what is really behind it? Satan. Go to Revelation 12. We wrap it up with this point this morning. Revelation, chapter 12. In Revelation 12, we find a very interesting scenario. It is a vision. And I'm not going to go into detail. I'm simply going to point out its significance.

There is a woman. There is a child. And there is a dragon. In verse 5, "The woman gave birth a son." The woman is Israel. The son is the Messiah. "The son is to rule the nations with a rod of iron and to be caught up to God and to His throne." That has to be Christ. Israel is the mother who gave birth to Christ.

"And the woman," verse 6, Israel, "fled to the wilderness." Why? Because the dragon wants to kill her. The dragon wants to destroy Israel. You find if you follow down in the chapter, "the dragon," in verse 13, "was thrown down to the earth. He persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child."

You see, Satan's strategy is to destroy Israel. Why? Because if he destroys Israel, he destroys God's Word. Because God promises future salvation for Israel, and someday He'll give them their kingdom, and all their land will be theirs to possess, and they will be blessed. God has promised that to them. If Satan can kill them, wipe them out, destroy them, then there is no promise fulfilled and God cannot keep His Word and Satan has won.

That's a major focal point of the battle. Satan goes after Christ. He wasn't successful. Now he's going after Israel. He tried it a number of ways. He tried it in the Old Testament by getting the pagans to intermarry with them. Once they were intermarried, they would lose their identity, and there would be no more nation Israel. That's why God wanted the Jews to kill those pagan nations, to preserve the purity of his covenant people and the coming of Messiah.

That is why Balaam was used to seduce the Jews to commit adultery with the pagans, to pollute the race, so there would be no people of God. That's why Antiochus Epiphanes tried to wipe out the

Jews. That's why Hitler, as the pawn of Satan, came to try to wipe out all Jews, because he was Satan's tool.

Saddam Hussein or any other leader of the current world who seeks to destroy, devastate and wipe out Israel is the agent of Satan who is still after the woman. Verse 17 says, "The dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her offspring."

So behind it all is Satan. Behind it all is Satan. There's no question in my mind that all the aggression against Israel that attempts to obliterate Israel is Satanic. Now, having said that, I want you to know, that does not mean that God doesn't very frequently judge Israel. He does, but always preserving her from those who would attempt to annihilate her.

Scripture says, Genesis 16:12, "the descendants of Ishmael will dwell in the presence of all his brethren." And that is how it is, in the same area with the other offspring of Abraham. So you have the Jews and the Arabs together, Arabs surrounding Israel. That's what Genesis 16 said, and that's what you see today.

Here we are. Israel's back in the land. There they are, surrounded by Muslim Arabs. And that doesn't even include, by the way, all of the Iranians, who are not true Arabs. They are Persians, who speak not Arabic but Farsi, a different language. This mass of people set against them, with destruction of people on their mind.

So Saddam Hussein is not shooting his little Scud missiles over to Israel in an effort to destroy Israel by the means of those Scud missiles. No. What he is trying to do is irritate Israel so that Israel will retaliate, and therefore all the Arab world that is hostile to Israel will unite against Israel. That's his ploy.

During Bible times, all these Arab groups were separate. They were disconnected. And now they are all one great nation, united by Islam. Guess who authored that? Satan knew that he could never get all those diverse nations to unify against Israel unless they had a common cause. And the common cause is Islam.

In our next message, I'm going to tell you all about where it came from, what it means, how it works. And I'm going to answer the question, is this the end of the world, or are we near it? Let's pray.

Father, we have covered so much this morning, and yet just touched the surface. Lord, it's so comforting to know that all of this is just the way you said it would be, that everything is on the perfect, divine timetable.

Is there a reason to fear? Have you lost control? Is Satan going to win the victory? Certainly not if we believe the Word. For we have a sovereign God who has promised the survival of His people, Israel, and someday that they will possess all that land, and who has promised to judge the infidels and the unbelievers and the wicked, who are blights on the earth.

Lord, may we take great confidence in the fact that you are God, that your power is ultimate, and your purpose cannot be withstood. Father, we are seeing the drama played out on the theater of the Middle East just the way Scripture indicated it would be.

And we know that Israel will never take that land until they bow the knee to their Messiah and become obedient to Him. And, under His rule, they'll possess it all, and live in that glorious millennial kingdom to receive the fullness of the promise they have forfeited by their centuries of unbelief.

But, Lord, how thankful we are that you protect them, for we see in that your faithfulness. Father, we ask that as we continue to watch these things happen before our very eyes on the television that we might interpret them in the light of your truth, with the realization that human history began there, and it will end there.

And, frankly, we know that Jesus could come at any moment, and then the end. We pray that no one would be ill-prepared for such a very real possibility. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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