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

War in the Gulf: A Biblical Perspective, Part 3
Scripture: Selected Scriptures
Code: 90-50

As you know, this morning we are returning to a special, brief series on a Biblical perspective on the war. And this will be the third and the last message in the series.

I'm sure you have been startled to some degree, as I have, at how this war has produced an amazing outburst of American patriotic emotion. In fact, the highlight of the Super Bowl was not the finish of the game, as great a finish as it was. The highlight of the Super Bowl apparently wasn't even the playing of the game, but rather the playing and singing of the National Anthem by Whitney Houston, because it elicited an unbelievable, and, I think, unequalled display of national pride, as people literally went outside themselves, running the gamut of emotion all the way from cries and shouts to tears and sobs. It was really an unequalled scene, certainly in our lifetime.

We feel good about ourselves in America. We like being the knight on the white horse. We like being Superman to the rescue. We need to feel good about ourselves in a time of growing crime problems, drug problems, abortion, economic downturn. When it seems like we've lost control of so many, many things, it feels good to have control of something.

America feels good about being macho, too, about displaying such unequalled military power. And it seems as though all of the emotion that we feel about feeling good just kind of bursts out every once in a while when we get an opportunity to sing the National Anthem.

But apart from all of that emotion and all of that feeling, how are we to understand the war? Not how are we to feel about it, but how are we to think about it? How are we to understand and comprehend its elements?

So we decided that we would approach the war and ask some basic questions. Question number one, why does war happen? And we endeavored to answer that general question out of Scripture. Question number two was another general question, can war ever be moral? We endeavored to answer that by way of reason and by way of revelation out of Scripture.

And that brought us to the question that we are considering now, the third one, which is a more specific one, how are we to understand this particular war in the Middle East? And we learned in our message that this conflict goes way back, to God's covenants with Abraham and Abraham's seed, the Jewish people.

In Genesis, chapter 12 and following, God identified a people that would come out of the loins of Abraham who would be the covenant people, and God promised to give them the land, the land of the Middle East, as we know it now. God said, "It is your land. I want you to go into it eventually and conquer it. I want you to be my instrument of judgment, my weapon of doom, on all of the godless, God-rejecting, truth-hating peoples that are there, wipe them out and take the land."

God also pointed out to them that in order for them to be His instrument of judgment and to possess their full entitlement to that land, they would have to be a holy people, a righteous people, a people obedient to God. The story is sad, because, though the land was rightfully theirs by promise, they never have been able to take it, because they've never been a holy, righteous and obedient people.

"If," God said, "you do not obey me, you will not only not take your land, but your enemies will be victorious." And we have watched that scene played out again and again and again throughout human history.

So it was out of the promises of God to the people that we call the Jews that the Israel-Arab conflict was born. When they were told they were entitled to all of that land, it was already in the possession of some of the nations listed in Genesis 10 in the table of nations and some of the tribal people listed in Genesis 15, who occupied its territory in their nomadic style. And then added to that were those that came out of the loins of Ishmael, Arab peoples, those that came out of the loins of Esau, more Arab peoples. And so this massive people group is in unending conflict with the Jews over that land.

Those idolatrous, sinful, God-rejecting people groups are not to have that land, ultimately. They have it now, because Israel is unable to defeat them because of her spiritual apostasy. So the conflict ebbs and flows through all of the years and the centuries. And during all of Israel's history, she has experienced conflict with Arab neighbors. A deadly kind of animosity exists even today, as she fights to survive, to conquer, to be conquered, in this ongoing battle.

So we know, then, that this war is to be understood as a part of a long, longstanding saga of conflict. Now, behind it is not just two people groups, as it were, battling for what they both perceive as rightfully theirs, but behind it also is Satan himself. In Revelation, chapter 9, it tells us that Satan seeks to destroy the woman who brought forth the child, the child being the Messiah, the woman being Israel, the nation, which gave birth to the Messiah.

Satan has always, will always go after the people of Israel to destroy them, because if he can destroy them, he can destroy the promise of God, which would therefore destroy the faithfulness of God, which would therefore destroy God, which would therefore destroy everyone whose hope was in God. And so Satan is forever after Christ, the child, and Israel, the woman who brought forth the child.

So you have it, then, the descendants of Esau, the descendants of Ishmael, the descendants of a number of the nations listed in chapter 10 of Genesis, the descendants of many tribal peoples, also indicated in the book of Genesis, are there surrounding Israel, as it says in Genesis 16:12. And the conflict is fomented and fueled and fired by a satanic effort on the part of Satan and his demons to wipe out the people of God, thus to end the reign and rule of God and to destroy God's integrity and so forth.

Now, all of these people groups existed in sort of a milieu of commonality and yet great distinctiveness. They were tribal, nomadic peoples who were connected in ancient times by some common ancestry and in more modern times by a common religion, but they were very diverse and very much in conflict with each other, as you well know.

Some centuries ago, the Arab sort of disintegrated tribal peoples began to move together. And I need to give you a little bit of that background so you'll understand the scene a little more clearly today.

The Arab empire started to really come together because of the rise of a man by the name of Mohammed. And, by the way, that name means "highly praised." He was born in Arabia in 571 A.D., in the year of our Lord 571. He was born of a nomadic, tribal people living in Mecca, an Arabic people, and he claimed, did Mohammed, to be a direct descendant of Ishmael.

He wrote the Koran, which is the religious book of the religion of Islam. He wrote it. It is quite an effort to write, but he wrote it, I'm confident beyond fear of contradiction, he wrote it simply as a human agent of a demonic source who put it together. It became the holy book of the Muslim world.

In the year 622, he made his home in a place called Medina. And if you talk to a Muslim today, the two most sacred places on the face of the earth, he will tell you, are Mecca and Medina. And when his home was set in Medina in the year 622, that became, and is so stated today, as the official date of the start of the Muslim era.

So the Muslim era begins in 622 A.D. Before all of that, they were disintegrated tribal peoples, not really connected together. The connection came out of the religion of Islam, which began in the year 622. At that particular point, they broke all ties with Christianity. Many of those people groups had been influenced strongly by Christianity. Some of them had been influenced strongly by Judaism. But they broke all those ties, and they decided that they were going to follow the new religion of Islam.

They made Friday their holy day, particularly because the Jews made Saturday their day and the Christians made Sunday their day, and they wanted to make a statement that this was different than

the Jews and the Christians. Their god was not the God of the Jews nor the God of the church, Christianity. Their god is Allah.

And it is not the same god as the God of the Jews and the God of the Christians. There was recently some kind of a meeting in Orange County in which the pastor of a famous church said, "We all worship the same God." I reject that as a Christian, and every Muslim on the face of the earth would reject that. Their god is not the God of the Bible. Their god is Allah. And anyone who worships the God of the Bible is a blaspheming, infidel apostate, from their viewpoint.

And so began their religion. Their mode of conquering and congealing together all of these assorted tribal peoples in the Middle East was conversion by the sword, and I don't mean the sword of the Word. I mean a steel sword, with a sharp edge. All wars were holy wars, to convert infidels. And it was simple, conversion or death. And they converted people simply because people didn't want to get their head chopped off with a sword. That is how Mohammed conquered for Islam.

And, even today, they still think like that. The Arab world believes that its conquering must be done by the steel edge of the sword. It must be done by death. They still maintain control over their people by sword. That's very clear. In fact, one of the reasons people in the West fear, in some ways, the death of Hussein is that, were he to be assassinated, they are afraid there isn't a living person in all of Iraq who could take his place, because anyone who would have that kind of capability has already been executed by him as a threat.

If you shoplift in Iraq or Iran or a Muslim country, you shoplift once, because as soon as they catch you, they chop off both your hands, so you can't do that again. You rape only once. As soon as you rape, the sword will ensure forever that you will never do that again. If you are engaged in drugs, you are taken immediately, when you are caught, with no time lost, into the city square, where you are killed with a sword in public view.

And people continue to ask the question, how is it that the Iraqis will go along with such a maniac? Why would they be willing to go along with him? Very simple. You don't go along with him, you're dead. The people who didn't go along with him are dead.

Islam has always conquered by the sword. It has always ruled by the sword. Islam, by the sword, conquered the Middle East. It had a very great effect, conquering even the land of Palestine. There were about 800 years of its massive power in the Middle East, from 622 for about another 800 years until the Middle Ages, when, finally, in the Middle Ages, the Roman Catholic Church had reached such an apex of power that it began to take on the powers of Islam.

One of the enterprises of the Roman Catholic Church, as you well remember, was called the Crusades. And the objective of the Crusades was to move into the Middle East and take back all of

the holy places that were in the hands of Muslims. And so they came back into the Middle East and they did that.

The result of the Roman Catholic power, the Crusades, which also gave the Roman Catholic Church the opportunity to massacre Protestant Christians at the same time, and also as a result of internal warfare among these Arabic people, caused the whole great Middle Eastern Islamic giant to go to sleep in the Middle Ages. And the whole thing just kind of faded away about 800 years after its birth. And the sleep lasted a long time.

But the sleep is over now, and the Arab Islamic giant has risen from his long nap. The agenda is still the same. Allah is god. We conquer for Allah. We conquer by the sword. We kill the infidels.

We destroy particularly the Jewish blasphemers, who are, by the way, the closest pocket of infidels to their world, and also are hated because of the tremendous conflict that goes back thousands and thousands of years. Not only do they hate Jews just because of the territorial dispute and the claim of the right to the land, but they hate them now because they are religious blasphemers.

Now, what was it that precipitated the rise of the modern Middle East? What brought back the Islamic giant from sleep? The answer is very simple. On May 26, 1908, drillers were drilling for oil in a place called Masjid-al-Salaman, and in that particular place, they discovered the first oil well in the Middle East. That's in a place in Iran. And they believe that that really triggered the great modern rise. And we know that to be true.

It took them until the 1970s to harness what they discovered. And it was in the 1970s that they formed OPEC, which was an allegiance of the oil-producing countries that could then create control of the marketplace of oil. And that's exactly what they did. They embargoed oil in the '70s. They increased the prices rapidly. They changed the world's economy greatly. And you remember, at one point in time, in the '70s, the tremendous lines that we all were involved in waiting for gas and so forth.

You will, if you remember a little bit, remember back when I first came to Grace Community Church that gasoline was 19 cents a gallon. And the reason it isn't anywhere near that anymore is because there is a new source of control over the oil of the world. And they have systematically elevated the value of it. They have created the world economy that now exists, which involves an absolutely immeasurable amount of inflation and debt in the energy-consuming nations that are dependent upon them.

As a result of the discovery of oil and the development of their oil capability, money began to flood into the Middle East. In the '70s, the money was flooding into the Middle East so fast that the London Economist, that's the name of a paper like the Wall Street Journal, wrote that they could buy the Bank

of America in six days, IBM in 43 days and all the major companies on all the world's stock markets in 15 years. Massive amounts of money pouring into the Middle East.

They now have more than half of the world's resources in oil, and some say it's as high as 65 percent. Their oil is very close to the surface, very easy to drill, very close to the sea for piping and shipping. It is of excellent quality. It is very low in sulfur, which means it burns very clean.

And, just to give you perspective, there are millions of oil wells, and one oil well can produce around 80,000 barrels a day. It is an immense, almost inconceivable potential for making money. The wealth of the world, then, has been shifted. It simply goes like this. The energy-consuming nations are giving all their money to the energy-producing nations. The energy producers own the energy consumers.

We are controlled, then, by the powers in the Middle East. So is most of the rest of the world. And the balance of power has shifted to what used to be, a few years ago, even 20 years ago, a third-rate, Third World, confused group of nomadic Arabic people and is now the center of world economy.

Can Israel survive such an immense economic power as surrounds them now? Can Israel survive such frightening military buildup as that money will buy them? Can the world halt the shift of power to the Middle East? Is this heading us toward Armageddon? For years, Christians wondered, why would the whole world gather to battle in the Middle East? Now we know. Now we know.

Israel could feel the power of Iraq, by the way, growing in the early '80s. By 1981, Iraq had developed, at a place called Osirak, nuclear capability. So the Israelis, in 1981, went in and destroyed it. They are hated by the Iraqis just because they hate Jews and always have. They are hated by the Iraqis and the other Arabs because they are infidels, worshipping God instead of Allah, and they are hated by the Iraqis because they destroyed the Iraqi nuclear capability in 1981. That is why Saddam Hussein is so set on destroying Israel any way he can.

Now, that leads us to the issue of how does Saddam Hussein fit into this? Who is this guy, and how does he fit in? His hatred for Israel goes back before they destroyed his nuclear capability. It goes back into his Arab world, the world from which he comes.

But to simply understand why he's doing what he's doing, all you need to know is this. He went into Kuwait for a very simple reason. It was economic. That's the only reason he would attack his own Arab brothers, because his drive for wealth and power and domination exceeds even his racial sense of kindred spirit.

Kuwait, you see, is very wealthy, beyond what you and I could ever imagine. Kuwaitis are more wealthy than Americans. And they have an immense amount of money. The United States has a

huge deficit, billions and billions of dollars in debt. And we are in debt because we are in debt to the energy producers, because we are such a massive energy consumer.

Just to show you the difference, the little tiny country of Kuwait has $100 billion of its government surplus in overseas investments, $100 billion. It has $50 billion of private enterprise surplus in overseas investment, $150 billion in overseas investment. In Kuwait, there is no income tax. There is no tax. Education is free. Medical care is free. Everything is free.

In fact, for every child you have, the government sends you an extra $140 a month just to help you take care of that extra child. And if you decide to get married, the government will send you a check for $7,100 to help you get your new marriage started. They have so much money they don't even know what to do with it all. And they don't pay any tax on any of it.

While Kuwait has become immensely rich because of its oil, Iraq has become poor. Iraq had a surplus of $30 billion before it went to war with Iran. But in the eight-year war with Iran, it cost Iraq $100 billion, in effect. They went from $30 billion surplus to a $70 billion deficit. It bankrupted their nation to carry on that war that nobody won with Iran. And I have heard numbers as high as one million Iraqis died in that war, as well.

Now, Saddam Hussein knew that the only way to rebuild his country was through oil. The only way to conquer the world, for him, is through oil. But the problem was, Kuwaiti people, Kuwaiti government, and Saudi Arabia also, sold the oil cheaper. And he wanted to drive the oil prices up, but they weren't willing to do that, because they were already making massive fortunes of money.

And because it was costing him more to produce it, because of the war problems, and because he was in a deficit position, he wanted higher oil prices. And when they wouldn't raise the oil prices, people continued to buy oil from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait and not from Iraq. And so finally he went to the Kuwait government and he said, "You give me $60 billion in cash that you have cost me by underselling me in the price of oil, or I'm going to come and destroy you." And had Iraq given him his $60 billion, there wouldn't have been an invasion of Kuwait.

David Lamb, writing in the LA Times, said, "If Kuwait had given him the money Saddam demanded, the access to the Persian Gulf he needed and the help he sought in pushing world oil prices higher, Saddam would have settled for a diplomatic solution between brotherly Arab states. But the Kuwaitis were stubborn. They were ignoring his call for less oil production. Lower oil prices were costing Iraq billions of dollars. From Saddam Hussein's perspective, Kuwait's intransigence was tantamount to economic warfare."

And so he went in there to take it over, so he could control the oil prices, and then, if he gets his way, to take Saudi Arabia, so he can control the oil prices. And he already tried to take Iran so he can

control the oil prices, and hold up the world as hostage to escalating prices to rebuild his country and then to build the new Babylonian empire, of which he sees himself as the modern-day Nebuchadnezzar.

Charles Dyer writes, "With the largest army in the Arab world, Saddam Hussein has set out to forge a worldwide economic empire, its boundaries established by Nebuchadnezzar over 2,500 years ago. The power to achieve his goal comes from a battle-hardened army of one million soldiers, and the economic windfall for victory would be control of over half the world's oil supply."

He wants to hold up the world, economically, amass a fortune and control the world. So, Saddam Hussein, called the Butcher of Baghdad, who murdered those who might be threats to him, who killed women and children at will with chemicals and still does, who killed people for not bowing down to his picture and still does, who imprisons people who happen to inadvertently fall over and knock against one of his posters, his passion is to exalt himself and establish a world empire like Babylon of old. His hero is Nebuchadnezzar. He has already begun rebuilding the old city of Babylon, already. It is the symbol of his new Babylon world empire.

He reminds his people all the time that Nebuchadnezzar is his hero, because Nebuchadnezzar was the only Arab ruler able to lead the armies against Israel, to defeat them, to take their land, and to capture their people. And he did it three times, 605, once in the 590s, once in 586, when he hauled them off into Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar is his hero because he ruled the world, he was wealthy, and because he conquered, destroyed and took captive the Jews.

Saddam wants power. He wants land and territory. He wants money. He wants Israel. He wants to be Nebuchadnezzar. In fact, when asked if he wanted to be Nebuchadnezzar, he said in one interview, and I quote him, "By God, I do indeed dream and wish for this." He has spent at least $34 billion on his army and his weaponry and his power base. Of course, that's being destroyed before his very eyes right now.

And we ask the question, is this man going to succeed? Will Israel get wiped out? Will Satan succeed with Saddam Hussein, who is Satan's ploy, like he failed with Antiochus Epiphanes and Hitler and any other leader he has tried to use to destroy the Jews? Will he succeed? And, of course, the answer is, no, he will not. God's judgment will fall on him. Christ will come and destroy him, along with all the rest of those who fight against the purposes of God. But he is making a massive effort to destroy Israel, and to become ruler of the world, to be the modern Nebuchadnezzar.

And I guess we need to ask the question, is there reason to fear today? And the answer is yes, but not to fear those who destroy the body, but fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. It's not a time to fear Saddam Hussein. It's a time to fear God. It's a time to fear God.

Hussein will end like Hitler did. Ishmael will never destroy Isaac. And Satan is behind him just like he was behind the king of Tyre in Isaiah. Satan, Lucifer, son of the morning, is behind this, but he will be no more successful now than he has ever been in destroying the purposes of God and the people of God.

So the war, beloved, is rooted in redemptive history. And we see in this the age-old Arab-Israel conflict and the satanic enterprise of the one who seeks to destroy the people of God. But it is not a time to fear Saddam Hussein. It is a time to fear God, to awaken to repentance in the light of God's coming judgment, to pray for peace, not political peace or military peace, but spiritual peace, to plead for salvation and mercy and for many to turn to Christ.

That leads us to the last question which I will endeavor to answer, is this a sign of the end? Is this war a signal we have come to the end of human history? Should we believe that Jesus is coming soon?

Well, military conflict in Asia, Europe, Korea, Vietnam, etc., has no prophetic significance. But military conflict like this in the Middle East has prophetic significance. Let me see if I can't show you why.

At the end of this age, the end of man's age, before the coming of Jesus Christ to establish His kingdom, the Middle East will definitely be the center of political, financial and military action. The Middle East will be the focus of the world. It is there that the armies of the globe will meet in the conflagration that ends all of human antagonism toward God, namely, the Battle of Armageddon. That's in the Middle East.

And I suppose we have wondered for years why everyone would rush to the Middle East to fight such a war, and the answer has come very clear to us in modern times, because the balance of power, the wealth of the world, therefore the control of the world, has shifted to the oil-rich Middle East. The Middle East has risen to world power and world prominence at a level never before possible since the Greeks and the Romans conquered them.

And at the heart of it is a completely Christ-rejecting, godless Islamic religion. And so there is a religion that hates Christianity and Judaism at the very heart of the whole control center of the economics and the politics of the world. Today the powers of the world are regrouping around the Middle East.

It was in the Middle East that the world empires of ancient times existed. Egypt was there. Assyria was there. The great Babylonian world empire was there. The Medo-Persian world empire was there. Alexander the Great came sweeping into the Middle East, conquering, in the Greek empire. The Roman empire, the Pax Romana, extended as far into the Middle East so that its eastern capital

was Balbec, deep into the Middle East, a city I have visited and seen much of the Roman ruins that are there.

And so the empires of the world have moved into the Middle East, and it is there that ultimately the great kings and kingdoms of the world will come together for the final great struggle. Up until our lifetime, frankly, the area was utterly undeveloped, one massive desert, primitive, with nomadic people living in tents. I, myself, along with my family, had the privilege of spending time in the Bedouin tents of the Middle East, out on the absolutely barren sands of the desert, as they eke out their existence with their camels, their oases, the tents that they live in, primitive.

And now, in just a matter of a few years, it has become the wealthiest place in the world. And the world wants it, and the world needs it. The Middle East without oil would be a third-rate, Third World non-issue, economically and militarily, without any influence except for its religion.

What is currently happening in the Gulf today demands that we focus our attention on it, because we do know that all of human history ends up at the Battle of Armageddon, in the land of Israel, in the Middle East, and we couldn't have imagined what they'd be all fighting about until we now know what's there. The stage may well be being set for the theater of the final conflict.

Now, there are a few signs that I think you have to take note of, a few signs that indicate we're rapidly coming toward the end. Let me just suggest some general ones, and then a bit more specific.

First of all, the Bible is very clear that at the end time there will be escalating sin and lawlessness. In II Thessalonians, chapter 2, we are told that a man of sin, or a man of lawlessness, comes along, and it is characteristic of the Antichrist's rule, which is during the time just prior to the return of Christ, that there is lawlessness and rebellion.

In II Timothy it tells us, in chapter 3, verse 12 and 13, that evil men will get worse and worse. Escalating sin, escalating lawlessness, an increasing moral debauchery will characterize the world in the end times. And I think someone would have to be blind not to recognize that that in fact is true all over the world.

We wonder today whether man can become more debauched than he already is. It seems like it would be an impossibility. There's nothing left for him to debauch himself with. It can only be a question of how many more people are going to live at that gutter level of lifestyle. So the Bible indicates that in the end, there will be escalating rebellion and lawlessness, and that rebellion and lawlessness is against the law of God.

Secondly, the end time will be characterized by apostasy. Again, II Thessalonians 2 talks about the falling away, or the apostasy, the development of a false religious system, energized and led by

Satan and his Antichrist, the beast. We find even in Revelation 17 a worldwide false religious system, highly developed and pulled together, an apostate religious system.

We find the beast, who eventually sets himself up as God and has a false prophet come along to call the whole world to worship him as the focal point of false religion, even much like the emperors of Rome in ancient times made themselves into deities and demanded worship, a false religious system stretching clear across the world.

Christianity, true Christianity, is gone, having been taken out in the rapture of the church. Judaism as such destroyed by the Abomination of Desolations. The Antichrist establishes the new kind of apostate religion that pulls the whole world together. And it will amass all of the false religionists into one great religion.

What will be its dominant character? Personally, I believe that it will be pretty well formed around the mysticism, mystical, intuitive, personal religious experiences, which can embrace all different kinds of religions. In that same meeting I mentioned to you in Orange County, it was stated that not only do we worship the same God with the Muslims, but at the same time we both believe in Jesus Christ. That's not true, either. But there is that sort of mystical Christ, that sort of mystical feeling about God, that transcends any specifics of doctrine that can frame up the world church, the world system.

When Chris Williams, from India, was here, not having been exposed ever to typical Christian television, I sat with him one night, for 40 minutes we watched Channel 40. At the end of that time, he looked at me, and he said, somewhat startled, "After watching this, all I can say is what I'm watching is Hinduism. This is what I see in my country every day. This is Hinduism. It has Christian words, but it is Hinduism. It is the mysticism of the Hindus."

And he says, "I believe that this is how Satan is going to orchestrate the unity of a false religious system, around mystical religious experience that people think they share commonly with people of other religions." We live in a time when the false, apostate religions of the world are moving closer and closer together. That, too, signals the potential of the end.

There's another component that we find in the ninth chapter of Revelation, in verse 16. It numbers an army there of 200 million. And up until rather modern times, it would've been inconceivable to imagine that anyone could have an army of 200 million. I remember a few years back when Newsweek magazine unwittingly, because they didn't know Revelation, reported that the Red Chinese army numbered 200 million. People began to take note of that, because that's the first time we ever saw that figure associated with an army.

It is not difficult to imagine now that even Saddam Hussein, with his one million, and the other Arab nations around him, if they ever coalesced into one great force, could easily number two million. It

could be that this 200 million army could come from the Far East. It might come from the Middle East. We don't know.

We know there's an army from the East of 200 million that's going to come into the great conflagration during the time of the Tribulation. It is now possible. There are a number of possibilities for an army of 200 million, which in prior history would not have been possible.

Now, moving a little bit more specifically, a fourth component to look for in the end is the rise of the nation of Israel. The end cannot come until Israel is constituted in its land with an identity of its own. Israel needs to be living in the land. They need to have made a pact with Antichrist for peace and safety. They need to be rebuilding their temple, which will be abominated by the Antichrist when he comes in there and desecrates it.

Israel becomes the focus in the end time, as the King of the North, according to Daniel 11, sweeps down to kill and destroy them. The King of the North supernaturally is destroyed by God, which leaves the Antichrist and the powers of the West in charge. He then makes a pact with Israel and is their protector for a brief time, until finally he tries to destroy them also and sets himself up as God.

The King of the South also comes in that same event of Daniel 11 and pushes in against them and makes war as well, and then there is that great army of the East. You and I have lived in the century when the nation Israel has been reborn. That little piece of prophetic data is of crucial significance.

The 20thcentury has witnessed one of the greatest miracles. It has witnessed the restoration of the ancient people to the land of their fathers after centuries of being scattered among every nation of the world and yet never absorbed. They have maintained their true bloodlines preserved by God, and now they have come back. The Middle East is ultimately to belong to them, when they look on Him whom they've pierced, even their Messiah, believe in Him, are saved and receive their kingdom.

But think about their history. God promised them the land, but Abraham never possessed it. Abraham's offspring then were carried for 400 years into Egypt, into captivity, and during those 400 years that small family grew into a nation of two to three million people. They then returned to occupy only a small portion of the land that we know as Israel, and not the full inheritance, which sweeps clear through the Middle East and north and south.

They took only a small part of their land, and they had to fight in war constantly even to hold on to that. In 721 B.C. Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser, came from the North and took the Northern Kingdom, Israel, and the ten tribes that were living there into captivity from which they never returned.

In 606, down into 586 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar took the Southern Kingdom captive into Babylon, the Babylonian Captivity. After 70 years, the Southern Kingdom returned, and this is their second return.

The first return came from Egypt. Second return comes out of Babylon. And they came back.

And in 516, they rebuilt their temple. And in 445, they rebuilt the city of Jerusalem. Then, in 70 A.D., the year of our Lord 70, the Romans slaughtered the Jews and took control of their land. A million one hundred thousand Jews were slaughtered in the city of Jerusalem alone, and 985 towns were destroyed throughout Palestine as the Romans took over.

And their third return from that Roman devastation didn't begin until 1871, 1871, eighteen hundred years later. And by 1881, 25,000 Jews had come back to live in Palestine. In 1917, the British government gave the Balfour Declaration, which identified Palestine as a homeland for the Jews, and by 1948, they had become a nation. They were back. Third time back.

They're there now. And what they want to do is establish themselves there. They want to rebuild their temple. And they want to begin to take over the land that was promised to them. And someday they will, someday, when they come back from their idolatry and their apostasy, not that they worship physical idols, but they have turned away from the true God.

But they're where they need to be for the end. They're there, sitting there, waiting to believe in their Messiah, waiting to make the pact with Antichrist, waiting to see the invasion of the North.

And who is the King of the North? Many have said it would be Russia. The most common enemy that came down from the North was ancient Persia, which corresponds to modern Iran. It could be an Arab coalition from the North. We're not sure.

All of their enemies came in from the North, because that's the most advantageous position to attack, because you attack from the top down. If you come from the East, you have to attack from the Dead Sea level up, and that's a very, very difficult enterprise.

But, in the future, the King of the North, whoever it might be, will lead an assault on Israel. That invasion will lead to Antichrist's supremacy. And that will ultimately lead to his attempt to destroy Israel.

The King of the South gets involved, which could well be an Arab coalition from the South that sweeps in to destroy them as well. But they're there, sitting there, waiting for all of that to unfold. And their enemies are all around them, as you well know.

That leads us to consider another element. Daniel was very clear in his prophecy that in the end time there would be a revival of the old Roman Empire. Those territories, those nations which once constituted the Roman Empire would come to life again in a ten-toed confederacy, or a ten-nation confederacy, and they would come against the land of Israel.

And we are standing on the brink of the united Europe, as you well know. By 1992, they frame up the united Europe. Right now, in the Common Market, there are about a dozen nations, and those nations could jockey around for positions. In the end, that final confederacy of Europe comes under the leadership of Antichrist against Israel. And here we are, watching the revival of Europe and the European Economic Community.

In fact, some of their own leaders have said this is a revival of the ancient Roman Empire. And thus they are identifying themselves with the prophecies of Daniel. And so Antichrist will rise, I believe, out of this European confederacy. He will lead them in there. He will be the peacemaker who will lay out the false peace as he comes conquering on a white horse.

He will be the great world hero who brings peace to the Middle East. And, by the way, the very fact that the Middle East so desperately needs peace sets the stage for the Antichrist to set up his false peace and establish himself as the great world ruler, from which vantage point he ultimately will destroy all religion, including Judaism, and attempt to destroy Israel and rule the world, deifying himself and commanding that everybody in the world who doesn't worship him be killed.

At that time, when he does that, the Jews and professing Christians, of course, will be caught in a worldwide persecution to exceed Hitler's methodical massacre of the Jews, and the world will begin to come apart at the seams. Then disaster after disaster, unfolded in Revelations 6 to 19, begins to happen, reducing the world's population down to a fraction of what it is now, all of that in a brief, brief period of about three and a half years.

That leads me to another component. In order for all of the things of the end to take place, the world would have to have the kind of weaponry that could destroy its population in a brief period of time. For the first time in human history, we have that weaponry today. We have the firepower, nuclear firepower, to wipe out masses of humanity.

In the Book of Revelation it says there's going to be a fourth of the whole of the world wiped out, and right after that a third of them wiped out, unbelievable numbers of people, in the billions, being slaughtered. We have to have the kind of weaponry to do that, and we have it now.

Furthermore, it tells us in Revelation the two witnesses will be killed during the time of the Tribulation, and the whole world will see them. How could the whole world see them? Satellite. The whole world can see anything. Anybody who can put his face in front of a screen can see anything anywhere on the face of the earth because of satellites. That's a possibility. Never before was it a possibility. Now it is a possibility.

So when you start to look at some of the components that are true of our particular time, you can see how the coming of Christ could be very near. There is apostasy in religion. There is escalating sin and lawlessness. The army of 200 million. Israel in the land. The revival of the Roman Empire. The united Europe.

The tremendous and desperate need that there is in the world today for peace in the Middle East sets the stage for Antichrist to be the false savior. The weapons that it takes to kill millions of people. The media to be able to see it from all over the world. All in place.

One final note. The rebuilding of Babylon has to be looked at as a fascinating, fascinating scenario. In Revelation 17 and in Revelation 18 it is clear that Babylon in some form is identified in the end times. Some people have taken it symbolically, that what it refers to is a symbolic world religious system in chapter 17 and a symbolic world economic system in chapter 18.

Some believe, as does Charles Dyer, who has written quite a bit on this, that Revelation 17 and 18 both describe the economic Babylon, the worldwide economic system of Babylon, which will dominate the world. Some believe the real Babylon will be rebuilt, and some believe it will be a symbolic system.

How fascinating it is, however, that, currently, Saddam Hussein is in the enterprise of rebuilding the ancient city of Babylon into a symbolic city, into a symbolic city. At this time, it is not his design that anybody live there, but it is to be the symbol of the new world order emerging in the Middle East, which is becoming the economic center of the globe.

It is clear that before the Lord Jesus returns, Babylon will reach significance again. Some kind of a Babylon, a worldwide economic godless apostate system, led by the Antichrist, moved and motivated by Satan, will be controlling the world. And that Babylon system, in the end, will be destroyed.

How interesting it is that Saddam Hussein is not just building a city called Babylon for people to live in, he is building a symbolic monument called Babylon, in fact, a city that no one will live in. It will be a place to take people so they can see the symbol of the greatness of the Middle Eastern empire that is to control the world, by his design.

He may not succeed, obviously, he may fail. He will ultimately fail. He might not even make it in conquering Kuwait. It doesn't look good for him. But just to understand what he's attempting to do in forming up that symbolic city, so that it'll be there when the end comes, to be the symbol of that evil system, has to make the Bible student excited.

Saddam Hussein has a passion to be the modern Nebuchadnezzar, to be the destroyer of Israel and the conqueror of the world, and he is rebuilding the symbol of Nebuchadnezzar's power, namely, the

city of Babylon. As of February 1990, one year ago this month, over 60 million bricks he had already laid in the reconstruction. And, as Nebuchadnezzar put his own name in the bricks of ancient Babylon, Saddam Hussein has his name in the bricks of modern Babylon.

He is building it on the very exact site of the ancient city. He has already completed the southern palace of Nebuchadnezzar. He has already completed the Greek theater that is in the city. He has completed many temples. He has built the throne room of Nebuchadnezzar, the procession street and the Ishtar Gate, and he now plans to rebuild the Hanging Gardens, you remember, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. And he's offered $1.5 million to any Iraqi who can design a hanging gardens to function as did Nebuchadnezzar's hanging gardens.

Amy Schwartz, writing in the Washington Post in April, wrote, "In the next few years, Director General of Antiquities, Dr. Muyad Said, predicts the government will also redig and refill the city moat, close the city to all traffic but pedestrians and horse-drawn carriages, and maybe rebuild the Ziggurat." The Ziggurat is the Tower of Babel. Right back where it all started, rebuilt again as the great world empire, which the Book of Revelation says is the final Babylon to be destroyed.

He is not building it as a city to live in, but as a symbol of a world empire. The Iraqi government has put out a brochure for tourists. The title of it, "From Nebuchadnezzar to Saddam Hussein: Babylon Rises Again." He's trying to build the Babylon of his dreams and maybe of Satan's dreams, and maybe the final Babylon. We can't be sure.

Will he succeed? Well, Isaiah 13 tells us that Babylon is going to be destroyed like Sodom and Gomorrah. Revelation 18, verses 19 and following, tells us about the unbelievable destruction of the future Babylon. No, not ultimately, he won't succeed. We don't know if this is the final Babylon before the Lord comes, but isn't it an interesting thing that he's attempting to build it and is already building it?

You say, "Is this the end?" I don't know. I believe Jesus will come and take His church out before these things fully unfold, which means we could go at any time. All the necessary elements are in place, the apostasy and the lawlessness, Israel in the land, the revival of the West, the focus of the world on the Middle East, the desperate need for peace, the rebuilding of Babylon. It's all there. It's all there.

I remember driving slowly down a freeway one time, and I noticed one of those sweeping overpass bridges, arching its way clear across several different layers of freeway traffic. And as it swept its way off into the sky, it ended suddenly with a huge drop, because the other half hadn't been completed. We've all seen pictures like that.

And as I noted it, sitting in slow traffic, I noticed that at first there was a sign, "Do Not Enter, Do Not Enter," and a little past the sign were some barriers. And then as you moved further out the bridge, the barriers got more dense and more dense and more dense, until they were finally thickly stacked at the end, just in case somebody unwittingly went by everything, to try to catch them with a final trap before they went off the end.

You can look at the end of the world that way. There is an end. There's a drop-off point. There's a disaster. There's an ultimate judgment and an eternal hell. But as you get closer to the end, the barriers become more and more frequent. We are looking, I think, at some rapidly increasing frequency of barriers and blockades, warning us that there is coming an end, and you'd better stop going the direction you're going.

There has to be a sense of urgency about our lives in the light of all of this. Jesus could come at any time. I don't know if this is the end, but I do know that the signs on the horizon are more indicative of the possibility than any time in my life past. And I also know that Jesus is closer to His coming now than He ever was before.

It's time for us to take stock of our lives and take a good look at where we stand with the living God and make sure that our salvation is right, not be like the virgins who didn't have any oil in their lamps who were waiting for the bridegroom and when he got there weren't ready for his arrival.

First of all, know that your salvation is real. And, secondly, like those servants to whom the Lord gave talents and said, "I'm coming back, so use your talents," we need to take whatever opportunity for service we have, and, because we know our Master is coming back soon, be busy to make the most of it.

It calls for a time of self-examination regarding our spiritual condition, our relation to God. It calls for a time of self-examination regarding our service to God as to whether we are spending ourselves in a worthwhile enterprise as we get nearer and nearer the return of Jesus Christ. Let's bow together in prayer.

Thank you, Father, for our time in your Word this morning. Thank you for the clarity with which your Spirit again has called this generation to assess its condition and its place in history. Help us, Lord, to realize that the inevitability of the return of Christ looms on the horizon as a very real possibility, to look at our lives and be sure that our salvation is genuine and that we are headed for eternal heaven and not the judgment to come, to make sure that we spend the days and hours of our lives that might be left in enterprises that will have eternal value.

May we use our talent so when the Master comes, He'll say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter the joy of your Lord. You've been faithful over little. I'll make you lord over much." Lord, I ask

that no one would stand in this very, very tenuous hour without a relationship to the living Christ through faith in Him that brings forgiveness of sin, the promise of eternal life, and that no Christian would waste his or her life, but rather that we would make it count in whatever days you give us. These things we ask in the name of our Christ, who alone can strengthen us for the hour at hand. Amen.

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