

I don't know how your past week has been... but I have had a challenging past couple of weeks. ... But I was encouraged when I read a story that I would like to recount to you right now.

*In the fall of 1991, a car driven by a drunk driver jumped its lane and smashed headfirst into a minivan driven by Jerry Sittser. Sittser and three of his children survived, but Sittser's wife, four-year-old child, and mother died in the crash. Over the years Sittser has offered some profound reflections about loss, grief, and suffering. In his book *A Grace Revealed*, Sittser shares the following story about how his son David responded to the tragic accident.*

*My son David is—and always has been—quiet and reflective. After the accident, he was the least likely to talk about it; but when he chose to, he usually had something significant to say or ask. I had to be ready to respond to him when he sent cues indicating he was ready to talk. Our best conversations happened in the car. One particular conversation has stayed fresh in my memory. David was eight at the time; we were driving to a soccer match some distance from our home. Typical for these occasions, David was quiet. The car was full of silence—not a heavy silence, but a liquid silence, as if some question was brewing inside him.*

*"Do you think Mom sees us right now?" he suddenly asked.*

*I paused to ponder. "I don't know, David. I think maybe she does see us. Why do you ask?"*

*"I don't see how she could, Dad. I thought Heaven was full of happiness. How could she bear to see us so sad?"*

*Could Lynda witness our pain in Heaven? How could that be possible? How could she bear it?*

*"I think she does see us," I finally said. "But she sees the whole story, including how it all turns out, which is beautiful to her. It's going to be a good story, David."*

... Like I said ... I'm not sure how your week has been... but isn't it a powerful thing when we are in the midst of a challenge... to realize the

complete sovereignty of God... and to be able to say: “*In the end it’s a good story*”... ?

That is what I would like our focus to be this morning... as we continue our study of Biblical prophecy. ... Let’s use it to marvel at God’s sovereign plan for the ages! He is in full control! All of this is going somewhere. (It’s going to be a good story!) ... And He invites us to participate with Him in an eternal plan that He has accurately announced through His prophets.

When we first began our study through the book of Revelation... I mentioned there are about 500 prophecies in the Bible that are like tributaries which feed into a large river... and that river is the Bible’s last book – Revelation. ... Revelation puts it all together for us... with one large flow that is going somewhere.

I also told you that we would be looking at some of those other prophecies... (how and where they flow into the river)... That is what we did the last time we were together... and will... perhaps do for the next two weeks. We are going to look at some important tributaries that make up the flow of this river that we call Revelation.

We have recently finished the first three chapters in the book of Revelation (the Big River.) And in chapter one we were given the outline (or topographical map) of the big river.

**Revelation 1:19 (ESV)**

*Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.*

John was told that he was to write about three subjects.

**1) The things you have seen.** Now John had just seen a striking image of Christ... and this was the first thing that he was told to include in the Book of Revelation... Which he did.

**2) Those (things) that are.** So when John finished describing the image that he saw of Christ... he launched into a two-chapter description of the entire church age (Revelation... chapters 2 and 3) which John was living in at the time... but had future historical periods... seven in all. These were the seven letters to the churches... and they are full of parallels to seven distinct periods of church history... the last parallel and church age being the one we currently live in. ... But the time that the church is on earth would end. And John was told to write...

**3) Those (things) that are to take place after this.** So John starts chapter 4 with these words... “after this.” ... (In other words... “after what he has just described of the complete church age that he was living in...” ) ... So from chapter four... and going forward... we are told of the things after the church exists here on earth. The descriptions we get from chapter four to the end of Revelation describe various scenes in Heaven... the great tribulation... and Jesus’ second coming to earth... when He will rule from Jerusalem.

The last time we were together we looked at and tried to answer the question – What happens between Revelation chapter three (the entire church age on earth)... and the descriptions John was given about the tribulation and the second coming of Christ... (which begins in chapter four)...? So we looked at some tributaries to the big river... in Ezekiel.

We saw that before the Great Tribulation... a few things must happen... and they are prophesied in the Old Testament.

In Matthew 24:1-8... we learned that there would be birth pangs from which we could start a countdown to the end of the age. There would be a great multi-national war... distinguishable from any ever seen before... and it will be paired with famines and earth quakes. World War I and World War II (which was an extension of the first) qualify and the sign... (especially when we look at the world wide famines that occurred alongside of those wars... and the increase of great earthquakes of 8.0 or more that surround both of those wars... and have increased today.)

Another tributary feeding into the big river between chapter 3 and 4... is Ezekiel 20 and Ezekiel 22... These are just two (there are several more) which speak of Israel returning their land in Canaan. We saw that Israel would be brought there FROM wrathful circumstances... and they would be unbelieving. The Jewish Holocaust during World War II was a wrathful condition which exterminated 23 million Jews. This brought world sympathies to the Zionist movement and made it all possible for the Jews to establish statehood in their own homeland... in 1948.

But our passages in Ezekiel also made it clear that the Jews would come from all over the earth... as unbelievers FROM wrath... and FOR wrath... and this second wrath would bring them back to belief. (Ezekiel 22:17-22). The next great wrath that they experience is designed by God to bring them back to Himself – and He will accomplish just that.

(LISTEN) – the Great Tribulation will be a judgment upon the whole earth... but its primary purpose is to bring Israel back to God. ... And it will.

## **Ezekiel 36:22-27**

But this is not the end of all that Ezekiel has to say about it. ... It is as though God anticipates everyone's question: "How in the world will God give them this new heart... and bring them from unbelief to belief?" So Ezekiel brings God's answer.

We already know that wrath will play a big part in it... but it will not happen all at once. It will be accomplished stages. In fact the process will begin BEFORE the Great Tribulation through another major event that must also occur. Ezekiel describes this other event (which has not happened yet) in chapters 38-39 of Ezekiel.

Before we look at that major event (in those chapters)... I would like to show you how Ezekiel makes it abundantly clear... that giving Israel a new heart... and giving them His Spirit... will be done in stages. That is the subject of Ezekiel 37.

You might already be familiar with Ezekiel 37. It is the subject of a children's song that is mindlessly... and happily sung by millions... "*Da foot bone connected to da ankle bone... da ankle bone connected to da shin bone... da shin bone connected to da knee bone... hear da word of tha Lord...*" ... Truthfully this is a happy passage! God is sovereign... and we can see Him today... working His plan out perfectly!

## **Ezekiel 37:1-6**

Israel is today in the condition we just read about. They fit this description of dry bones and without the breath of life. (Breath... by the way... is the same Hebrew word for Spirit.) ... Jewish people have gathered there from all over the earth. But the vast majority are agnostic and atheist. They

have a political being... they exists as a state in the eyes of the world... but they have not been brought back to belief. They have not had life breathed into them. It will happen in stages.

### **Ezekiel 37:7-14**

The rest of the chapter reveals that Israel's regathering would be as one nation... and not two. When Ezekiel prophesied... the Jewish people were divided between the 10 tribes of the North... known as "Israel"... and the two tribes of the South... which was known as "Judah." But Ezekiel reveals that when they come back into the land... they will no longer be split. They will be one. ... .. And that is how they returned.

The next thing to happen in this process of giving them a new heart and His Spirit... (of bringing Israel from unbelief to belief...) is described next... in chapters 38-39. ... The church may be raptured off the earth before this happens... or it may not be. The Bible is unclear. ... But we do know that the major event of these two chapters... 1) has not happened yet... 2) it will happen before the Great Tribulation... and 3) just like the Great Tribulation... it is part of the process whereby God is bringing Israel back to belief.

### **Ezekiel 38:1-2**

"Gog" is the title of the ruler of the land area that Ezekiel knew as "Magog." "Gog" is like the title "pharaoh"... "kaiser"... or "czar" ... over the territory of Magog. So... whoever is ruling over the territory of Magog at the time of this event... is Ezekiel's "Gog."

Megog... Meshech... and Tubal were the tribal territories that covers the vast area... that we know today as “Russia.” ... Ezekiel’s Gog... will be the ruler of Russia at the time.

### **Ezekiel 38:3-6**

Russia will not be alone... but will lead a group of nations in a military attack. Before we see where they attack... let’s discuss who these other nations will be.

- “Persia” is Iran.
- “Cush” is Ethiopia.
- “Put” which is mentioned next... is often translated as Libya... But Libya in ancient days was called “Lub”... and Ezekiel probably would have said “Lub” if he was referring to modern day Libya. “Put” is far most likely to be Somalia (which borders Ethiopia - or as Ezekiel knew it – “Cush.”)
- Next is “Gomer” for which there is overwhelming evidence that this is modern day Germany. (Even the Jewish Midrash... and the Talmud... refer to Gomer as Germania.) ...
- And then finally... there is “Beth-togarmah” – which is present-day Armenia.

So the leader of Russia will put together a confederacy of nations – Russia... Iran... Ethiopia... Somalia... Germany... and Armenia. And this confederation will launch an attack.

But notice... please... Who is bringing all of this about... (Who is in full control) ... It is God! As we continue to read... keep the sovereignty of God in your focus... for this invasion. God is going to punish Russia... Germany... and these other nations for their anti-Semitism.

Now let’s notice where they invade...

### **Ezekiel 38:7-9**

This prophecy continues to address Russia's leader... who leads this invasion. He will lead them into the mountainous regions of the land of Israel. The mountains of Israel extend the length of the center of their country. They start at the Valley of Jezreel and go South... petering out just North of Beersheba. The region includes the cities of Dothan... Shechem... Samaria... Shiloh... Bethel... Ai... and most importantly Jerusalem (which is probably the goal of this invasion.)

Never before (until now) has the land of Israel fit this exact description... 1) brought back from the sword (since being scattered in 70 a.d by the Roman General Titus)... 2) gathered from many peoples/nations... and 3) having mountains that had been wasteland for a long time. Never in it's history was this ever true about Israel... until recent years... since 1948.

Now we are ready to read why they will invade...

### **Ezekiel 38"10-13**

"Cattle and goods and silver and gold" are general Old Testament references to the spoils of war. They are after plunder. They will come to take what they can get. ... Exactly what Russia and the others want is not clearly spelled out. ... We can only say for sure that Isarel will have something they want... and they will come to take it.

Many have speculated that they will come because of oil deposits under the Dead Sea... or perhaps its 45 billion tons of sodium... chlorine... sulfur... potassium... calcium... magnesium... and bromide. (I don't know) But whatever it is... it will be for Russia's self-interest.

Now very interesting... verse 13 says that there will be several nations who protest... (Sheba... Dedan... Tarshish... and all of it's leaders.)



Sheba and Dedan are countries in Northern Arabia. Probably some of the Arab nations will not like Russia's presence in the Middle East. Tarshish is Spain... but the phrase that follows ("*and all it's leaders*") is an unfortunate translation into English. In the Hebrew... it is "*with all the young lions thereof*" and it is a Hebrew idiom which means "nations that have come out of Tarshish." ... Have any nations come out of Spain...? You bet! All of South America (except Brazil.) One can even make a claim for the US... because the Spanish ships were the first to come here and explore the East and West Coastlines.

But the point is... that there will be some form of mild protest... but no action taken against them. Wow! Doesn't that describe what we can expect from today's world...? Russia will invade and the rest of the World will do nothing but issue a mild protest.

So... we know why Russia will come. We see their motive. Next we learn why God brings them.

### **Ezekiel 38:14-16**

God is revealing His glory to the people of the earth. He will reveal it by the action He will take... which is described next...

### **Ezekiel 38:17-23**

Israel receives no help from the rest of the world... But God responds! God defends helpless Israel through... 1) an **earthquake** – verses 19-20... 2) causing the soldiers to turn on themselves (a **civil war** breaks out) – verse 21... 3) **pestilence, blood, flood, hailstones, fire, and brimstone** (a lot of natural disaster... what people today call "Acts of God" – verse 22.

### **Ezekiel 39:1-6**

Now please NOTICE the next verse... verse 7!

### **Ezekiel 39:7-8**

A revival occurs in Israel... and around the world. ... But God has begun the process of bringing National repentance to all of Israel. He will still use the Great Tribulation to complete the transformation.

The next two verses give us a strong clue for when this will happen. None of this can happen after the Tribulation. That is when Christ returns and begins His peaceful reign. All of this is completely inconsistent to Christ's reign of peace on earth. ... This invasion hasn't happened yet... it won't happen after the tribulation... and what we are about to find out... is that it cannot happen during the tribulation.

### **Ezekiel 39:9-10**

During the period of the Great Tribulation... we will see when we return to the Big River... (Revelation's prophecy)... that during the last 3 ½ years... Israel will be put to flight. They won't be burying the dead or collecting fuel for their fires. So if they will be doing this for seven years... they will have to start doing it at least 3 ½ years BEFORE the Great Tribulation.

But remember... the church on earth can be raptured at any moment. We can go at any time. Then... perhaps the invasion of Israel occurs... This is part of God's process of turning the hearts of Israel back to Himself. It will result in a significant revival... But more will be needed... So... 3 ½ years later... when the Great Tribulation begins... the process of giving them a

new heart continues... bringing about complete national salvation for the Jews.

Folks... Sovereign God is at work! We can already see His plan in motion. And let me say plainly... that this same sovereign God is bigger than any of the problems that you currently face.

I have been talking about prophecy as though it was a river. But let me ask... have you put yourself into the river of God's will...? Are you in the flow of it... as it moves very rapidly (now) toward its final destination?

May I encourage you to place your problems... and your entire life into this flow...? Ask God to use your circumstances to bring honor and glory to His name – in light of the flow of His sovereign will.

*“God... would You answer my prayer in accordance to Your perfect will...? Would You use these circumstances to increase Your fame...? I know that in the end, it's a good story!”*