

Are These the Last Days?

WRCC Dillon Burroughs 5.6.07

[NOTE: The following are the speaking notes from Sunday's messages and are provided here for your personal growth. They have not been edited for publication. Most of the quotes and statistics used are quoted with documentation in the book *Middle East Meltdown*. Please send any comments to Dillon@dillonburroughs.org.]

I want to begin by personally thanking those of you at White River for your kindness to me and my family during our time here. You have been exceptionally gracious and have accepted us with warm hospitality. I have seen numerous lives changed during my brief time in this church, not only in this community, but to the nations. This commitment to reach the nations is a joy we experienced in part a few weeks ago at Missions Sunday and continue today as Pastor Tim Brock and several others serve our ministry partners in Panama, literally sharing the gospel to the ends of the earth.

Today, I also want to recognize many of those in attendance who serve or have served in our armed forces. If you are one of those who have served our nation in any military capacity, would you stand so we can honor you this morning? (applause)

I think we would agree this morning that we are gathered at a time of great peril for our country, for our values, and for the security of our world as we know it. North Korea, in recent months, has successfully tested nuclear weapons in underground facilities. In 2006, North Korea's prime minister has been quoted as stating that war with America is **inevitable**.

In Iran, current president Ahmad Ahmadinejad (say that five time real fast!), has attracted the attention of the world. When he came to power in 2005, he began telling his citizens that the end of the world was only **two or three years away**. In order to hasten or speed up the return of the Twelfth Imam, or the Mahdi, the seventh prophet in Islam, he is encouraging Muslims to **increase violence**.

Repeatedly, Ahmadinejad has vowed to "wipe Israel off the map," calling Israel the Little Satan. America has become affectionately known as the Big Satan, and he has challenged his country in speeches to dream of what the world would look like without the United States.

Together, it is known that Iran and North Korea have worked together on nuclear weapons. To what extent is unclear, but many believe it is only a matter of time before we see such weapons of mass destruction not only in **existence** but also in **action**.

U.S. intelligence believes that both of these countries have practiced container ship bombings for use with nuclear warheads. Using this method, any container ship headed toward a major port city such as New York, Seattle, L.A., or D.C. could be used as a target. America does not have a missile defense program for this. We would only have a few minutes of warning. We don't track every container ship from around the world.

We watch every day on the news as radicals try to overthrow Iraq, the only democracy in the Middle East outside of Israel. The ongoing conflict hurts **oil prices**, such as the nearly three dollars per gallon we are now paying for gas. It influences government policies at home, such as restrictions regarding **travel** and **immigration**. Our troops, loved by families and friends in communities across our nation this morning, are impacted as they long for their safety. Just this month an old college friend of mine left to serve an 18 month term in Iraq as a medical pilot. He leaves behind a wife, a loving family, and numerous friends who daily pray for his safety and his safe return.

Newt Gingrich, a conservative political leader of our times, noted in 2006 that we are already in the early stages of World War 3.

Senator McCain, current presidential candidate for the Republican party, thinks we could be entering a war of **apocalyptic proportions**. While McCain is known for many things, he is not typically known for making statements regarding end-times theology. When I had the opportunity to hear McCain speak in February in Orlando to a gathering of Christian leaders, his overarching theme was how America should address the issues currently at hand in Iraq and throughout the Middle East. He and many others are beginning to note that today's war on terror and the middle east conflicts of our time have a unique **spiritual aspect** to it.

In February, Dr. John Ankerberg and I released a new book called *Middle East Meltdown*. In it, our major focus is that much of what is taking place in the Middle East today has some type of **spiritual issue** at its source. We began writing this book during last summer's Hezbollah conflict with Israel, which only highlighted the importance of this book as the Hezbollah, a terrorist slash political group based in Southern Lebanon, explicitly states in its charter that one of its purposes is to destroy the government of Israel.

Today's TV and radio news hosts are seriously asking, "Are we living in the last days?" They're asking questions like, "Should I pick up my dry cleaning? How close is it?"

The truth is, we don't know the date. However, the Bible does provide ample information to help us recognize when we would be living **near** the end.

But if we are living in the last days, so what? What does it mean for us today? What does it mean for Baghdad, Afghanistan, Israel, Iran and other places? What does it mean for each of us **individually** and for our **families**?

My personal background on this is from the perspective as both a pastor and as a communicator. I had previously spent the last decade of my life serving local churches, addressing the critical spiritual issues of the emerging generation. Then two years ago, God began to open opportunities for me to use my communications background to serve Christian writers and publishers with their needs. Armed with a master of theology degree from Dallas Seminary, my publisher thought it would be a perfect fit for John Ankerberg and I to address the meltdown in the middle east from the Bible's perspective.

And let me pause just a moment to share with you what has happened as a result. Before *Middle East Meltdown* had even been officially released, Tim LaHaye and his coauthor Ed Hindson asked me to help them finish writing a book they were writing on the Middle East called *Global Warning* that will be released this September. I had spent a few minutes with Tim LaHaye at a conference last summer and was honored to help with the project.

John and I then hosted a book signing at the National Religious Broadcasters Convention in February, where we handed out books to ministry leaders from around the world for a solid hour, some of whom had already been reading the book. It was also mentioned on an NPR interview during that time. Within two months, the book was on the bestseller list at christianbook.com, including the number two end times theology book and is beginning to find its way into Barnes and Noble, Borders, and other nationwide bookstores in addition to Christian bookstores nationwide.

John Ankerberg's show is currently airing an international documentary series featuring this book, and I've already discussed some major follow up publications on the issue that are still in development.

Now, you have to understand that I am not sitting in some research lab dissecting the latest news from every publication around the world. I gave a copy of *Middle East Meltdown* to my friend Justin at the Starbucks in front of the Regal Theater in Carmel where I live. Why? Because I wrote the entire book sitting at a table in his café. At some points, I would look up research on a particular issue of prophetic significance and find that a fitting news article had been posted on CNN or the Jerusalem Post online only seven or twenty minutes before. God brought together connections every step of the way as John Ankerberg and I combined prophecy interviews he had conducted over the past 27 years with the Scriptures and today's current events in a blend no one has attempted to date. God has blessed this relationship now to the point that next month my family and I will be moving to Chattanooga, Tennessee to partner full-time together in writing at the Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, where I will have the opportunity to work on additional books, articles, TV and radio broadcasts, and online content to help people understand the spiritual issues of our times, including this issue of the meltdown in the Middle East.

But what DOES the Bible say about what will happen in the end times, especially in the Middle East? When we look to what God's Word says on this issue, one passage that stands out is found in Matthew 24. Here, Jesus was asked, "When are you coming back? What should we be watching for?" He could have said, "No comment, next question," like many leaders do today, but he didn't. He spent time here and in the related accounts in Mark and Luke. He clearly states in verse six, "I'm not telling you the day or hour." That's not for us to know.

But he does share some information regarding **certain signs** that will take place near the end. Let's look at Matthew 24:36-41 together. It reads:

36 "No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. 37 As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; 39 and they knew nothing about what would happen until the

flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

What is Jesus talking about here? A major key to these verses is what Jesus says just before this in verses 32-35, the parable of the fig tree:

*32"Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. 33 Even so, **when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door.** 34 I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. 35 Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*

It says to recognize he is near, right at the door. What is the fig tree? Jeremiah 24 tells us another account of about figs that would provide the cultural understanding of these verses to the Jewish people. There we read about two baskets of figs: one good, one bad. The good are the children of Israel who are following the Lord. The bad figs are those who are not following the lord. Some are following and some are not.

This passage refers to when Israel is reborn as a country and people return to the nation. It would be a time when some follow the Lord and others don't. When you see this, you know the time is near, Jesus was saying.

In the mid-1900s, the Jewish people who had been persecuted across Europe, returned to Israel and began again as a nation. At that point in history, the people began to return in massive numbers, preparing for a future day when they will rebuild the temple once again. Did you know that there are already foundation stones, a complete blueprint, and even the clothing of the priests already remade in preparation for the time God allows His Jewish people to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem?

In fact, most people are completely unaware that the Jewish Sanhedrin that existed during New Testament times has recently been restarted. There are now thousands of trained levitical priests, a selection for the high priest, a reformed Sanhedrin, and a training school for temple worship in Israel. Israeli scientists have even claimed to identify the chromosome identifying Levitical tribe members. A gold menorah for the temple, made from one hundred pounds of gold, now exists for the temple. There is a fascinating discussion of these developments in *Middle East Meltdown* that provides more detail for those interested in this little known topic.

Yet ever since that time, another story has been taking place. More Jewish people have accepted Jesus as Messiah than at any other time in the history of the church. A couple of years ago, I met Dr. David Brickner, president of Jews for Jesus, an organization that specifically seeks to reach those of Jewish background with the message of Jesus as the Messiah. This humble leader provided story after story of Jewish men and women who have come to know Jesus during his time there. By the year 2000, Jews for Jesus claimed that around 75,000 American Jews believe Jesus Christ to be the Messiah, and that some 50,000 are members of Jews for Jesus. Some estimate that as many as one million Jews worldwide have embraced Jesus as the Messiah.

But where else in the Bible do we find information regarding the Middle East scenario we see unraveling on the news today? When we look for other clues in the Scriptures of places that connect with what is happening in the Middle East, the one other passage finding much attention is Ezekiel 38-39. I want to spend some of our time this morning looking at this scenario that has been discussed in both the Left Behind series and Joel Rosenberg's popular novels, and that seems to be looming ever closer today.

The background to these chapters is once again the reuniting of the nation of Israel in chapters 36 and 37. This happened on May 14, 1948, nearly 59 years ago. 2007 also marks the 40th anniversary of Israel's famous six-day war in which Israel took over and conquered the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Sinai Peninsula, and Golan Heights, though Sinai was later returned to Egypt.

Then in chapter 38 we have a coalition of nations gathering against Israel for war, to "wipe Israel off the map." Let's read the first two verses together:

1 The word of the LORD came to me: 2 "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal; prophesy against him."

There is some detective work here, isn't there? First, who is Gog? A study of the Hebrew background of this word refers most likely not to a nation but to a personal leader, a "prince" from land of Magog.

Second, where is this land of Magog? Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, noted that the Magogites were people who settled north of the Black Sea and Caspian Sea, directly north of Israel. What is due north of Jerusalem? Moscow. Russia is the lead country in this prophecy. This land of Magog may include some other parts of the former Soviet Union, but includes Russia. I know, you thought the Cold War was over. Russia is now a democracy. But we are not talking about democracy versus communism. These verses address Russia and its leader as the strategic influence behind a coalition of nations with the intent of destroying Israel. We'll see more about this in a moment.

But next, where are Meshech and Tubal? These locations are a little more difficult to determine. Some identify them with Moscow and Tobol'sk, but the areas known to Ezekiel that best fit include areas in Asia Minor, now known as Turkey. It's interesting to note the radical Islamic, anti-Christian and anti-semitic practices in Turkey in recent news. One April report noted three Evangelicals who were killed in an attack on a Bible Publishing House in Turkey. These three men were found with their throats slit in a publishing house in eastern Turkey that printed Bibles and other Christian literature. Just look online and do a google search of Turkey's involvement with Russia and see if you can find enough information to make this prophetic scenario something that could happen in our time. The connections already exist.

One European news source noted that Turkey is now highly interdependent with Russia economically. It has over 1.5 billion invested in Russia, and trade revenue in 2007 is expected to hit 25 billion dollars. It is already Russia's second leading trade partner (after Germany). Russia has also become one of Turkey's key advocates in assisting the nation's bid to enter the

European Union, led by none other than its president Vladimir Putin. The connections are already there—and growing.

But who else will work together with Russia in this future coalition? Let's look at verses 5 and 6:

Persia, Cush and Put will be with them, all with shields and helmets, 6 also Gomer with all its troops, and Beth Togarmah from the far north with all its troops—the many nations with you.

The first country is Persia. This one is pretty easy to figure out, because until 1935 this was the legal name of Iran. Why is this disturbing? Iran is one of the only nations in the Middle East led by a militant Shiite Muslim government. One Iranian exile interviewed stated:

“The trouble with you secular people is that you don't realize how firmly Ahmadinejad believes—literally—in things like the winged horse...And he believes that his religious duty is to create chaos and bloodshed in the "infidel" world, in order to hasten the return of the Mahdi—the Hidden Imam. So don't expect him to behave, in your eyes, "reasonably"!”

So who is this Hidden Imam? He was a direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammed who, at the age of five, disappeared down a well around AD 940. He will only return after a period of utter chaos and bloodshed, whereupon peace, justice and Islam will reign worldwide.

But according to the political editor of Iran's Resalat newspaper, the President's apocalyptic mindset 'makes you very strong. If I think the Mahdi will come in two, three, or four years, why should I be soft? Now is the time to stand strong, to be hard'.”

Interestingly, Iran has never had an alliance with Russia since Ezekiel's prophecy was written until now. In 2005, they signed a one billion dollar arms deal, just one month after mentioning their intention to **wipe Israel off the map**. Iran's president had just told his people to **imagine a world without the United States**. Then two months later, this arms deal.

Russia has assisted Iran with nuclear technology for some time. Over 1,000 Iranian nuclear scientists have been trained by Russia, despite the fact that most of the rest of the world is working to place sanctions to limit Iran's development of nuclear power and potential weapons.

The Bible speaks here of this Russian-Iranian alliance. By assisting nuclear development, Russia has virtually joined the axis of evil.

But what is Cush? Cush is not referring here to a character from the movie Top Gun! Some translations call this Ethiopia. But this land does not refer to the Ethiopia of today but rather the land just to the south of Egypt, Northern Sudan. Sudan has been involved in genocide that has been closely allied with Iran for a number of years. And here we see these two nations side by side in the Scriptures.

In January 2006 when Iran was blasted for defying the UN regarding nuclear development, one of the most vocal nations supporting Iran's use of nuclear development was—guess who? Sudan's president al-Bashir. Now, Sudan's president has shown a desire to “work together” with

Iran to develop its own ability to produce nuclear power. The connections here are direct and growing.

Now Put. Where do we put Put? Josephus names Put as Libya, but at that time it was a larger area that included Algeria, Tunisia, and possibly other parts of northern Africa, but not Egypt. Interestingly, Egypt is never mentioned here or elsewhere in these chapters. They have a peace treaty with Israel right now, which could provide an explanation for their absence in this coalition against Israel.

Russian prime minister Putin made a historic visit to this area, to **Algeria**, last year and signed the largest arms deal since the Cold War, a seven and a half **billion** dollar arms deal. Later that year, Putin sent the Speaker of the Russian parliament to **Libya** to start new talks on military arms agreements.

Two more nations are listed here. First, Gomer, but not Gomer Pile! This is an area of Turkey as well. In Ezekiel's day, Turkey was a land of many nations, so here Ezekiel has now noted three of the major ones in these verses.

Lastly, we have Beth-Togarmah. This is a tough one that scholars are divided on. Some think this people group is in what we call the Stans in Central Asia. However, many others, and myself, agree that this area most likely refers to part of modern day Turkey.

Why? Togarmah was a descendant of Noah through Japheth then Gomer according to Genesis 10:1-3. He is known to Assyrian records as Tilgarimmu. Tilgarimmu was a city state in modern Turkey, more specifically, as Charles Ryrie states, "the southeastern part of Turkey near the Syrian border."

Looking back at the text, we read in chapter 38, verse 8: *After many days you will be called to arms. In future years you will invade a land that has recovered from war, whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate.*

A good friend of mine is about to lead a tour to Israel. Where are the mountains there? The mountains of Israel are in the north near Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. The troops will be there according to this verse, whether those nations are involved or it just happens in that location. The 2006 Hezbollah war is an example of the kind of location where this could be.

In the text, no country comes to Israel's aid, not the EU, not the UN, or even the US. Who comes to Israel's aid? Verse 18 tells us who—it's the Lord.

There has been much speculation as to why the US is not mentioned in this end time prophecy and seems to be left out of other end time prophecies. Why is this?

I won't spend much time here, but according to an interview I shared with Dr. Mark Hitchcock, author of *Iran: the Coming Crisis*, he noted:

1. America may fall due to external forces (war, economic).

2. America may fall due to internal forces (moral decay).
3. America could be part of the end times world government as one of its many members.
4. America could be weakened due to the Rapture. If even 20 percent of Americans disappeared at the rapture, 60 million people would disappear instantly. That could certainly change America's impact in the world.

But regardless of where America falls in this particular scenario, verses 18-20 talk about a **great earthquake**. We don't know if this is a global earthquake or symbolic of political or spiritual tremors. Regardless, do you see the emerging picture? This is the most tragic moment in human history to date. We are not told for certain if this happens before or after the Rapture. What we are told is that it will take seven months to bury the bodies. It would be longer if it wasn't for the birds eating the bodies that are mentioned in verses 39, verses 9 and 10. God loves the **people** of Russia and these other nations, but we're talking about these **governments** coming against Israel.

Yet even in God's wrath against the nations who stand against Israel, we read about another aspect of God as we fast forward to 39:25: His great mercy: *"Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for my holy name."*

And in verse 29: *"I will not hide my face from them any longer."* This statement in verse 29 may start the greatest spiritual awakening in history. We are the first generation of satellite and internet technology where the whole world could watch what God does for Israel in this moment. When this happens we'll see millions come to faith in Christ.

Will everyone come to Christ? No. Judas was with Jesus for three years, but it didn't change him. But many will. Why? Because that's what the Spirit of God does.

Now let's address some of the "so what" questions? What does this mean for us, for our families, our friends? Given the context, that we are living in the last days, according to Matthew 24 and Ezekiel 38-39, will these events happen in our lifetime? The answer is uncertain. We don't have enough information to know this yet.

We do know that today's activities are **consistent** with these prophecies. For instance, Russia recently sent forces into Lebanon to work with the peacekeeping UN forces. So has Turkey. Many are there to keep peace. Germany has 1,000 navy officers there.

Did you know that Russia hasn't had troops in Lebanon for over 220 years? Turkey hasn't had troops there since almost 100 years ago. **What's going on?** We don't know yet. We, as Christians, **shouldn't disgrace the gospel** by making every troop movement a fulfillment of prophecy, but **it is possible**, based on what we've seen in Israel in our lifetime, that it could happen.

Now for a word of application: If you are a **believer** here today, if you're planning any *major sins* right now, you may want to change your mind. You may want to hold off. It's not a good

time to be living in sin as a believer, doing things you would be ashamed of Jesus seeing you do if He returned today. It's close. And I don't know about you, but I do not want to be ashamed.

2 Peter 3, verses 11 and 14 tell us: *Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives...dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him.*” What sort of people should we be? People living holy, sacred lives that are different than those of everyone else we work with or attend school with.

The Apostle John tells us in 1 John 2:28: *And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*” Let me ask you this morning: Are you living a life that is worthy of Jesus Christ? Are you spending time with other believers who are encouraging and challenging you in your faith? Are you living a **holy** life? A life of impact?

Matthew 28 is our mission: Go into *all the world*. Are you leading your family members, friends, and neighbors toward faith in Jesus? God doesn't grade you based on your church. In other words, He will not say, “Your church reached a lot of people. Very impressive.” He will individually evaluate **you**.

What about your unsaved loved ones? Your mom, brother, or uncle who does not know Christ. Deborah and I have one relative who is 90 years old that we continue to pray for and share Christ with. We are not going to stop seeking her salvation as long as there is one more chance for her to be with Jesus for eternity.

And not just our community and country, but the world. The nations of the Middle East, the Jews who do not know Jesus. The Muslim world that is highly underevangelized.

One way we can help in the Middle East is in the area of humanitarian aid. This is how the body of Christ operates. Jesus said love your **neighbor** and love your **enemy**. Jesus healed his Jewish people AND others. We have to love those in the West Bank and Gaza, those in Iran who declare war on our nation, those who attack our troops in Iraq.

We are especially called to show love to those in difficult areas who are in the family of Christ. Just last month, a Christian bookstore in Gaza was destroyed by radical militants. Though the event grieved me, I was overjoyed nearly to tears to hear that a Christian organization here in the United States immediately committed to help rebuild the bookstore to help Christians there continue to share the good news of Jesus.

It's no accident that Matthew **25** follows the signs of the times in Matthew **24**. We read there in verses 37-40:

37"Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

*40"The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, **whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.'***

Our goal is to help those with humanitarian needs with the love of Christ. Did you know that today, more Muslims are coming to Christ than at any other time in history? Several churches have started in Iraq as a result of missionaries allowed into the nation to provide humanitarian relief since the War in Iraq began in 2003.

Personally, when I worked on the book *Middle East Meltdown*, I wanted to in some small way give back to help bless those serving on the front lines of ministry in the Middle East today. As I prayed for what God would have my family and I to do, we felt led to donate a significant portion of the advance of the book to missionary efforts in the Middle East. As a result, even more people have heard the good news that Jesus is the Christ.

As I visited a missionary shortly afterwards from the organization we supported, I was told of how many missionaries had been forced to leave Lebanon during last year's war. My new friend I'll call "Mike" left after serving there for seven years with his family. Yet he told me that now **dozens** of new missionaries are moving into this same area with humanitarian relief to share the Gospel in places and in ways that were never available before. God is using even today's Middle East meltdown to reach people for His glory today around the world.

What is your role? I don't want to stand before Jesus and hear him say, what part of all nations did you not understand? There is really no excuse. I don't want Him to be ashamed of me. I want to hear well done good and faithful servant.

If you're not sure about your own relationship with God, today you can be.

If you seek peace, forgiveness, and wisdom, Jesus is reaching out to you. He wants you to give your life to Him. He wants to take you on the greatest adventure of your life.

We don't know what tomorrow holds, but we know that we are in the last days and we need to be ready to meet Jesus Christ.