




A Publication of CJF Ministries and Messianic Perspectives Radio Network

# Messianic Perspectives®

*God has not forgotten the Jewish people, and neither have we.*



## THE COMING MIDDLE EAST WARS

### PART 2

BY DR. GARY HEDRICK



*This is the second installment in a two-part series dealing with the end-time wars described in biblical prophecy.*

According to the ancient prophets, the events of the Eschaton (the end times) will revolve around a series of world-scale military conflicts centering in the Middle East. Even as we were going to press with this issue of our paper, there were rumblings in the Arab world that served as yet another reminder that the stage could very well be set now for the fulfillment of these remarkable prophecies. In the previous issue of *Messianic Perspectives*, we talked about the preliminary Arab-Israeli wars and the Antiochus-style wars of Daniel 11. In this last installment, we deal with the Armageddon Campaign and the two battles of Gog and Magog.

## FIRST BATTLE OF GOG AND MAGOG—EZEK. 38 AND 39

The timing of Gog and Magog One is vague. The text only says that these events take place “in the latter years” (38:8) and “in the latter days” (v. 16). This limited information does little to help us understand precisely when it will happen.

Prophetic author Mark Hitchcock summarizes seven possibilities for when Gog and Magog One could take place:

1. Before the Rapture;
2. Between the Rapture and the beginning of the Tribulation;
3. At some point during the first half of the Tribulation;
4. At the end of the Tribulation (this view equates Ezekiel 38-39 with Armageddon);
5. In two phases (Ezekiel 38 at the midpoint and 39 at the end);
6. At the beginning of the Millennium; or
7. At the end of the Millennium.<sup>1</sup>

Hitchcock concludes that No. 3 is the most plausible choice (during the first half of the Tribulation) because it corresponds most closely to the biblical data.

## Going with the Flow (Context)

As I have said many times, the three most important things in biblical interpretation are context, context, and context. The Prophet Ezekiel describes this war in detail in Chapters 38 and 39. To get the context right, however, remember that these chapters follow two other related prophecies in Chapters 36 and 37.

In Chapter 36, the Lord God is displeased because Israel’s enemies are gloating over the way Israel has been judged because of her sins (vv. 1-15). He goes on to say that He will not only judge the enemies of Israel, but He will also restore His own people to their Land (vv. 16-38).

The Lord says (and this is important) He will do this not for Israel’s sake (because the nation’s sins were great), but for His own holy Name’s sake (v. 22). When the so-called “replacement theologians” say that Israel has sinned and doesn’t deserve to be known as the People of God, they’re right. But guess what dear Christian friend? No one on earth deserves it—including NT believers! God will honor His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for the sake of His own Name and reputation. You can mark it down: God always keeps His Word!

So, Ezekiel 36 is a wonderful prophecy about Israel’s ultimate restoration—physically (to their Land) and spiritually (to their God).

Chapter 37 comes next, with its well-known “dry bones” prophecy. The Lord



A map of Germania, or Middle Europe, was published in 1645 by W. Blaeu. According to rabbinic tradition, this is where descendants of Gomer, a grandson of Noah, eventually settled. Gomer is mentioned in Ezekiel 38:6 as one of the invading armies in the first Battle of Gog and Magog.

## Messianic Perspectives®

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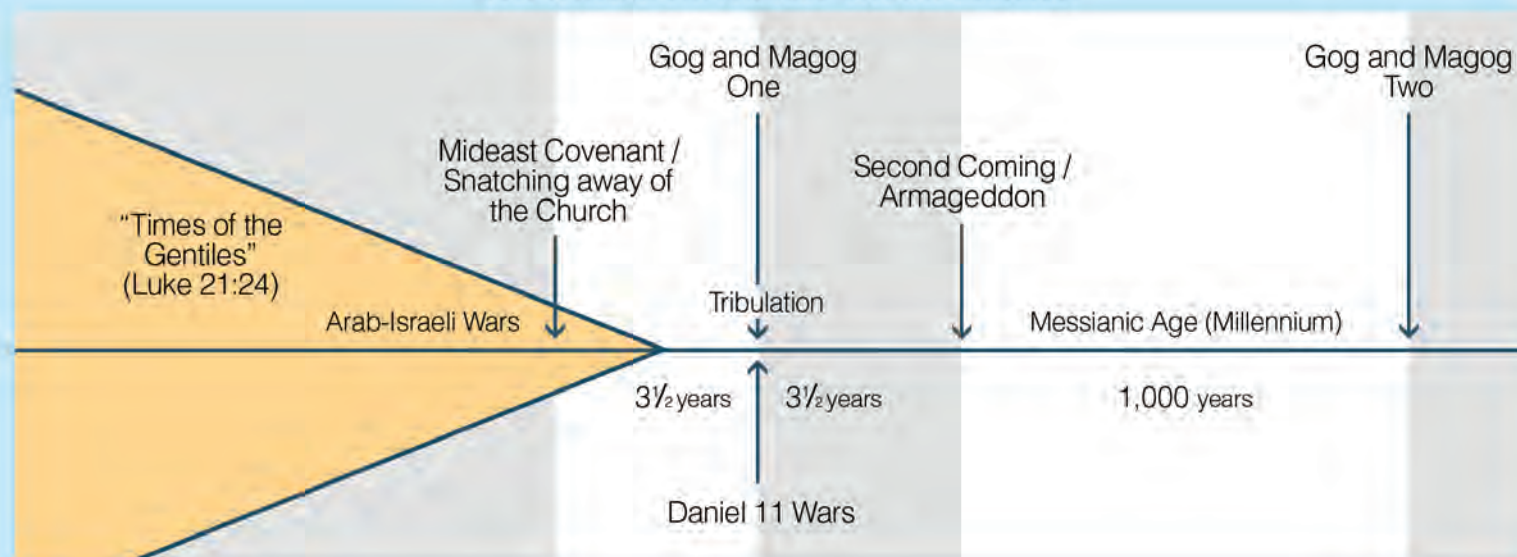


tells Ezekiel to speak to a valley full of dead, dry bones—and remarkably, miraculously, those bones begin to show signs of life. The Lord explains that the bones represent both houses (north and south) of the ancient nation of Israel (v. 11). When the dry, dusty bones come to life, it represents the resurrection of national Israel from the dead: “*I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it, says the LORD*” (v. 14).

I can’t help thinking this passage in Ezekiel 37 is what the Apostle Paul had in mind when he said, “*For if [Israel] being cast away is the reconciling of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?*” (Rom. 11:15).

Now we come to Chapter 38. In the flow of the context, God is in the process of restoring national Israel. He is resurrecting her, literally, from the dead; He is doing it in stages over an extended period of time.<sup>2</sup>

### “The Times of the Gentiles” and the Eschaton



### The Wars of the Eschaton

Battle/Conflict	Prophetic Text(s)	Participants/Location	Beginning	Ending/Outcome
Preliminary Arab-Israeli Wars	Psalms 83; Isa. 11—19; Obad. 15-21	Repeated conflicts between Israel and her Arab neighbors in the Middle East.	Unspecified, but this series of wars could prepare the way for the Mideast “covenant” of Daniel 9:27, marking the beginning of the Tribulation.	Once again, unspecified, but indications are that the Israelis are overwhelmingly victorious.
Antiochus-Style Wars of Daniel 11	Dan. 11:36-45; 7:8, 20, 24-25	Invaders approach from north and south to battle with “the king” (an Antiochus-like, end-time Antichrist) in Israel.	Probably happens sometime near the midpoint of the Tribulation once the Antichrist breaks the covenant and is firmly entrenched in Israel.	The prophecy telescopes ahead to the end of Armageddon, when the evil king will ultimately meet his end (11:45).*
Gog and Magog One	Ezek. 38 & 39	Invaders from the far north enter the Middle East and march toward Jerusalem.	Could overlap with the Wars of Daniel 11, with the emphasis here on the invasion from the north.	God destroys the invading armies, but the Antichrist might take the credit.
Armageddon Campaign	Rev. 16:12-16; 19:17-21	Huge international expeditionary force (“the kings of the earth, and of the whole world”) launches an assault on Jerusalem to the south from its staging area in Megiddo (northern Israel).	Also called “the battle of the great day of God, the Almighty” (16:14), this campaign begins with the movement of the Antichrist’s forces toward Jerusalem near the end of the Tribulation Period.	The Armageddon Campaign is brought to an abrupt end by the Second Coming of the Messiah (19:11-16).
Gog and Magog Two	Rev. 20:7-10	Undercurrent of millennial resistance and rebellion finally breaks the surface with rebels from around the world mounting a desperate, yet massive, assault on Messiah Yeshua in Jerusalem.	Takes place near the end of the thousand-year millennial reign of Messiah Yeshua.	Fire comes down from Heaven and destroys God’s enemies (20:9) and the devil is cast into the everlasting Lake of Fire where the Beast (Antichrist) and False Prophet already are (v. 10).

\*The demise of this evil “king” in 11:45 has led some commentators to suggest that he is not the Antichrist. Instead, they say he is some other “godless Jewish ruler who virtually will substitute himself for God during the period of the Great Tribulation (vv. 36-37)” (*Criswell Study Bible* [Nashville, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979], 999). However, it’s unlikely that there will be two false messiahs during the Tribulation, both setting themselves up in the rebuilt Temple as objects of worship or veneration. There is no good exegetical reason why this “king” cannot be the Beast (or Antichrist) described elsewhere and whose end is depicted in both Daniel 11:45 and Revelation 19:19-21.



## An Ancient Description of Israel Today

Ezekiel is anticipating a future point in history when Israel will exist as a nation—but she will be only a shell of what she was in the days of David and Solomon. There will be no life or vitality. God will not have breathed His life into her—at least, not yet. She will exist, but she will be spiritually lifeless.<sup>3</sup>

So then, why doesn't the Lord just breathe life into Israel now? What's the holdup? The answer is the same as the one for many other questions: He's working out a plan toward a specific goal—and He's on His own schedule.

In this instance, the Lord's plan is to make Himself known to the world through these events: *"Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the LORD"* (38:23).

Throughout the Bible, this theme is repeated over and over again: *God wants us to know Him*. He wants me to know Him. He wants you to know Him. He is anxious to make Himself known.

Note that God identifies Himself here using His covenant-keeping Name, *Yahweh* (*yod-heh-vav-heh* in Hebrew, or יהוה) or LORD (all caps) in English. He wants the world to know that He is the One who made those promises millennia ago to Abraham and his descendants—and He is now in the process of keeping them. That's what this is all about!

Some naïve Christians might wonder, "Why should I care if God keeps His promises to Israel? That's between Him and them. It has nothing to do with me."

Better think again, my friend. If ancient Israel forfeited her relationship to God because of her behavior (which was admittedly reprehensible), what happens to those of us who are Christians when we don't measure up? Will God disown us, too?

Do we think God deals with humanity upon the basis of a double standard? That is, if Israel steps out of line, she's toast; but Christians can do it and still be fine. What a horrendous contradiction—and what an insult to the God who says He treats all people alike (Acts 10:34). If the New Testament teaches us anything, it's that God deals with Jews and Gentiles in exactly the same way—by His amazing grace. He disciplines us when we fail Him, certainly (Heb. 12:5-11); but the

relationship is always there. The goal of divine discipline is *restoration* and *reconciliation*—not ultimate *rejection*.

If God doesn't keep His promises to Abraham and his descendants, what makes us think that He won't change His mind about keeping His promises to New Testament believers?

## A Massive Invasion

At this point in the unfolding Mideast hostilities (around the mid-point of the Tribulation, if our chronology is correct), God is bringing a horde of armies down on Israel from regions in the far north. They are identified with cryptic names that are difficult to interpret today. But we can be reasonably certain that Russia is in the mix somewhere.<sup>4</sup>

A notable omission is that not one of the immediately surrounding Arab nations is listed as a participant in this campaign. The invading nations are all from farther away—from the east (Persia, or modern Iran), west (Gomer could be Germany)<sup>5</sup>, south (Ethiopia and Libya), and "the north quarters" (KJV)—that is, nations from the former Soviet bloc, including Russia.

This begs the question: Why wouldn't the Arab nations, who so desperately want to see Israel wiped off the map, lend their support to a war against Israel? If our interpretation of the earlier Arab-Israeli wars is correct, the answer is they can't. Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, and Saudi Arabia will have already suffered such utter destruction and unequivocal defeat that

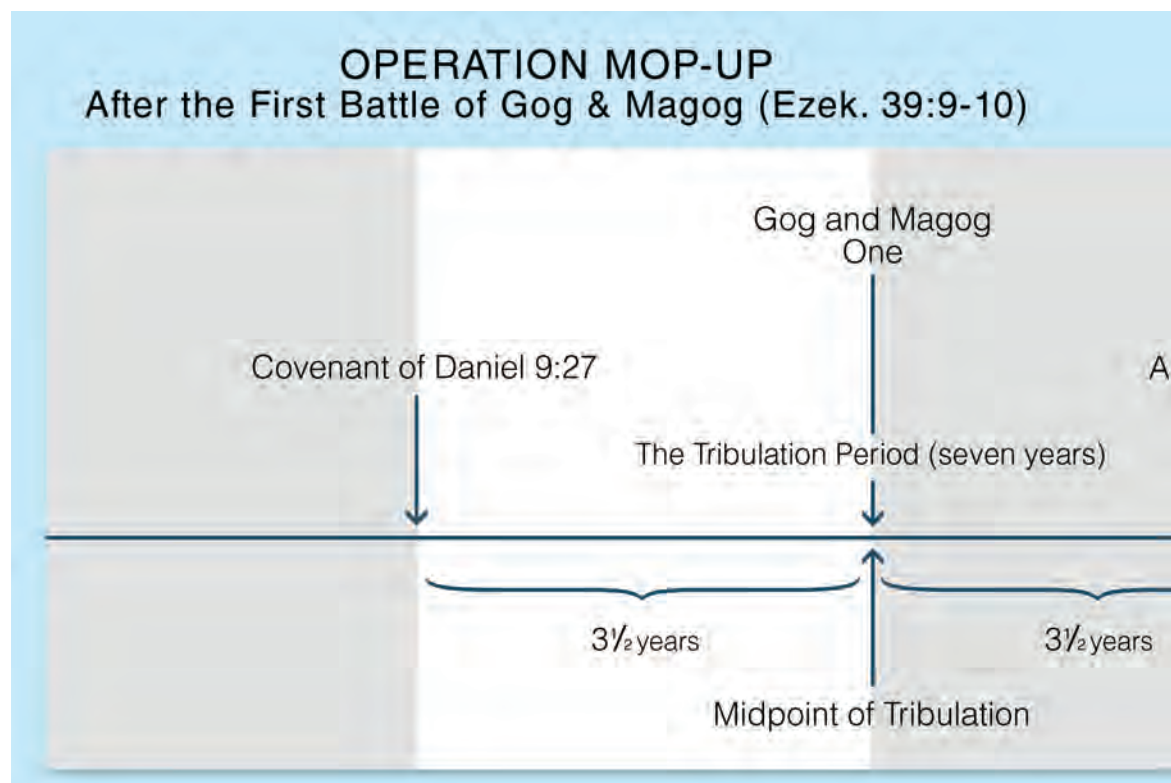
their presence in the region will be irrelevant. Their surviving populations will be decimated, their soldiers dead, their economies destroyed, and their resources depleted. They will have no military capacity with which to defend their borders. All they can do is watch helplessly while foreign armies roll roughshod through their territories on their way to Israel.

## Divine Destruction

God intervenes and destroys these invading armies once they reach Israel. Many of them will be cut down by "friendly fire" (that is, they will end up killing each other in the midst of all the confusion; Ezek. 38:21). A massive Mideast earthquake will wreak unprecedented destruction on them (vv. 19-20). God will send deadly plagues, widespread bloodshed, hammering rainfall, and crushing hailstones, along with fire and brimstone (v. 22).

This Gog and Magog invasion at the mid-point of the Tribulation may be an important factor in the Antichrist's rise to power. Under the terms of his seven-year Mideast peace accord, this Roman-European political leader will be obliged to move in and "defend" Israel from the invaders.

It's entirely plausible that this conning Messianic imposter could take credit for the destruction of the invaders from the north (and the south), even though God did it without his help. In the wake of the repelled invasion, he could then occupy Israel for "protective" purposes.



## False Messiah

The Orthodox rabbis are very familiar with the OT prophecies about Jerusalem being surrounded by enemies and the promises of divine deliverance (e.g., Zech. 14:1-4). If these religious leaders in Israel recognize their predicament (when Jerusalem is besieged by enemies) and become convinced that the Antichrist played a role in delivering them from the first Gog and Magog invasion, it could enhance his Messiah-like status in their eyes.<sup>6</sup>

Once he's firmly entrenched in Israel, however, the Antichrist will show his true colors. He will turn out to be a brutal and ruthless dictator. Israel's former protector and pretend "Messiah" will now become her oppressor. He will set himself up as an object of worship on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, desecrating the rebuilt Temple (Dan. 9:27b; 2 Thess. 2:4).

These events will inaugurate the second three-and-a-half years of the Tribulation Period—the reign of the Antichrist (or Anti-messiah).

## THE ARMAGEDDON CAMPAIGN—REV. 16:14-16

In pop culture, "Armageddon" has become a catchall term to describe almost anything having to do with the end of the world. It was even the title of a 1998 sci-fi thriller (starring Bruce Willis) about a Texas-sized asteroid on a collision course with earth.<sup>7</sup>

As usual, however, the world has gotten it wrong. Armageddon isn't just vague, end-of-the-world rhetoric. Instead, it's a specific military campaign that the ancient prophets said would take place in the Middle East someday. It will come to an abrupt end at the Second Coming of the Messiah.

### Scope of the Conflict

Messianic scholar Arnold Fruchtenbaum folds eight specific, prophetic events into the Armageddon Campaign:

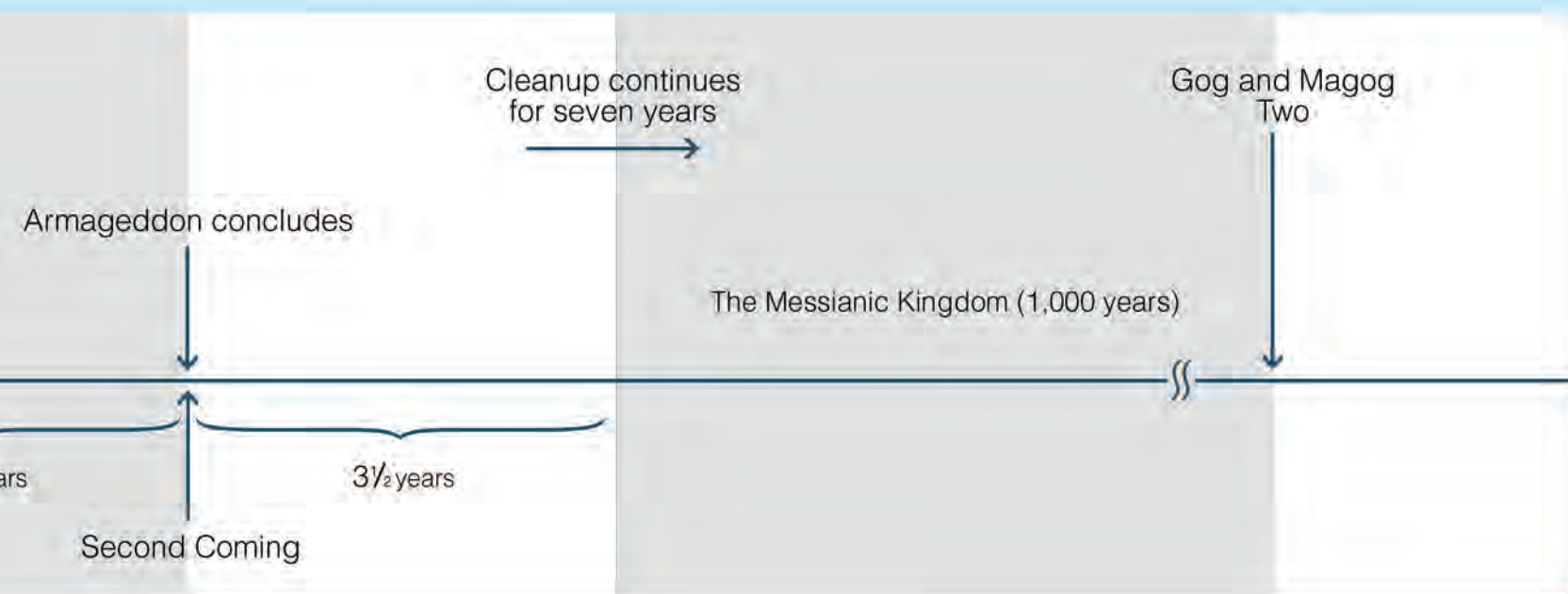
1. The assembling of the Antichrist's allies (Rev. 16:12-16);
2. The destruction of Babylon (Zech. 5:5-11; Isa. 14:1-2);<sup>8</sup>
3. The fall of Jerusalem (Zech. 12:1-3; 14:1-2);
4. The armies of the Antichrist at Bozrah (Jer. 49:13-14);
5. The national regeneration of Israel (Zech. 12:10-13; Rom. 11:25-27);
6. The Second Coming of Jesus the Messiah (Micah 2:12-13);<sup>9</sup>
7. The battle from Bozrah to the Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:12-13); and
8. The victory ascent up the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:3-4).<sup>10</sup>

I've always thought it's a bit odd that Armageddon will come to such an abrupt end. After all, here we have Armageddon, the most legendary military conflict in the history of the human race, and it ends more with a whimper than with a bang:

And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh (Rev. 19:19-21).

This vision includes figurative language, of course (like the sword coming out of Messiah's mouth), but the meaning is clear. The ringleaders (the Beast and the False Prophet) are captured (and later cast into the Lake of Fire) and everyone else (i.e., "the kings of the earth" and their armies) is killed in action. There will be no survivors among God's enemies.<sup>11</sup>

It all seems so brief and sudden!





If I had written the script, I would have inserted more pathos and drama. I would have made it a battle to remember—with back-and-forth, ebb-and-flow action and lots of Industrial Light and Magic special effects! But as it turns out, the outcome is very straightforward and matter-of-fact—even anticlimactic. The Messiah arrives on the scene, and the action quickly comes to a crescendo with the swift and sure destruction of the advancing armies.

## Nuclear Warfare?

Some Bible teachers have suggested that the biblical language (i.e., eyes dissolving in the sockets and tongues melting in their mouths) implies warfare with thermonuclear or neutron weapons. It's as though they think modern technology makes Scripture more plausible or realistic.

However, the pertinent texts say that the Lord himself is the one who smites these armies—and He doesn't need any help. Zechariah 14:12 states that He will smite His enemies with a "plague."<sup>12</sup> It certainly sounds like a direct act of God himself! In a corresponding passage in the NT, Paul says the Antichrist and his legions will be destroyed by "the breath of [God's] mouth" and "the brightness of His coming"—not by the brightness of anything like a nuclear bomb (2 Thess. 2:8-12).

The Messiah's thousand-year millennial reign follows on the heels of Armageddon. Yeshua of Nazareth, the Messianic Son of David, will rule the

world from His throne in Jerusalem. Isaiah prophesied:

For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this (Isa. 9:6-7).

## SECOND BATTLE OF GOG AND MAGOG—REV. 20:7-9

At long last, we have come to the end of human history. The curtain is about to fall on the tragic yet triumphant epic that began with the Fall of the human race in the Garden of Eden.

And this is how it ends—with one last war.

The Lord's ways are often steeped in irony. At Calvary, for instance, He used death to do away with death (Heb. 2:14-15). The Bible also says, "The last will be first, and the first last" (Matt. 20:16), and we can save our life by losing it for Jesus' sake (Mark 8:35). These are all familiar biblical ironies.

And now, here's another one: *God will use a war to end all wars.* Gog and Magog Two will be the world's last war. It will take place at the close of

the Millennium, a thousand years or so after the Armageddon Campaign.

We already saw Gog and Magog One in Ezekiel 38. Gog and Magog Two is found in Revelation 20: "Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea" (vv. 7-8).

## One Name, Two Conflicts

Some people think it's a stretch to say that two separate conflicts, more than a thousand years apart, are known in Scripture by the same name. But this is not uncommon even in secular history. Take World War I, for instance, and its deadly successor, World War II. Both are called World Wars, distinguished only by the order in which they took place.<sup>13</sup>

Ezekiel and Revelation use the same name for two different conflicts because of the similarity of the circumstances. They both involve invasions of Israel by powers from the north.

Since science and technology will likely advance at an accelerated pace during the Kingdom Age, this final war could truly be cosmic in its scope—that is, its frontiers might include far-flung outposts on other planets or even in other star systems. Who knows? There are myriads of possibilities. Besides, doesn't the Book of Revelation intimate that the final showdown between the forces of good and evil will spill over into the heavenly regions (12:7)? That would be *Star Wars* in the truest sense!<sup>14</sup>





## Some People Are Hard to Please

How could there be a war during a perfect age of worldwide peace, justice, and prosperity? It's a good question. The answer is simple: the Millennium won't be perfect. The thousand years represent a transitional time between our present, fallen world and the future, perfect Eternal State (Rev. 21:1—22:5). The effects of sin will be greatly minimized, but not yet eliminated entirely.<sup>15</sup>

Only believers will enter the Millennial Kingdom, but those who are mortals will procreate and produce more millennial citizens.<sup>16</sup> These people will have the same, inborn fallen nature that we have now. While there will be outward conformity to the law and to societal norms, some people will choose not to follow Yeshua. Outwardly, they may *look* like typical Kingdom citizens, but in their hearts they won't be. They will be rebels.

In most environments, whether it's school or work, like-minded people tend to gravitate to one another. They recognize each other even when others don't. So the rebels will find each other during the Millennium.

For a thousand years, there will be no war and the nations will live in perfect harmony—united by their common faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Hunger and disease will exist only in history books. Unemployment and poverty will be eliminated. Justice will prevail equally for everyone. But none of this will matter to the rebels. These millennial miscreants, over time, will form an insurgency. Through surreptitious means, they will eventually organize themselves well enough to accumulate resources, remanufacture weaponry,<sup>17</sup> and do the unthinkable: they will mount a full-scale attack on the Holy City where the Messiah rules from the Davidic throne.

## A Magnet of Evil

This is why God turns Satan loose at the end of the Millennium (20:1-3, 7-10). Like a powerful magnet that can quickly gather metal shavings scattered across a workshop floor, even if they're buried in mounds of sawdust, the Evil One will attract a following of insurgents from the mass of humanity stretching to every corner of the globe. Evidently, the insurgency will gain momentum and the number of rebels will become quite significant—as numerous “as the sand of the sea” (v. 8).

It's interesting that Israel's King-Messiah allows the rebel force to advance as far as they do. The text indicates that they will approach Jerusalem and encircle the city (v. 9). The Millennial government may not have much in the way of military hardware or trained soldiers because the Kingdom—at least, up until now—has been a time of universal peace (Isa. 2:4).

Nonetheless, there's little doubt that the Messiah could have wiped out the insurgency long before this. All it would have taken was a word from His mouth. But He doesn't do it. It's as if He's drawing them in, closer and closer, to make a point. He wants the world to witness His defense of the Holy City—and the final destruction of the forces of evil.

At last, fire falls from heaven and consumes them (Rev. 20:9). That's how it all ends.

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## Conclusion

Let's remember that interpreting the prophetic Scriptures is often not a precise science. It's not like chemistry or physics, for instance, where you can test and falsify the results of experiments.

Prophecy isn't so clear-cut. Many passages are characterized by time-compression, so that long periods of history are represented by a mere comma or verse break. This allows for dual prophecies with both ancient and eschatological (end-time) fulfillments.<sup>18</sup> Most of the ancient nations no longer exist (that is, not in the same form or by the same name as in Bible times and sometimes not even the same ethnicity), so we plug in their 21st-century equivalents as best we can.

All of this involves a fair amount of assumption and speculation. That's why good, solid Bible interpreters often have dissimilar conclusions based on the same set of data. Even under our premillennial tent, opinions differ about precisely when some of these

wars will take place. So it's wise to be gracious and humble toward others who see things a bit differently.

Besides, we don't want to miss seeing the forest for the trees. One of the greatest miracles in the history of the world is staring us right in the face—the modern State of Israel. Let's not allow smaller issues to obscure that miracle. Never before in the history of the world has a nation of people been driven from their homeland and their cities burned to the ground, only for them to return and reclaim that homeland thousands of years later.

So we come together in agreement on a unifying theme: namely, that God is at work today in our world and among His ancient people Israel. God the Father is in charge of the Second Coming timetable (Acts 1:7). When the end finally arrives, He isn't going to ask any of us how the final scenario should play out. He won't consult our CDs or our books with their neat, little charts and diagrams. He will orchestrate the whole thing in His own way, according

to His own plan. And that's just fine with me.

Someday, when the dust settles, I'll be happy if I end up with an 80 percent or better accuracy rating! The one thing we can be 100 percent certain about, though, is that the Lord is coming back someday—and when He does, the nation Israel will come to faith in her Messiah and enter into the full realization of her prophetic destiny.

*"I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD" (Ezek. 37:14).*



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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Mark Hitchcock in *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2012), 303. Dr. Hitchcock is a pastor and adjunct professor at Dallas Theological Seminary.

<sup>2</sup> In Ezekiel 37, the "dry bones" are not resurrected in one, sudden act. Rather, it happens progressively, in successive stages: first, there's a rattling sound as the bones came together (v. 7); second, tendons grow, flesh appears, and skin covers them (v. 8); and third, they are infused with the breath of life and stand to their feet, an "exceedingly great army" (vv. 9-10). So the prophecy indicates that there will be a future point when Israel will be restored physically as a nation—but without yet having the Spirit of God within her. We believe that time is now.

<sup>3</sup> This is an apropos description of modern Israel in her current condition. She suffers from many of the same sociological problems as other countries—including abortion, prostitution, sexual perversion, and drug trafficking. Tel Aviv has been described as a miniature New York City because of the similarities. Only a small religious minority of Israelis has any serious interest in spiritual matters.

<sup>4</sup> Some prophetic teachers have identified "Rosh" with modern-day Russia, "Meshech" with Moscow, and "Tubal" with Tobolsk (Ezek. 38:2-3). However, these associations are based on superficial similarities in sounds and have no basis in true etymology. (It's a bit like saying that the prophetic hordes of Gomer will be led by a TV character played by Jim Nabors.) Nonetheless, on geographical grounds alone, since Moscow is situated almost 1,700 miles due north of Jerusalem, it's very likely that Ezekiel's coalition from "the far north" (v. 6) will indeed include the Russian Federation.

<sup>5</sup> Many scholars today associate Ezekiel's Gomer with the ancient Cimmerians, who once lived around the Black Sea. However, the Babylonian Talmud identifies Gomer as "Germania" (Yoma 1:1, III.14.B). Germania would have been the area of Middle Europe or much of what encompasses modern-day Germany. For more information about a possible Gomer-Germany connection, see my booklet *Germany and the European Nations in Prophecy* (San Antonio, TX: CJF Ministries, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Some people object to the notion that a non-Jewish "Messiah" could deceive the Israeli people. The Hebrew *Mashiach*, however, simply denotes someone who is "anointed" by God for a specific task or purpose. One notable, biblical example of a non-Jewish political figure being referred to as *Mashiach* (translated "anointed" in most English versions) is Cyrus, King of Persia (Isa. 45:1). There are many different ideas in broader Judaism about who the Messiah will be (or even if there will be a human Messiah at all) and what he will do.

<sup>7</sup> *Armageddon* was produced by Jerry Bruckheimer and released by Disney's Touchstone Pictures.

<sup>8</sup> Fruchtenbaum believes that the prophetic references to "Babylon" point to the literal city of Babylon in modern-day Iraq (*The Footsteps of the Messiah* [San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2003], 235).

<sup>9</sup> Fruchtenbaum suggests that Yeshua will return first to Bozrah (the ancient capital of Edom, situated south of the Dead Sea) rather than to the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. The Mount of Olives, according to his timetable, is where the "victory ascent" later takes place (Ibid., 290-93).

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 309-57.

<sup>11</sup> That is, there will be no one left from the armies that came against Jerusalem. However, there will be survivors from among the nations who sent those armies: "And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zech. 14:16).

<sup>12</sup> The Hebrew word translated "plague" can mean a "blow," a "slaughter," or a pestilential "plague" (*Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1979], 532).

<sup>13</sup> Another example is the Battle of Manassas during the Civil War. Two conflicts took place roughly a year apart in the same locale, so they're both known as the Battle of Manassas. Civil War historians distinguish between them by using the terms First Manassas (July 21, 1861) and Second Manassas (August 28-30, 1862).

<sup>14</sup> Some people believe Psalm 115:16 means that humankind's domain is limited to Planet Earth: "The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's; But the earth He has given to the children of men." No one disputes that the earth—especially with its moderate climate, ideal gravitation, perfect distance from the sun, and life-friendly atmosphere—is ideally suited for human habitation. However, does that mean we shouldn't explore God's universe and perhaps even visit and study other worlds? Psalm 8:6 says, "You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet"—and note that in this passage, "the work" of God's hands specifically includes the "heavens" and "the stars" (v. 3).

<sup>15</sup> The Edenic period wasn't perfect, either; after all, it ended with an invasion by the devil and the subsequent Fall of the human race. Likewise, the millennial period will be wonderful in many ways but will also have its own problems—and will end with a large-scale war.

<sup>16</sup> At the outset of the Millennial Kingdom, there will be two types of people on earth: (1) immortals who were raptured and/or resurrected either before or after the Tribulation—and will therefore possess glorified bodies; and (2) mortals who survived the Tribulation and have become believers in Messiah Yeshua. Although their lifespans will be greatly lengthened during the Millennium, some mortals, on rare occasions, will die (Isa. 65:20).

<sup>17</sup> Most of the implements of war will have been destroyed following the Armageddon Campaign at the close of the Tribulation (Isa. 2:4).

<sup>18</sup> Fruchtenbaum, Ibid., 4-5. Dr. Fruchtenbaum distinguishes between a "double reference" (which he accepts) and a "double fulfillment" (which he rejects) in prophetic passages. If a passage refers to more than one future fulfillment, it's a double reference—not a double fulfillment. That is, specific verses within a prophecy that refer to one future event cannot also refer to another event in a different timeframe. He uses the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9-10 as an example, saying that Verse 9 refers to Messiah's first coming while Verse 10 was fulfilled at His Second Coming. Following this approach, it would be misleading to say that the two verses together comprise one prophecy with a dual or double fulfillment—because they don't. Each verse (or section of verses) has its own prophetic timeframe and focus.



# A STUDY IN CONTRASTS

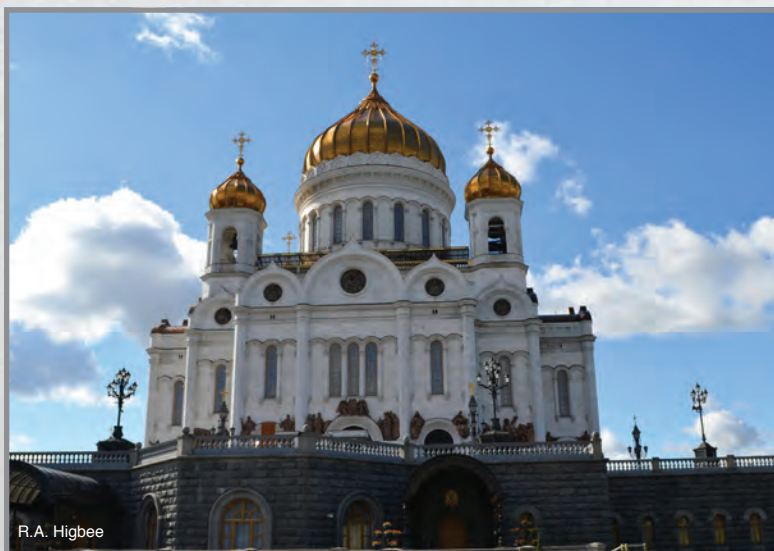
## Evangelism in Russia

by Georgia Heisler

Reaching the Jewish people in every corner of the world sometimes faces obstacles. When a group from CJF Ministries traveled to Russia in September, they got a first-hand look at some of those challenges in this former communist country.

The Russian Baptist Union invited CJFM to hold a conference on God's plan for Israel and the Jewish people after similar ones in Belarus and Ukraine were well received. In response, the CJFM leadership team of Dr. Gary Hedrick, Gideon Levytam, Rob Styler, and Rander Draper traveled to a retreat outside of Moscow to conduct a three-day conference for more than 200 Russian pastors. The Baptist Union is a respected minority in Russia where an estimated 75 percent of the country's population identifies themselves as Orthodox Christians.

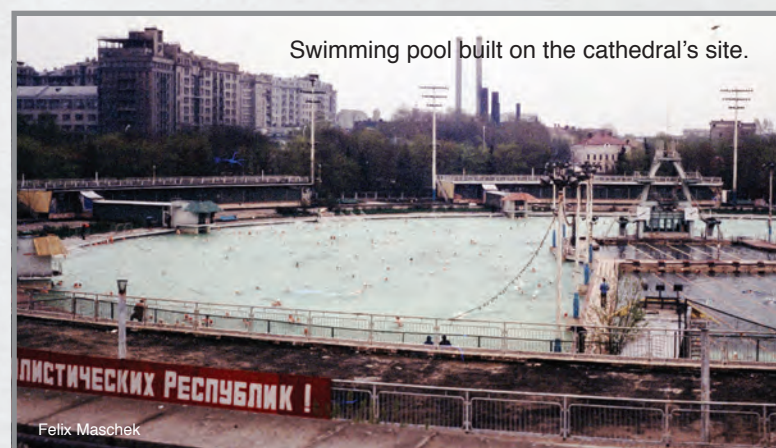
For more than 70 years, atheistic communism sought to remove all vestiges of religion in Russia. Under communism, the Orthodox church suffered greatly; many church leaders were arrested or put to death, and most of its property seized or destroyed. However, when new religious liberty laws were passed under Gorbachev in 1990, the church experienced a renewal. After the conference, the CJFM team visited some of the monuments built in Moscow during the window of freedom—including those memorializing Jewish suffering in the Holocaust. Another important building they saw was Christ the Savior Cathedral.



Czar Alexander I (czar 1801-1825) commissioned the building of the cathedral in Moscow after the Russian victory over Napoleon in 1812. Alexander wanted to honor both God and the heroic Russian people. Disputes over style and location delayed construction,

however, and the cathedral wasn't actually built until decades later. Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture" debuted in the cathedral in 1882, a year before the finished cathedral was finally consecrated.

This cathedral (modeled after the massive Hagia Sophia in Istanbul) was leveled in 1931 by the communists under Stalin, who wanted both the church building's 20 tons of gold, and the land on which it sat. In its place, they planned to build a "Palace of the Soviets," with a huge figure of the recently deceased Vladimir Lenin on top. The foundation for the "palace" was dug in 1939, and framing began, but various difficulties delayed the project, and construction finally stopped when war broke out in 1941. Building materials were diverted to Russian defense needs, and the Tower of Babel-like structure was never built.



In the late 1950s, Khrushchev had a huge public swimming pool placed on the land. And then, in 1990, under Gorbachev, the Russian Orthodox Church received permission to rebuild Christ the Savior Cathedral on the original site and according to its original design. Millions of Russians and sympathetic foreigners contributed to the \$300 million cost of the building. The cathedral was completed in 2000, and at a height of 344 feet, is believed to be the tallest Orthodox church in the world.

In many ways, this cathedral holds the same historic and emotional significance for the Russian people as the Hurva Synagogue does for the Jewish people. Despite the cathedral's beauty and the apparent religious renewal it symbolizes, Russia (like most nations) still struggles for its soul. Both Russia and the Church struggle with an anti-Semitism that is endemic. But God's plan to reach His people continues, and today the Baptist Union in Russia is seeking new ways to reach Moscow's 500,000 Jewish people. Central to that effort is their desire to offer clear teaching of Romans 9, 10, and 11.



# Bible Questions AND Answers

by DR. GARY HEDRICK

## Have a Bible question?

Submit it to Dr. Hedrick at [garyh@cjfm.org](mailto:garyh@cjfm.org), or mail it to 611 Broadway, San Antonio, Texas 78215.

You may see your question addressed in a future issue of *Messianic Perspectives*.

**QUESTION:** *I heard you talking about 1 John 1:9 on the radio. You said all we have to do is confess our sin and it's taken away from us "as far as the east is from the west." That sounds good, but what about when we confess a sin and then turn right around and do it again? If we keep on confessing each time we do it, does that really make it right? That sounds rather presumptuous to me.*

**ANSWER:** Excellent question! First, let's look at some key terms:

**Confession**—The Greek word for “confess” is *homologeō*, which literally means to “speak the same thing.” So when we confess our sins to God, we are agreeing with Him about those sins. That is, we are agreeing that they are destructive to us and offensive to Him. John writes, “*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness*” (1 John 1:9).

Positionally, of course, our sins (past, present, and future) are completely forgiven at the moment we trust in the Messiah for salvation (Col. 2:9-14). That's because forgiveness occurs when we establish our *relationship* with God and become His child.

Practically, however, we must maintain *fellowship* with God by confessing our failures and shortcomings every day. That fellowship-relationship distinction is very important. Even an earthly father may not have *fellowship* with a child—but the *relationship* is always there. It's

in the DNA and that never changes! The tense of the Greek verb in 1 John 1:9 describes continuous action: “If we are confessing our sins.”

Since 1 John is addressed to people who are already believers (2:1), we know that the subject here is *fellowship* rather than *relationship*. He's addressing people who already have a relationship with God through His Son, Yeshua the Messiah. Now they need help in maintaining daily fellowship with Him.

**Forgiveness**—The Greek word for “forgive” is *aphimi* and it means to “send away.” As you noticed, I like to quote these words of King David of Israel: “*As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our transgressions from us*” (Psalm 103:12).

Why is it east and west? Why doesn't he say, “As far as the north is from the south”? It's because north and south are finite distances. That is, if you keep traveling north, you'll eventually find yourself headed south (and vice versa). But if you set out in an easterly (or westerly) direction, you can keep on going indefinitely—it never ends. David is saying, then, that the separation between our sins and us is infinite when God forgives us!

There's no such thing as “mere confession” if we really know what confession means. As we saw above, heart-felt confession is a continual process. King David said, “*For I acknowledge my transgressions, And my sin is always before me*” (Psalm 51:3).

If we tell God that we're sorry we did something, but we keep on doing it—then that's when divine discipline comes into play. The writer of Hebrews says, “*For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives*” (Heb. 12:6).

If divine discipline doesn't take place, that means the offender is not a believer: “*But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons*” (v. 8).

Years ago, when I was a pastor, we had a church member who tried repeatedly to quit smoking. However, I never had any doubt that he was a believer. He had a sweet spirit and was one of our most generous financial supporters. Anytime the church door was open, he was there. But he struggled with his nicotine addiction for years. He would quit smoking for a few weeks or months—but he always ended up going back to it. Sometimes he would come forward in church and ask us to pray that God would help him. At times, I saw tears in his eyes. He had a tender heart and he loved the Lord. But that habit had a powerful grip on him.

Many Christians struggle with sins of the flesh—drug addictions, sexual habits, gluttony, laziness, or whatever it may be. The Lord knows the difference between outright rebellion and those times when one of His children is overtaken or overwhelmed by sinful, destructive habits (Gal. 6:1).

A besetting sin, by definition, is one that we struggle with. We know it's wrong, but as hard as we try to overcome it, we can't. Some people just give up the fight—or maybe rationalize it as a normal part of life. Besetting sins are the ones the writer of Hebrews encourages us to shed:

## Two Aspects of Salvation and Forgiveness

Positional heavenly perspective	Justification	Establishes relationship	Forgiven once (punctiliar-aorist action)	Basis: shed blood of Messiah
Practical earthly perspective	Sanctification	Regulates fellowship	Forgiveness ongoing (present-continuous action)	Basis: shed blood of Messiah

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# Fruit from the Harvest

by Violette Berger



## To His Glory!

In his 12 years of ministry with CJFM and as pastor of a Messianic congregation, **Beth Yeshua (Las Vegas)**, **Richard Hill** rejoices that 815 souls (including 58 Jewish people) have prayed to receive Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Rich's ministry is multifaceted: he leads a campus ministry at UNLV, travels on speaking tours, teaches the Jewish roots of Christianity, and leads Messianic Passover Seders at churches and other venues.

While leading a Passover presentation at a veterans' home in Las Vegas, Rich was blessed that four Jewish veterans attended. The contrast in their reactions, however, was apparent. At one table sat a Jewish man with two of his gentile buddies. They were having a great time partaking of the Passover elements, laughing, and listening attentively to the Gospel message. At another table, were seated three Jewish veterans who were obviously upset at the Seder's focus on Yeshua.

They paid little attention and eventually left the service prior to the invitation for salvation. The Jewish veteran and his two buddies, however, prayed to receive Jesus and he later told Rich, "The Seder just came alive for me, and I was able to put all the pieces of the Jewish puzzle of Jesus together and finally believe in Him." A female veteran also prayed to receive Jesus that day. Rich writes, "What a wonderful privilege and a pleasure to honor our veterans for their service and help them see the light of Jesus out of a somewhat darkened war-torn world they used to live in!"

## You and All Your Household

Richard Hill's wife, Oanh, is a faithful and active participant in their ministry, and he shares one of her recent divine appointments. Sampson and his family have been attending Beth Yeshua congregation for many years, and he also serves on the evangelism team. Sampson hurt his shoulder and asked Oanh if he could use her special cream that helps with pain.

She dropped off the cream while on her way to run errands. Before she left, Sampson asked Oanh to pray for his sister-in-law's physical healing and salvation. As she was leaving, Sampson's sister-in-law showed up distraught and proceeded to relate her physical and spiritual problems to Oanh. When Oanh finished sharing the Gospel, the sister-in-law tearfully and joyfully prayed to receive Jesus as her Lord and Savior. Oanh then encouraged her to tell Sampson's family, including his father, that she had just received the Lord—and she did.

As Oanh was preparing to leave the house again, Sampson asked her to pray for his brother's hardened heart against

Jesus. Then Sampson's brother came through the front door. Oanh spoke at length with him about the Gospel, and he also prayed to receive Jesus right there in Sampson's house!

Once again, Oanh exhorted him to tell the rest of the family—which he did. Oanh said, "Everyone in the house then praised the Lord and hugged one another for the salvation brought to Sampson's household that day!"

## Forgiven!

**John Kanter, CJFM Southwest representative (Dallas)**, preached recently at Buster Cole Prison in Bonham, TX. He taught from John 1:6-18, naming his message "The Face of Grace." John's main idea was that divine grace has a human face, emphasizing "the fact that God the Son became one of us to do for us what we could never do for ourselves—secure forgiveness of sin enabling us to have a reconciled relationship with God coupled with the hope of eternal life." At the conclusion of his message, 15 of the 70 inmates present responded to John's Gospel invitation for the gift of forgiveness and eternal life.

## A Spiritual Dip in the Pool

**CJFM Director of Missions Emeritus (Phoenix) Barry Berger's** and my grandsons, Austin (age 16) and Jared (age 11), visited for a week in August. The boys are a lot of fun, and Barry and I are always excited to see them. Both boys are believers in the Lord, attend church regularly, and are growing in the Lord—but neither has been baptized. Weeks before they came to visit, Barry prepared four 30-minute Bible studies for them, and each day they studied different topics (such as the need, mode, and reason to be baptized).

During the lessons, the boys understood that baptism does not save you; it is only by God's grace through faith in Jesus that our sins are forgiven and we then receive God's free gift of eternal life. Both Austin and Jared fully understand and believe that baptism is only symbolical and identifies them with the death, burial, and resurrection of our Messiah. It is a public proclamation of our faith in the Son of God.

The Saturday afternoon before the boys left for home, we held the baptism in our backyard pool. Seventeen people witnessed this blessed event, as Barry baptized both Austin and Jared with the help of David Wimbley, a member of the *Tikvah BaMidbar* (Hope in the Desert Messianic fellowship) leadership team. Each boy gave a short testimony of his faith and was baptized. Afterward, we sang hymns and then had a "pizza party." At the end of the day, Barry and I knew that God was glorified.



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*“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1).*

Notice that he says becoming ensnared comes “easily.” The hard part is breaking free! Can we experience victory over besetting or entangling sin? Yes, of course—the writer of Hebrews would not have told us to shed those sins if it were not possible to do so. How, then, do we do it? The key is embedded right in the text of Hebrews 12. Go back and read the entire chapter slowly, while noticing these three main points: running (v. 1), looking (v. 2), and considering (vv. 3-11). Take a pen and paper and arrange the information in an outline with those three main points. Mull it over. Let it sink in.

Remember that the Lord Yeshua the Messiah is all about freedom. He frees us from any kind of bondage (Rom. 8:21). It’s what He was called to do: *“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, Because the LORD has anointed Me To preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives, And the opening of the prison to those who are bound”* (Isa. 61:1). When the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:36). 

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