

Signs Intensifying: What's Ahead for Israel?

By PAUL J. SCHARF

As we approach this New Year, our world is weighted down with manifold troubles. Yet believers in Christ need not succumb to despair. God's Word gives us the capacity to discern God's work in history—in light of the prophetic Scriptures. Jesus, in fact, entreated His followers to engage in this exercise, and chided those who were unable to “*discern* the signs of the times” (Matt. 16:3).

Surely the terror attacks which Hamas inflicted upon Israel on October 7, 2023—along with all that has unfolded since that time—give us much food for thought in this regard as we turn our calendars over to 2024. But how can we evaluate these things? To put it simply, what's ahead for Israel—and what does it mean for us?

In the prophetic future—once the church is taken by Christ in the pretribulational rapture (see Rev. 3:10)—Israel will once again become the focus of God's work in the world (see Ezek. 5:5; 38:12). Temple worship will be reestablished under the direction of the two witnesses (see Dan. 9:27; Rev. 11:1), who will lead a worldwide revival (see Rev. 7:9-17) and oversee the launch of the final restoration of Israel (see Isa. 4:3; Rom. 11:26). The fulfillment of prophecy revolves around Israel—all based in God's gracious, unilateral, unconditional covenant, which He gave to Abram in Genesis 12:1-3.

So how is the current conflict in Israel related to all that lies ahead? As we strive to answer that question, we will gain insights to help us act wisely now. Let me state up front that the attacks of October 7 did not directly fulfill any prophecy. They do, however, work toward setting the stage for the future fulfillment of prophecy. I offer the following six areas in which I believe the current conflict is indeed setting the prophetic stage.

The next occurrence on the prophetic timetable is the **sudden disappearance** of all believers at the rapture, which will end the church age. Since there are no signs of the rapture (as there are for Christ's final return in glory [see Matt. 24:30]), there is no direct connection between the war in Israel and the timing of the rapture. However, as we look at our globe in turmoil, this conflict is clearly setting the stage for the whole world to experience the **devastation** that will follow the rapture, with all its concomitant events.

Following the rapture, Israel will be placed under the ministry of her **sages of divinity**—the two witnesses (see Rev. 11:1-12). It appears that this conflict is setting the stage for Israel to accept God's **revelation** through these men and their disciples, the 144,000 witnesses (see Rev. 7:1-8; 14:1-5). In this time of tragedy, we are hearing reports that the Jewish people are becoming more receptive to the gospel of their own Messiah.

The tribulation will officially begin by a **signing with death** (see Isa. 28:15)—that is, the ratification of a covenant between Israel (reconstituted as a nation, in unbelief, in her land) and the antichrist (see Dan. 9:27). In so many ways, this war is certainly setting

the stage for Israel to be in a state of such **desperation** that she will eagerly seek out any such covenant, as long as it provides a realistic promise of lasting peace.

Then, the Bible warns us that the tribulation—and even the days leading up to it—will be a time of **spiritual delusion** (see Matt. 24:4-5; 2 Thess. 2:3, 9-11). Do we not see a deluded mentality evidenced by the protesters who chant mindlessly in favor of Hamas, as well as in the growing worldwide antisemitism? Sadly, even many in Israel will be deceived into trusting the antichrist instead of their own Messiah (see Matt. 24:24; John 5:43). This conflict is setting the stage for the whole world to fall into **deception**—believing lies regarding the true God of Israel and His chosen people.

The tribulation will also be a period of **Satanic desolation**—"the abomination of desolation" (Dan. 12:11 [see 9:27]; Matt. 24:15; Mark 13:14). The antichrist, energized by Satan himself, will commit atrocities in the Temple (reminiscent of Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes [see Dan. 11:31]; see 2 Thess. 2:4). Satan, through the antichrist, will also persecute the Jewish people mercilessly (see Rev. 12:3-6). We know, additionally, that "all the nations" will be set "to battle against Jerusalem" (Zech. 14:2). We can see how current trends are setting the stage for Israel to be targeted for **annihilation**—hated and hunted by Satan and his demonic and human forces, especially in the second half of the tribulation.

Praise God, before the world ends the Lord will undertake a **supernatural deliverance** of His chosen people (see Zech. 12:10; 13:8-9; Isa. 4:3; Matt. 24:13; Rom. 11:26). Today, many Jewish people are returning to their land in unbelief. God will use the tribulation to bring them to repentance—to receive their King and His kingdom. They will finally return in belief! Surely, the Lord is directing events today to set the stage for Israel to receive **restoration**—physical deliverance and spiritual salvation through the one true God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and His Son, the Messiah, Jesus.

God has ordained a glorious future for Israel, but there will be many more heartaches until the nation finally embraces Christ. How amazing that we are here to witness these incredible signposts pointing toward the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy.

May we become faithful and wise to "*discern* the signs of the times" (Matt. 16:3). And may we always stand with Israel, and "Pray for the peace of Jerusalem" (Ps. 122:6).

Paul J. Scharf (M.A., M.Div., Faith Baptist Theological Seminary) is a church ministries representative for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, based in Columbus, WI, and serving in the Midwest. For more information on his ministry, visit sermonaudio.com/pscharf or foi.org/scharf, or email pscharf@foi.org.

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