

# Is the war in Israel a sign of the end times?

## TRANSCRIPT

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**NOTE: This transcript was AI-generated and has not been fully edited.**

**Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, this is the rare occasion for me to get to say good morning and good day to Dr. Denisons both of you, Jim and Ryan, we're glad to have you back on The Denison Forum Podcast for what I'm sure will be an intriguing and challenging conversation about The end times or what theologians like to call the doctrine of eschatology.

And Jim, we're just going to start with you this morning. Why is it that theologians change simple words and make them into big words that most of us get confused about? And particularly this thing called the doctrine of eschatology end times. What is eschatology and in what sense is it biblical?

**Dr. Jim Denison:** Well, you're right. It's our job really to make simple things as complex as possible and to never use a small word if we can use a big word, you know, the eschatological implications of that epistemological assumption have ontological applications, you know, that sort of thing.

**Dr. Mark Turman:** And that's job security. Is that what you're

**Dr. Jim Denison:** That's the goal here.

That's the goal. Our job is to impress you if we can, and if nothing else show that we went to seminary, I suppose. And so, and this could be an example of that exactly what you're saying

**Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, let me back up and ask you a earlier question. Then this is obviously an important season and very tragic season globally. Lots of things that we're concerned about. So this is a special podcast, obviously about what's going on between Israel and Hamas and others.

We're almost a month in to this tragedy. Where do you sense that we are now, as Israel continues, its now land in what they're calling an incursion the interesting terminology that maybe we're not used to, but what's your sense of where we are in the conflict?

**Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, there's good place to start and then from there we can move over to looking at what that means in the minds of some certainly from an eschatological or end times point of view. Where we are at this point in time is where I think we could have predicted we would be at this point in the process.

There's been obviously conflict between Hamas and Israel from the time Hamas was founded. Hamas was created for the purpose of eradicating Israel and renaming the whole area Palestine as they understand it. So Hamas attacking Israel is nothing new. Israel responding to these attacks, usually with missile incursions, that sort of thing kind of mowing the grass, as they have said, trying to reduce Hamas to a place where at least for a while it couldn't attack Israel again, has been how they've responded in the past.

October 7 changed everything on two levels. First of all, we understood that Hamas is willing to do terrorist acts of atrocities against Israeli civilians on a level that had not ever occurred in the history of the modern state of Israel. Previously had been soldiers against soldiers. It's never been kidnapping, terrorizing individual Israelis as happened on October 7th.

So the outrage on the part of the typical person in the street against Hamas is on a level that's never been before. And second, Hamas demonstrated that the Israeli Defense Force was not sufficient for protecting Israeli citizens on a level that previously they had thought to have the capacity to do.

And so now, for the first time since 1948, Israelis walking around on the street are in fear of their lives, for themselves and their families, from Hamas, from Hezbollah, from Palestinian Islamic Jihad, on a level that has not been the case previously. That's required the Israeli defense force, the IDF, to take a stronger retributive sort of step into Gaza and Hamas and has been the case in the past.

That's why you're seeing the incursion that you haven't seen in the past. That's why you're seeing a level of strength of response that's unprecedented since Hamas was founded because they have to do this if for no other reason than because of the absolute outrage and fear on the part of the typical Israeli citizen.

But where this goes ultimately, Mark, and I try to do this briefly as I can, if Hamas is allowed to survive in anything like its current state, it will continue to attack Israel. Hezbollah from the north still has the capacity, certainly even more than Hamas, to attack Israel. Neither of them can defeat Israel as a military power.

I don't, I wouldn't want to take on Israel as a military power from a from a military point of view, but what they can do is a war of attrition that over time will cause Israelis to abandon Israel. Every Israeli I've met in Israel, and you've had the same experience are eminently employable anywhere in the Western world, incredibly literate, incredibly professional, incredibly capable people, just as a community, as a culture.

Well, they live there because they choose. to live in this nation for the sake of preserving the Jewish people. If they decide the state of Israel can't do that anymore, they'll leave. Many of them will leave. And Hamas will ultimately win. It'll ultimately drive the Israelis out of Israel. Not as much through military means as this war of attrition.

So now what Israel has to do, bottom line, is make there be no more Hamas, at least on a level that threatens Israel, without incurring so much civilian casualty that they bring Hezbollah into this, Palestinian Islami Jihad and an Intifada in the West Bank, on a level that makes this a three front war instead of a one front war.

That's their balance. Eradicate Hamas without enraging the rest of the Muslim world to a level that makes this an even broader conflict. That's what they're trying to do right now, is thread that needle with that kind of a very thin balance. And it's a, we don't know if they can do it. We don't know if it can be done or not, but that's what they're attempting to do.

**Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, we've, certainly have our own experience in the United States with dealing with the terrorist group and how difficult it is to, it's nearly impossible to eradicate one in

total but to at least hamper them in their abilities to do things like what happened to us in 9 11 and that type of thing.

It's a similar kind of thing. Heard one commentator say that Hamas has made themselves into the new ISIS. And we know what an ongoing and challenging difficulty that is, but to your point trying to create another form of dispersion of the Jews. Fundamentally, it's the work of every government to protect its citizens.

That's first and foremost its responsibility. And we also know as human beings in places all over the world, when people just decide that they are not safe they're going to try to move to a place where they can sense that safety at a very fundamental level. But one of the most frequent questions that we've received over the last three weeks or so About this conflict and about this new level of engagement between Hamas and Israel has to do with this big issue of the end time so what is that doctrine? And in what sense, Jim, is it biblical? And how is it how does it compare to what other religions, particularly Islam might have in their teaching about future events and how the world may come to a conclusion.

**Dr. Jim Denison:** Sure, so eschatology is the doctrine of the end times, comes from the Greek word eschaton, having to do with end or last or final or that which is out there. And so, and logos is a word. So it's a word about the end times, so to speak, is an eschatology.

All Christians have an eschatology. Whether they've defined it fully or not, whether they could communicate it clearly, most religions of the world have an eschatology, a sense of what the future will bring at some point in time.

If you're a Buddhist, your eschatology centers in nirvana, a sense of being absorbed into the larger world. If you're a Hindu, your concept of moksha or salvation is that you're absorbed again into Brahman, which is their sense of ultimate reality. Well, Islam has defined eschatology as well. Some of which is very relevant to what's going on right now with the Middle East in Iran, for instance, which is a Shiite version of Islam.

70 percent of Shiites are what are known as 12ers, which means that they believe I'll try to do this as briefly as I can, that the 12th Imam, which disappeared in the 10th century, occluded, they would say, we'll come back at the end of history. They call him the Mahdi, M A H D I, and they see him as a kind of Messiah.

Many of them believe the reason the Mahdi has not yet appeared is because they tolerate the existence of Israel. So, Ali Khamenei, who's the supreme leader of Iran, has said that if Muslims would ever attack Israel, the Mahdi would then appear to protect them from retribution. Well, that makes Iran's desire to have a nuclear weapon, especially an existential crisis in Israel,

because if they launched a nuclear weapon on Israel, they might not fear the retribution of Israel and America if the Mahdi appears to protect them.

Now, whether they'll actually do that or not, I'm not here to say. But they certainly believe that attacking Israel hastens their version of the end times and the coming of this Mahdi, this Messiah, who they believe will come at the end of the world. Hamas believes the same thing. It's actually in their charter and their documents they talk in very specific terms about this Mahdi, this Messiah that they think will also come somehow related to their eradicating of Israel.

So, eschatology is certainly playing a major role in what's happening in the Middle East right now. All Christians have a version of an eschatology, however they might understand it.

**Dr. Mark Turman:** Jim, thank you for that. Ryan, you've recently written on this topic trying to help sort this out. Can you give us at least a short history of doctrines of the end time, particularly this doctrine called dispensationalism that seems to be very much the popular approach in our world today for a number of reasons, but you've written on that can you give us a summation of the short history of how most American Christians, anyway, look at the end times?

**Dr. Ryan Denison:** Absolutely. And it's interesting that kind of what I just mentioned, how the Muslims have this belief that the conflict in that attacking Israel will hasten the end times and their Messiah returning. There's actually a, I don't want to say a similar belief within Christianity, but within the premillennial approach, this belief that there is a war with Israel in the Middle East is necessary to the second coming of Christ is actually in some ways kind of similar.

But there's two dominant ways that the end times have been seen throughout much of Christian history. There's seven in total that we get into in an article on the website.

But the two main ones are probably post millennialism and pre millennialism. And the pre millennial approach is the belief that essentially Jesus will come back to set things right and then establish a reign on earth. And that's when the second coming comes in. And for much of the first three centuries of the faith, that was the dominant belief, where even throughout much of the New Testament period, there was the belief that Jesus is going to be coming back very soon.

Within a lot of Paul's writings, there's hints that he thought that might even happen within his lifetime. And so that was the dominant belief up until about the rise of Constantine. And then when Constantine came and legalized Christianity, started promoting Christianity, the state of the church and the status of Christians improved so much that there started to be this growing sense that, well, maybe this is how it's going to happen that the church will inaugurate this kingdom and then Christ will come at the end of it.

But the church will be the one to kind of activate the kingdom of God on earth and bring that in. And there was a historian named Eusebius that when he wrote about Constantine, he almost, he didn't go as far as saying he is the second coming of Christ, but he painted him in this very almost messianic sort of sense.

And so throughout much of the church history up until about the 1800s, this post millennial belief was dominant. And so there were Christians always looking towards, all right, how are things improving? , What role can the church have in improving the state of the world and preparing the way for Jesus to come a second time?

And that all began to change to an extent around the 1800s. Dispensationalism is by no means the only form of premillennialism, but it became a popular version of it in the 1800s when a man named John Nelson Darby started he was actually an Anglican priest in Ireland for a couple years before becoming discontent with the church there and helping to start a movement called the Brethren and later known as the Plymouth Brethren, and one of their key pieces of theology was a clear distinction between Israel as a nation and the church as two separate people. And he helped popularize the idea that that God has a different plan for each of those. And so as part of that, for God to be able to fully save, like, kind of come back and accomplish his salvation plan for the Jewish people, he is going to take the church out of the world first and historic premillennialism there's a sense that the rapture and Christ's coming would happen at the same time, or, and he kind of helped popularize the idea of a rapture first. And so that's one of the main distinctions now among the pre millennialists is when the tribulation is going to happen, whether we'll be here for it.

But it's also helpful to remember that all of these terms, whether it's post millennialism, pre millennialism, dispensationalism, they're almost kind of poles on the end of the spectrum, and most Christians exist somewhere between those. So, very few people relative to the entirety of the church are strictly one view or another most people exist somewhere in the spectrum between them but as that relates to what's going on in Israel, Dispensationalism had a lot to do with this belief that there being a nation in Israel that would have a role to play in this.

And when Israel was re established and became a nation, which happened almost 100 years after Darby was talking about his theology and really starting to popularize that, that it was seen as a sign that it was a big check mark in that box for this guy maybe knew what he was talking about and really helped to spark the growth of that. That's kind of part of how we got to where we are today with a lot of pre millennialism and dispensationalism placing a great emphasis on events in Israel and what happens there as being related to the end times.

**Dr. Mark Turman:** A lot to think about right there, but just just kind of summarizing that in my brain is just thinking about that early on in the story of Christianity in the church after Jesus's

resurrection and ascension, this idea that, Okay, things are now on a completely different track and things are getting better and they're going to continue to get better because of God's work through the Holy Spirit in his church, constantly making the world better.

And that idea persists for a long time as you said, the kingdom of God coming through the ongoing work of the church until we get to more modern times the civil war and then the two world wars in the last century and now and you even see that now the script is flipped you might say where things are just going to get progressively worse until a cataclysmic kind of ending where Jesus comes in some form and I wonder how that even relates to some of our modern thinking.

We're constantly having these polls that say You know, do most Americans think that that the country is on the right track or not? And in at least the last number of decades, it's usually come back negative. No, it doesn't matter who's in office. There's a large number of people who think that we're not on the right track. And so you hear this kind of thinking on and on again.

Jim, let me ask you to weigh in for a minute on this idea of just how Christians should think about this teaching of end times. Would you say that this is a primary doctrine of Christianity? It's kind of hard for me to think of it as a primary doctrine when there are so many divergent views and understandings, but I can go back, you know, I've been a Christian for a little over 40 years. I think I'd been a Christian for maybe a year and a half, when one of my friends that was instrumental in me coming to faith said, You've got to read this book by Hal Lindsey, The Late Great Planet Earth, it was probably the first book outside the Bible where another believer said, You've got to read this.

You've got to understand this. How does this fit into that spectrum of doctrines of primary doctrines and in important but secondary doctrines? And where should the believer position this in terms of its importance?

**Dr. Jim Denison:** It's a great question. There are really two answers to the question depending on how you come into it. It's a little like the horse you get on the carousel is usually the one you get off on and you know, it's kind of how you see it at the beginning is how you're gonna see it at the end. The dispensationalist approach is not just an eschatology and I want to be very fair to that by the way.

I grew up in a church that when I became a Christian, anyway, that our pastor was very much a dispensationalist. My first study Bible was a Schofield study Bible. My first commentary was Late Great Planet Earth. There's a New World Coming. First sermon I ever preached was on the seven judgments as understood by dispensationalism.

And so I certainly am not a dispensationalist today, but I have many friends that are, I have very good friends at Dallas Theological Seminary, which was founded to advance Dispensationalism by Lewis Sperry Chafer. They have a different version of it now than was the case then, of course, but, so I want to be very fair to that.

I know a lot of our listeners are, I'm sure, dispensationalists as well, and so I want to be very fair when I say to you that dispensationalism is an entire system of theology. And so their answer to your question would be to say that this is really a primary doctrine, because they think all of Scripture needs to be understood in terms of the proper dispensation or place in history where it is intended to belong, that God has acted with humanity in different ways at different points in the human story.

Some say there's two dispensations, some say three, some say four, most say seven. And so what you want now to do is attach scripture to where it fits within this larger dispensational strategy by which God is dealing with the human race.

For instance, in the Old Schofield Bible, you get to the Sermon on the Mount, and the note says that this really only has a kind of a moral application to us today, but it really applies to the millennium. So you pick it up and set it up at that thousand year reign of Christ after the rapture and the seven year Great Tribulation.

That's where that section is most to be understood. That's how they can take Zechariah, Matthew 24 and 25, and assemble them together to create a larger structure, a larger system, because they believe they're putting them where they go within the proper dispensations, or the proper kind of scheme by which God relates to humanity.

So in that sense, their eschatology is part of a larger hermeneutic, a larger way of interpreting scripture that is a primary doctrine. That's how all of the Bible's to be interpreted, not just passages that relate to the end of history.

Now, for the rest of us that aren't dispensationalists, I would say it would be very much a secondary doctrine. I don't myself, because I'm not a dispensationalist, understand all of the Scripture to be read in those terms through that kind of lens. And so passages and topics that do relate to the end times, I believe are primary in this sense: they tell us the Lord is coming back and we need to be ready.

That's a primary doctrine. The second coming is a primary doctrine. The fact that Jesus is going to return one day, that Jesus will end history as we know it, that we will face judgment one day, that it's appointed unto all men once to die and then the judgment, that we will one day stand



before Christ where he will, according to 2 Corinthians 5, this idea of the return of Christ and judgment is a primary doctrine.

How we get there, the seven theories, all that sort of, I would see as secondary. I have my own thoughts. Others have their own thoughts. I don't think they should be divisions of faith. I don't think they should say that they believe the Bible more than I do or the other way around. I see those the same way I see baptism theology.

Very important, but I don't see them as so primary that if you were baptized as a Methodist and I as a Baptist that we therefore can't have common cause for the gospel. I see them in ways that some people see the role of women in ministry, that women can have different opinions on that. It's a very important topic, but I don't think it's so important that we ought to divide in faith over it.

I see that relative now churches are governed, whether you believe in an elder model or a deacon model or more of a bishopric model congregational or Presbyterian theories. Those are important, but they're not saving doctrines. They're not doctrines we should break faith over. I see end times doctrines in that same way, except for the part of end times that says Jesus is returning.

You have only today to be ready. You're one day closer to eternity than you've ever been. That's where this becomes practical and primary. So that would be how I would see this primary versus secondary, but a dispensationalist, as I said, would have a different approach.

**Dr. Mark Turman:** Yeah. And people of very mature faith and very strong faith often disagree about this. I can remember if my memory holds up right here, learning years ago that even within the part of Christianity, the denomination out of which the three of us come, that the likes of Billy Graham and George Truitt, I think didn't have the same view, two iconic figures of the 20th century and from the same branch of Christianity in many ways but held significantly different views, at least around some of the pieces of this of this doctrine and teaching.

**Dr. Jim Denison:** Example of that, B. H. Carroll, founded Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary to hasten the coming of the millennium. As Ryan was saying, he was very much a post millennialist, as was George Truett. As were most Baptist leaders, it really was two world wars. As you mentioned earlier, they convinced a whole lot of people, well, the church really isn't bringing in the millennium like we thought it was.

Like we hoped it was but that's why there's a Southwestern Seminary is specifically out of a post millennial Impulse of bh carroll himself. And so you're right whether it's Billy Graham and

George Truett or whomever there certainly have been conservative Evangelicals who have different positions on this subject.

**Dr. Mark Turman:** Well, when we look at it now in this current conflict it just seems like anything that happens we now in the world because of the way we're connected in technology, we now know just a whole lot more about anything that happens in the world than we normally or the previously would have known.

And that includes obviously the events of October the 7th. When we think about this, both in a geopolitical sense, as well as in a biblical sense talk about in either one of you can jump in on this, just this idea of the role of Israel today as we understand it as a geopolitical entity that came into being in 1948 through a war, this sense in which what happens with this nation, sometimes we can refer, we're thinking in geopolitical terms as a nation. Sometimes we're thinking in terms of religious biblical terms of faith. And Jim, I've heard you say recently, you, that you do not believe in a replacement theology where the Bible is teaching that the church is the true Israel that completely replaces the nation of Israel.

But how do we understand this is Israel the bellwether? Is it the key indicator that we're supposed to keep our eye on more than we would say events and conflicts going on between Ukraine and Russia or many of the other conflicts going on in other places in the world? We just can see this by what's happened in our own ministry as we've talked about these things for the last few weeks.

People look at this part of the world and they're like, what happens there is different from what happens anywhere else. Even though Jesus, Ryan, in your article, Matthew chapter 23, I think it is, Jesus said there would be wars and rumors of war. Both of you, either of you weigh in on this.

How do we look at Israel? Should we be looking at Israel as some kind of a bellwether or a key figure in this in ways that we don't look at other things in other places in the world.

**Dr. Ryan Denison:** I think there's even beyond the eschatological reasons, I think what happens in the Middle East really stays in the Middle East, just from a geopolitical perspective. And so I think there's reason that to pay attention, regardless of what we think about the role that what happens in Israel will play on the end times, right?

To begin to see with a lot of the threats of Iran getting involved and implications that could have for bringing in China and then Russia and how this conflict has roots that go well beyond the Middle East.

But from an eschatological perspective, I do think there is something in Scripture that clearly just seems to heighten our awareness of what happens in Israel and points to that being something we should keep an eye on. I don't think Scripture is so clear that we can know what that means or what we should be looking for directly. I don't think there's, I don't think Scripture gives us a checklist of things that we should be going like, okay, well that one happened, then that one happened, then that one happened necessarily.

But I do think that what it is clear is that when things are happening around Israel, then we should pay attention and maybe ways that we shouldn't, that might not have the same implications elsewhere. So personally, that's kind of where I sit with it is it makes me raise my eyebrows a little bit and wonder if maybe God's up to something and look a little bit more closely as to what's going to happen.

But I don't think I could say with any great confidence that I know exactly what I should be looking for or to really go much beyond that in terms of depth.

**Dr. Mark Turman:** So Jim, how would you add on that? Particularly, I get in this conversation, I always go back to one of my favorite books of the Bible, the book of Romans and particularly those somewhat very intriguing chapters of nine, 10 and 11 that Paul talks about the Jewish people, the Israel in some sense, Israel coming back in through the gospel. How would you address that?

**Dr. Jim Denison:** Yeah, and you've mentioned it earlier, kind of three categories here about which we can see this. And I'm so glad Ryan started with the geopolitical because that's kind of a fourth category, which understands Israel is such a pivotal place from a geopolitical point of view. It's a land bridge between Egypt to the south and the great empires to the north, whether that's Babylon or Assyria or Persia whatever the Ottoman, whatever.

So there's always been wars there up and down this one land bridge, this tiny little piece of land about the size of New Jersey. And even to this day holds an enormous geopolitical significance. You've got the Muslim world, two billion people watching what's happening there. If they became convinced that what's happening is an attack on Islam, well, the Quran in Surah 2 verse 190 requires Muslims to defend Islam.

So you could create a pathway by which what's happening in the Middle East could lead to a global war. of the West against Islam, as it were, or the non Muslim world against the Muslim world. You could go that direction. You can certainly connect dots from Iran to China to Russia, and now you're in a World War III sort of a scenario that started there.

So, apart from theology... You see the geopolitics of this and America's role in this. We're more in the Middle East now than we've been in a long time. We have 40,000 troops that are stationed in the Middle East. There have been 27 attacks on American troops in recent weeks as they're stationed in Iraq and Syria and other places.

We have a stronger strike force in the Mediterranean than we've had in a long time. So you don't have to go a long ways. To see this being an enormously significant place just from purely a geopolitical point of view.

But relative to kind of the three other buckets, the first we've already mentioned is the dispensational. Creation of Israel in 1948 is a fulfillment of prophecy. Any prophecy made to a literal nation of Israel has to be fulfilled by a literal nation of Israel. And so in times, theologies are very much in play here. Whether you see Iran as Gog or Magog, or possibly something involving Turkey and the old Ottoman Empire, Russia coming in, a lot of strategies we're hearing about right now that look at it that way.

Replacement theology is the opposite. The church replaced Israel when the Messiah came. Purpose of Israel was to bring the Messiah. Now that we have a Messiah, Israel as a nation, the Jews as a people, are no different from anybody else. Galatians 3, there's neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, or all Abraham, seed and heirs according to the covenant, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

So their answer would be to say, look, this is really no different than any place else. This is a horrible conflict, just like Ukraine is, just like Kosovo was, and so on and so forth. So that'd be a replacement theology approach.

A middle ground that Ryan and I would both embrace would be to say, God is still, in some unique way, using the Jewish people. I believe that he is still, on some level, using what's happening in the Middle East, in a unique way. I can't explain all of that, I can't understand all of that, but I do believe that there are some unconditional promises made to the Jewish people in the Old Testament. I believe there are conditional promises as well.

It's clear if you go back to second chronicles 7, for instance, that God makes it very clear that if you keep your covenant, I'll do this, but if you don't, I'll do this. If my people call by my name, humble themselves and pray, seek my face, turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, heal their land.

A lot of covenant promises that are conditional, others that are unconditional. I just think God has a covenant relationship with the Jewish people that's unique among the people on earth. Quick example I often cite the Jews have never been more than 2.5 percent of American

population but they hold 37 of our nobel laureates. The Jewish people as a race are a unique People i've been to israel more than 30 times over the years.

I love the Jewish people. I have a great deal of background, but some of my dearest friends live in Israel. So I certainly have a personal bias, I suppose you could say, but I think there's a third category there that would say God is using this in some unique way. And I'm praying for him to redeem this conflict in a unique way that could advance spiritual awakening in the Muslim world, in the Jewish world and across the Western world as well.

I don't know how all of that works myself. So that's why I'm not a replacement theologian or a Dispensational theologian, but I still believe God's uniquely using Israel. And you have the geopolitical issues as Ryan has described, which certainly are coming to bear in this conflict right now as well.

**Dr. Mark Turman:** So many different levels to think your way through this. And you can understand why so many people pay attention, whether you're a Christian, a person of faith or not a person of faith. We pay particular attention to events going on in this part of the world.

They seem to have ramifications on a lot of different levels both spiritually and practically in a lot of ways. Ryan, when I get into this way of thinking and kind of contemplating these issues, I go back to the first chapter of the book of Acts. And when Jesus bodily ascends into heaven and not surprising, I think I would have done the same thing.

So astounding for that to happen for a person to bodily ascend into the heavens to be with God. It's not surprising that his followers are so mesmerized. They're staring into space and won't stop staring into space until two angels, the Bible says in Acts 1, appear and gently correct and redirect them to what God is going to do next and what unfolds in the book of Acts.

And how do you think in some ways Christians are still like those early believers staring into the sky over this issue? Do you sense that maybe too many of us are sometimes too hyper-focused on this and too much working on a calendar? Has that been some of your experience?

Such

**Dr. Ryan Denison:** so. And even going back to what you mentioned previously with Romans nine through 11, it's like so much of the conversation around this, we look for clear choices or we want Scripture to be clear on subjects that scripture is just not clear on, like in Romans 9 through 11, it talks, Paul will talk about Christians being grafted into the tree of Judaism, essentially, and

this formation of something unique after the coming of Christ, but at the same time, he also talks about the Jewish people still having a role to play.

And I think that tension there, where so much of it is necessary to know the context, where Paul's trying to write to a church in Rome that was struggling between the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers and how to incorporate everyone together, that they were fighting over things that were secondary to the, what God was really calling them to do.

And I think that's the problem we can face within times theology as well, is that we do spend so much time staring up is something that's truly fascinating and the implications of which are absolutely essential. But doing so in a way that distracts us from the more important kingdom purposes that God has for us.

And I think at times it takes something as equally dramatic as angels coming down to be the ones to deliver that message to actually help us snap out of it. And I think that's maybe something, one of the ways that God can redeem something like a war in Israel and the atrocities we're seeing there is by helping us remember that this stuff is important, but also by using it to call us back to the idea of if this really is a sign of the end times, which we can't know until Jesus comes back. I mean, people have been thinking Jesus was coming back and that this war was going to be the war for basically 2000 years and to date, everyone's been wrong. Someone eventually is going to be right though.

And I think one of the things that God wants to do with stuff like that. One of the ways you can bring good from it is by making us think eschatologically, but then go back to the practical as a result of saying, it's like, okay, if this really is the war, am I okay with that? Is my neighbor going to be going to heaven if this, if Jesus is coming back at the end of this? If the answer is no, then that needs to be our focus a lot more than, okay, well, what does this mean with regards to timing? What else should we be looking for down the road?, I think one of the things Scripture is consistent on is that it is a very practical book and that it's focus is very practical and all the times it calls us to think big and to think about the end times, the second it's does so to lead us back to this idea of how are we preparing for the end times and is there any work we would feel like we left undone if Jesus came back today? And if the answer is yes, then I think Scripture is equally clear that's where our focus needs to be.

**Dr. Mark Turman:** a good word. Thank you for that. Jim, I wanted to give you the last word. As we talked before we started, we could talk about this for a long time in a lot of different ways, but I wanted to give you a last word and maybe even if you want the opportunity to close this in prayer, but Ryan referenced this a minute ago.

One of my favorite parts of Scripture not only the writings of the apostle Paul, but particularly his early letter to the Thessalonians followed by a second letter. It seems like some of the people in that city of Thessaloniki,

**Dr. Ryan Denison:** heard about his story.

**Dr. Mark Turman:** As you've taught me about early on 2000 years ago they got so fixed on this that apparently some of them quit their jobs or just stopped working because they thought well this is going to happen so soon.

It'll happen before my food runs out. And so I don't need to worry about planning for you know, two weeks or two months from now. This is going to happen and Paul even goes so far at one point to say, look, if you don't work, you're not going to eat. And so give us a little bit of a final word, lead us in prayer around this idea of, should we be looking forward to the coming of Christ?

Should we have anxiety over it? Should there be a sense of dread over it? What should be kind of the baseline fundamental outlook in addition to what Ryan's challenged us with? Because, I think what we've gained from this conversation is how you think about these things does matter and it will affect your joy as a Christian, your worship your focus in terms of work and witness. How would you summarize all that before we pray?

**Dr. Jim Denison:** Now, thank you for that. I go back to what Ryan said, about the fact that the Bible's a very practical book. We ask speculative questions of a practical book and get frustrated, you know? It's like using a cookbook to repair a car, or a fly swatter to play tennis. Just not what it's made for. It's not made to give us speculative answers that wouldn't help us anyway.

If I could right now, Mark, prove to you which of the seven theories out there is the right theory. If I could absolutely demonstrate and prove that to you with crystal clarity and convince you that I'm right, what would that do about your life today? How would that change your life today? Wouldn't you still have to go to work?

Wouldn't you still be raising your kids? Wouldn't you still be doing the things that you do? But if you can come along to the practical implication, which is you have to be ready today. Well, now that does change something. If I knew Jesus was coming back next week, what would I do differently today? This is someone I would forgive.

Someone I would seek forgiveness from, something I would start doing, something I would stop doing. Well, that's the best way to live, even if I have another 50 years, or the Lord's gonna delay

his return for 500 years. The best way to live, the highest quality of life comes when I'm ready to meet Jesus today.

And that's why the Bible so focuses, like Ryan says, on being ready. And if, to your question, if I'm not ready for that, if I don't see the return of the Lord as a joyous thing, but as a fearsome thing, well, then I need to ask myself, well, why? What is it that I'm not ready to meet Jesus about?

What is it that I'm not ready to stop doing or start doing? Maybe I don't understand heaven well enough if I think this world is better than that world. If I think that what I can create here can compare to what God can give me there, well, then I'm not understanding God very well. I'm not understanding His grace very well.

And so if I'm not ready for the second coming, if I can't pray as the end of Revelation prays, even so come Lord Jesus. If I can't do that, I need to ask why. And that's a very practical question now. And that's exactly what the Bible is for, is to address those practical issues and draw us to that practical conclusion.

So I'll close with a story very briefly, and then we'll pray together. I have told this story quite often over the years as it relates to this topic. As I said, I've led more than 30 tours to Israel. We always go to Megiddo. It's that military town built up on a very high rise over the main road going through what they call the other side is the valley of Megiddo known as Armageddon or Armageddon.

And it's right there as you're looking out over Armageddon that we're reading from Revelation, the reference in Revelation 16 to Armageddon end times, and we talk a little about these various theories, that sort of thing. And then I always say to the group there, the reason we're here above all reasons is to be ready for our own Armageddon, for the time we come to Megiddo ourselves, whether the Lord returns or we go to him.

He could delay us coming for a thousand years, but could call me to him today. Whenever that is, whatever that is, whenever your Megiddo comes, are you ready for it? Then I always tell the story about a Sunday morning. I was pastoring first baptist church in Midland, Texas years ago preached on judgment that morning And the need to be ready what we've been saying now the need to be ready to stand before the Lord whenever that comes Well that night we had evening worship in those days and had a fellowship afterwards because we're a Baptist church It always have to have fellowships at each, you know And so we were doing this fellowship after the evening service and this older couple Faye and Ruby Doherty came up. Wanted to thank me for the sermon that morning told me that they had really taken it to heart that afternoon they prayed together.



They confessed anything. They thought they needed to confess They just wanted to make sure they were ready to meet the Lord been a wonderful time they said that afternoon and so that night they sought me out to thank me for the sermon and tell me that the next day Faye died had a heart attack and died the next day on Tuesday.

I received a thank you note from her in the mail. She had written it that afternoon and put it in her mailbox in case she didn't see me that night. She died on Monday. I got the note on Tuesday. I read it at a memorial service on Wednesday. I still have that note in my files. I think about her story whenever I think about Megiddo and Har Megiddo and end times and all of that because it's my story too, and it's our story.

None of us knows. We only have today to be ready. You're one day closer than you've ever been. If today was your Megiddo, would you be ready? That's the question. Would your loved ones, would your neighbors, as you said, would the people you influence be ready? And if not, what are you going to do about it? So let's pray about that.

Father God, thank you for the fact that Jesus is Lord, that he is King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And one day he's going to come back and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Amen. Even so come Lord Show all who are hearing this conversation what we must do to be ready for that day.

Father, show us what we need to confess, what we need to stop, what we need to start, what we need to do differently, how we can live our lives ready for that day, knowing that's the very best way for us to live in the abundant life Jesus came to give us. I pray that for me and for us, use this conversation to equip us to be ready for eternity by living for eternity today.

If this is our Megiddo today, I make this my prayer for me and for us in the name of Jesus our Lord. Amen.

**Dr. Mark Turman:** Thank you for that. Thank you to both of you for today's conversation. And also want to thank our listeners. If this has been helpful to you, please rate, review us as we often ask you to do, and of course, share it with family and friends and as events warrant, we'll be back with additional conversations about Israel in addition to our regular podcast schedule.

Thank you. And God bless.