

Thy kingdom come - What the future holds 30

Aim of lesson

The aim of this lesson is to create in the young people an expectancy that the return of Christ is near, and an awareness of the signs we should look out for. It is not to produce a 'tick-list' of things that must happen first, nor to place the events in a precise sequence; the Almighty knows what he will do, and we may safely leave the details to him.

Bible background

Ezekiel 38,39; Daniel 11,12; Joel 2,3; Haggai 2; Zechariah 10,12,14; Mark 13; 2 Thessalonians 1,2; Revelation 11,16,17,19,20.

Preparation required

Find a map which indicates the lands occupied by the descendants of Noah, to assist in discussion of Ezekiel 38 and 39.

Suggested outline of lesson

The intention in this lesson is for the young people to complete a chart such as the one set out below. It should be emphasised that it is not intended as a definitive statement, nor as an accurate sequence of events. It merely tries to set out relevant scriptural passages in such a way as to provide a framework for teaching and discussion.

Begin by asking them to think of the things they expect to happen at the time of the return of Jesus, and write them on a whiteboard or piece of paper. They may think of most of the points in the left-hand column of the table. In some respects the sequence is straightforward; nations have to come to fight against Israel before they are defeated, for example. So without labouring the point, try to get their points in a 'good' sequence, and help them to fill in the left hand column, giving them some advice about where they should leave gaps if there are things they have not thought of.

Now, beginning with Ezekiel 38, look at the passages listed along the top. There may be other references which you would like to add, or to substitute, but they are a good starting point.

In several cases successive chapters appear to speak of the same events, sometimes in slightly different ways. For example, Ezekiel 36:27 speaks of the conversion of the people of Israel: 'I will put my spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees ...'; as does 39:29 - 'I will pour out my spirit on the house of Israel'. Whether or not

these verses are speaking of the same event is not certain, but the table below does attempt to resolve these parallels where they occur.

The following notes may be helpful.

Ezekiel 38, 39

These chapters contain the only Old Testament reference to Gog. It is clear that Gog is the name of a prince, while Magog is his land. Look at Ezekiel 38:1-6 and spend a moment or two identifying the other nations involved. You may like to look at Genesis 10:2-3 and Ezekiel 27:13-15.

38:7-9

Dwelling in safety; compare with Ezekiel 34:25-28. It is open to some question whether they live in safety at present, but compared with the persecutions of previous centuries the situation is a dramatic improvement. 'Like a cloud covering the land': a similar analogy occurs in Ezekiel 38:16 and in Joel 2:2.

38:14-16; 39:1-2

The invasion comes from the far north. It is wise not to be too dogmatic about the precise direction from which Gog and his allies will come; the Assyrian and Babylonian armies are also described as coming from the north (as in Jeremiah 50:41, and Ezekiel 26:7). It is worth also reflecting on Ezekiel 38:17, which suggests that Gog is to be identified with an Old Testament enemy of Israel.

38:19-20

There are repeated references to earthquakes in these passages, which are presumably literal.

38:21-23; 39:3-6

Another repeated pattern is that the deliverance will clearly be from God, and will not be seen as another triumph for the Israeli forces.

39:9-10

There is a row in the table entitled 'Cleansing the land'. The other passages refer to cleansing by flowing water.

39:21-22, 26-29

These verses speak of the grace of God extended to the people of Israel, in contrast to their faithlessness.

Daniel 11, 12

11:40-43

These verses would seem to apply to the very end not just because of verse 40 but also by virtue of the link at the start of chapter 12.

12:1-3

You may also like to discuss verse 4.

Joel 2,3

This prophecy makes no direct link to any specific historical context, although it no doubt had one. However, towards the end of the book there are many references to the final completion of the purpose of God in the redemption of his people and the judgment of the nations.

2:1-12

A frightening picture of destruction.

2:18-27

It is the Almighty who brings the army, and who then defeats it.

2:28-32

You will recall that the apostle Peter quoted this passage at Pentecost, and appears to have stopped in the middle of v32.

3:1-2

The valley of Jehoshaphat is presumable a reminder of the day when God routed the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites in the wilderness of Tekoa, about 10 miles south of Jerusalem. Whether it refers to a literal valley, or to the manner of the victory, is unclear. There are many echoes in 2 Chronicles 20:22-25 of these events - the repentance of Israel; the victory wrought by God in bringing their enemies to destroy themselves; the clearing of the land afterwards.

Haggai 2

There are some historical parallels with the days of Haggai: people returned to their land, surrounded by enemies, building their own houses rather than a house for God.

2:6-7

The image is of the Almighty shaking the nations like someone holding something upside down and shaking it to collect whatever falls. You may like also to look at Hebrews 12:26-28, where this passage is quoted in a future context.

Zechariah 10, 12, 14

It seems likely that chapters 12 and 14 are talking of the same events - there are many parallels, but it is not certain.

Mark 13

There is a point at which the Olivet prophecy turns from the events of the first century to the events surrounding the return of Christ, and it seems that it occurs at around verse 19.

2 Thessalonians 1,2

You may, or may not, feel it appropriate to discuss the 'man of lawlessness' in chapter 2.

Revelation 11, 16, 17, 19, 20

11:13-18

The seventh trumpet covers the time when the 'mystery of God is finished' (10:7).

16:17-21

Whether the events of Armageddon are the same as those described in Ezekiel 38 and the other passages is not certain, but there are many common elements.

Some other relevant passages

You may also like to think about Psalm 2, Daniel 2, Daniel 7:18-27, and 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

Relevance to our lives

Point out that all these events could take only a few days. Modern warfare does not depend any more on armies marching at 3 miles an hour. The events of the wars in 1967 and 1973 illustrate how much can happen in a day.

The relevance to our time is not that we should be able to predict precisely what is going to happen - still less that we should argue about it. What matters is that, as Jesus said at the end of the Olivet prophecy, we should watch, and always be ready for his return.

	Ezekiel	Daniel	Joel	Haggai	Zechariah	Mark	2 Thessalonians	Revelation
Israel regathered	38:7-9		3:1		10:7-10			
Time of trouble		12:1				13:20-23	2:1-4	16
Many nations invade	38:14-16; 39:1-2	11:40-43	2:1-12; 3:2, 9-14		12:2-3; 14:1-2			
The Lord fights against the nations	38:21-23; 39:3-6	12:1	2:18-27; 3:16	2:22	12:4-5; 14:3			11:15-18; 17:12-14
Signs in sun moon and stars			3:15			13:24-25		
The return of Christ					14:4	13:26-27	1:6-7; 2:8	19:11-19
Earthquake	38:19-20		3:16	2:6-7, 21	14:4			11:13-14
Cleansing the land	39:9-10		3:18		14:8			
Repentance of Israel	39:21-22; 25-29		2:28-32; 3:21		12:10-13:1			
Resurrection and judgment		12:2-3					1:8-10	20:4-5
Worship from Jerusalem				2:6-9				

Prayer

Almighty Lord God, we do not know when the Lord Jesus Christ will return, but we thank you that you have given us so many glimpses of what the days will be like. We pray that we may be ready when he comes, and prepared to welcome him. In his name, Amen.

Other suggestions for activities

1. If you have a suitable wall area, you may be able to represent the chart in the students' notes by a layout of paper notes stuck onto the wall with some form of removable(!) adhesive.
2. Look with the young people at Mark 13:35-37, and discuss with them what 'watching' involves.