

Spiritual Insight For The Week

with Rabbi Bentzion Kravitz

Is the War of Armageddon Inevitable?

Sukkot and Simchat Torah



The Jewish High Holidays, known as the Days of Awe, constitute a spiritual progression.

On Rosh Hashanah, we coronate God as our King, on Yom Kippur, we receive God's forgiveness; and on Sukkot [the Festival of Booths], we rise to another level.

Sukkot is a time to demonstrate our trust in God by moving from the safety of our homes to the

temporary and less-secure dwelling known as the sukkah.

In this tiny hut with its roof of branches and leaves, we are reminded that protection does not come from "the roof we put over our head." Rather, God is our ultimate source of protection and sustenance.

Remarkably, during this holiday we read a portion of the prophets (Ezekiel 38:18- 39:16) concerning the war of Gog and Magog [גּוֹג וָמָגוֹג]. Although some religions view this war of "Armageddon" as the end of the world, Judaism has a very different understanding.

According to some opinions, the ravages of exile and World Wars have put this apocalyptic event behind us (Shem MiShmuel, Vayigash 5677). However, we are still confronted with the spiritual battle of Gog and Magog.

Sukkot is a time to demonstrate our trust in God

The words Gog and Magog share the same root as the Hebrew word for roof, "גּג—gag." Gog and Magog are the force that tries to convince us that we should rely on our own efforts "to put a roof over our head" rather than on God for protection and substance.

By moving from the security of our home to the sukkah with its fragile roof, we proclaim that these negative forces are wrong and that we trust in God alone, as it says, "*Israel, trust the LORD! He is your helper and your shield*" (Psalms 115:9).

No wonder the sages (Sukkot 52b) describe the Sukkot celebration in the Temple as being so joyful that anyone who did not see it "*Never saw celebration in his life.*"

Nevertheless, rejoicing can be a double-edged sword. Done properly, it can enhance our love of God; however, because "joy breaks boundaries," inappropriate levity can lead to a moral disaster, with men and women losing respect for one another.

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Our sages foresaw the potential for disaster during the Sukkot celebration, so they instituted a mutually agreed upon and respectful separation of men and women. They built a balcony that afforded the women a superior and unobstructed view of the festivities.

The Talmud asks how the sages could introduce a “new” structural change in the Temple. In response, the sages brought as proof an event mentioned in the book of Zechariah.

The prophet Zechariah foresaw a time in the future when there would be great mourning for Jews who died as martyrs in battles against our enemies. Zechariah tells us that at that time, all of Jerusalem will mourn “*With the men separate and the women separate*” (Zechariah 12:10-12).

Our sages explain that if a separation is required at a funeral, when levity is unlikely, how much more so is separation appropriate at joyous celebrations like the Sukkot festival and Simchat Torah when we dance with the Torah.

In the Hebrew original, Zechariah says the Jewish people will “*look to Me [God] concerning [רְשָׁת תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר] et asher* the ones [the Jewish martyrs] who were pierced, and they will mourn for him” (Zechariah 12:10).

Missionaries take advantage of the unusual grammar and mistranslate Zechariah 12:10 to read, “*they will look toward God Whom they pierced*” and claim it refers to Jesus, who they say was pierced [crucified] by the Jews. In their translation, God and the individual who is pierced are one and the same.

Truth will prevail, and sorrow will be transformed to rejoicing.

However, in the original, the words “*Me*” and “*him*” confirm that the text speaks of two different subjects. Additionally, the prophecy cannot be speaking about Jesus since he was never mourned in the manner described by Zechariah.

In addition to being inconsistent with the Hebrew, the missionary argument contradicts the New Testament account that attributes Jesus’ death not to the Jews, but to a Roman “*soldier who pierced Jesus’ side*” (John 19:34-35). Later, in verse 37, John claims that this piercing of Jesus by the soldier fulfills Zechariah’s prophecy “*They [the Roman soldiers] will look on the one they [the Roman soldiers] have pierced.*” The multiple inconsistencies demonstrate that the missionary mistranslation and interpretation is clearly another contrived attempt to fit Jesus into a prophecy.

May we soon see the day when truth will prevail, and sorrow will be transformed to rejoicing as it says, “*You turn my mourning into joyful dancing*” (Psalms 30:11).

Chag Sameach,

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