

THE IMPENDING INVASION OF ISRAEL

It's impossible to interact with the media these days without hearing or reading something about the dangers of the many current and on-going crises in the Middle East. And almost always, regardless of the crisis, there is the threat by some Islamic or European leader that 'if this or that action is taken' Israel will suffer.

As we noted last night, Israel is the world's chronic 'hot spot.' I believe, according to the Word of God, that at some point the threats against Israel will in fact become reality, and Israel will find herself the target of war. In fact, I am convinced that an invasion of Israel is one of the major signs that indicate that the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ is imminent.

Before we examine what the prophetic Scriptures have to say on the matter, let's take a brief review. As you will note, from the chart which you have received, it is important to understand that there are two aspects to Christ's return:

The Rapture—when Christ comes in the **AIR**, FOR His saints, and

The Revelation—when Christ comes **WITH** His saints to the **EARTH**, to end the reign of the Antichrist, to bind Satan and establish His 1,000-year millennial reign.

In the seven-year period between the Rapture and the Revelation, there will be activity in heaven and earth: In heaven, there will be the Judgment Seat of Christ and the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. On earth, there will be the horrific rule of the Antichrist during the Tribulation.

We indicated last night that we believe that there are six major reasons (as well as numerous other less significant ones) to feel that the Revelation must be nearing. And, of course, if this is so, the Rapture must be that much closer.

The six reasons we listed are these:

1. The existence of the nation Israel
2. The apparent preparations for the prophesied invasion of Israel
3. The march of empires foretold by the prophet Daniel
4. The setting of the stage for the rule of the Antichrist
5. The emergence of the end-time global counterfeit church, &
6. The appearance of the 'birth pang' signs Jesus predicted

Tonight we will focus on the second of these—the impending invasion of Israel as prophesied centuries ago.

Russia is going to invade Israel. It's not a question of *if*, but *when*. However, the invasion of tiny Israel will result, not in the annihilation of the Jews, but rather in the crushing defeat of the awesome war machine of the Soviets and their allies.

That seemingly unlikely outcome may, I believe, create the power vacuum that will propel the Antichrist to his prophesied world control, though some Bible scholars think that his reign may begin before the invasion. I do not feel that we can be dogmatic about the exact timing of this invasion, except to say that it will come before the Revelation of our Lord.

We need to begin with a prophecy uttered some 2,600 years ago by the Prophet Ezekiel. If you have your Bibles, please turn to Ezekiel 37. This is the

account of how Ezekiel was taken to a valley full of dry bones—the scattered remains of a vast army. God told him to preach to the bones, and when he did they came together to form skeletons, after which sinews and flesh came upon the skeletons, then breath and life entered into them, and finally they stood up—a mighty, living army.

We don't have to wonder what this means, for God explained the meaning.

Look at Ezekiel 37:11-17:

Then [God] said to me: “Son of man, these bones are the WHOLE house of Israel. They say, ‘Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.’

Therefore, prophesy and say to them, “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: ‘O My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them: I will bring you back into the land of Israel.’

I will put My Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land. Then you will know that I the Lord have spoken, and I have done it, declares the Lord.”

Next, God told Ezekiel to take a stick and write on it: “Judah and the Israelites associated with him.” He was to take another stick and write on it: “Ephraim's stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him.” Next, Ezekiel was to join the two sticks together so that they became as one in his hand. Then God said: (Ezekiel 37:21-25)

This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land.

I will make them ONE nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over them all, and they will never again be two nations, or be divided into two kingdoms.

They will live in the land I gave to My servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever.

It's of interest to note that this ceremony of the two sticks becoming as one in the hand was actually literally enacted in the Knesset, the Israeli Parliament. Quite obviously, the political leaders of Israel believe that Ezekiel 37 is being fulfilled. Indeed, there can be no question but that the 'dry bones' prophecy is coming to pass, at least in part. The breath of God's Holy Spirit has not yet come into them nationally, for Israel is a very secular nation, even though many are coming to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

As we considered last night, Israel—against all odds—became a nation in 1948. The Jews have poured back into the land, settling in, surviving wars and in the process rebuilding the ancient ruins and the 'formerly desolate cities' of Israel.

That the Jews have come from all over the globe, as prophesied, is undeniable. The President of the Bible College I attended was a former missionary to Israel, and he showed us footage he had filmed of Jews arriving in Israel from dozens of countries around the world. In addition, I have seen DVDs such as

“Quest for Lost Tribes,” which documents the existence in various cultures (such as India and Africa) of Jews from the tribes of Israel. New discoveries of so-called lost tribes have been announced recently.

And re-gathered Israel is becoming incredibly wealthy. A recent economic report of the area indicated that Israel’s Gross Domestic Product that year was \$123 billion, which was \$42 billion more than Egypt’s, the next most productive Mid-East country, & almost \$100 billion more than that of either Syria or Lebanon.

More than this, natural gas has been discovered in Israel, and though the extent of the reserves has not been finally confirmed, the indication is that this will make Israel not only independent, but also an exporter. Then, there’s the incredible chemical wealth of the Dead Sea. Add it all up, and you can see that Israel is indeed prospering, in spite of all the threats and turmoil. Bear that in mind as we look at the rest of Ezekiel’s prophecy. Please turn to chapter 38, beginning at vs. 1.

The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meschech and Tubal; prophesy against him and say: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws and bring you out with your whole army—your horses, your horsemen fully armed,⁷ and a great horde with large and small shields, all of them brandishing their swords. Persia, Cush and Put will be with them, all with shields and helmets. Also Gomer with all its troops, and Beth Togarmah from the far north with all its troops—the many nations with you.

Get ready; be prepared, you and all the hordes gathered about you, and take command of them.

Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog: 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: In that day, when My people Israel are living in safety, will you not take notice of it? You will come from your place in the far [uttermost] north, you and many nations with you, all of them riding on horses, a great horde, a mighty army. You will advance against My people Israel with a cloud that covers the land.

In the days to come, O Gog, I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me when I show Myself holy through you before their eyes.

(Vs 8) ...In the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations and they are living securely, all of them.

(Vs 11) ...and you will say, I will go up against the land of un-walled villages...to turn your hand against the waste places which are now inhabited, and against the people who are gathered from the nations, who have acquired cattle and goods, who live at the center of the world.

Please note that there is no indication in this prophecy that there will be any nation or nations who will come to Israel's defense. There is, however, an intriguing comment in verse 13.

Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish with all its villages [or young lions], will say to you [the invaders]: ‘Have you come to capture spoil? Have you assembled your company to seize plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to capture great spoil?’

Before Israel became a wealthy nation during the past 65 years no one would have ever even remotely thought of invading the Holy Land in order to be enriched through the plunder of war, but that’s quite apparently one of the motives for the prophesied invasion. Now, though Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish question the invaders, they do not intervene; all they do is utter what appears to be a rather feeble diplomatic protest over the invasion, but they do not come to Israel’s aid.

We need to ask several questions relating to this prophecy.

First, who are these ancient nations named in Ezekiel’s prophecy as part of the confederacy which invades Israel?

Second, what are their modern names today?

Third, having answered those questions, what does the current political scene in the Middle East look like?

The nations mentioned in Ezekiel 38 are: first, the leader of the invading confederacy—a northern entity described as Magog, Rosh, Meschech and Tubal. With this leader comes Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, Beth-togarmah, and possibly others, indicated by the phrase “and many peoples with you.”

What are the present-day names for these nations?

Magog, Rosh, Meschech and Tubal is RUSSIA and the former Soviet republics—all those Islamic nations with names ending in ‘stan.’ Only Russia

qualifies to be described as being located to “the uttermost north” of Israel. There is little or no debate over the identification of the leader of the invasion as Russia.

Persia is IRAN. The name change (from Persia to Iran) was made less than 100 years ago, in the lifetime of many of us here tonight.

Cush is the present-day SUDAN, ETHIOPIA and possibly ERITREA.

Put is unquestionably LIBYA, ALGERIA & TUNISIA.

Gomer is believed to be parts of TURKEY, GERMANY & AUSTRIA.

Beth-togarmah is well identified as TURKEY & ARMENIA and the Turkic-speaking peoples of Asia Minor and central Asia.

Map

We mentioned earlier the nations Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish, who question the motive and aims of the invaders, but do not intervene. It is very difficult to positively identify them. Some scholars feel that the present-day nations which occupy the areas of these three protestors are Yeman, Oman and the Gulf states as well as Saudi Arabia.

Others suggest that, (because the term “Tarshish’ came to be used as a synonym for any maritime & industrial power, and because some translations use the term ‘young lions’ in connection with Tarshish) it could refer to the younger nations of the Old and New maritime, industrial worlds, especially Britain and her former colonies, such as the United States. I repeat, we can’t be certain here, but if it should indeed somehow refer to the U.S. and Britain, it is easy to see how (given the mood of the British and American people after Vietnam, Iraq & Afganistan,

coupled with Obama's attitude toward Israel) there will be no 'Desert Storm' effort—no intervention.

Now, before we look at the current situation in the Middle East today, I want to make two other comments. First, please note that there is a very significant absentee in the biblical lineup of nations that come against Israel. There is no mention of Egypt, which seems very strange because, historically, Egypt has been a very important Middle East nation, and has also generally been seen to be an enemy of Israel. The reason Egypt apparently does not join in the invasion may be that, in 1979, Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty. It was a most unlikely treaty, but it has held for over 35 years, and though it was threatened when the Muslim Brotherhood took over the government last year, it still stands, thanks to the overthrow of the Brotherhood by the Egyptian military.

A second reason for Egypt's absence may be because of what Bible scholars are calling 'the Psalm 83 War.' To fully consider this concept is impossible, timewise, but let me briefly summarize. Many believe that Psalm 83 describes a war with the nations immediately surrounding Israel borders, in which these nations are defeated by the Israelis. Egypt, of course, is one of these nations. It is believed that this war comes before the invasion by the Russian-led confederacy. For more detail on this concept, I have provided a 2-page handout on Psalm 83, which is available at the close of our service.

Well, with a pretty clear identification of most of the invading forces in terms of today's nations, the two most significant of which are Russia and Iran, let's briefly consider what is currently happening in the Middle East, weighing it against the biblical prophecies.

No one who pays any attention whatever to current events can have escaped noticing what has been happening in Iran in recent years. Most significant is their attempt to obtain nuclear weapons capacity. But equally important from a prophetic viewpoint are the public pronouncements of their former president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Repeatedly, he called Israel a tumor which must be removed, and declared that Israel must be wiped off the face of the earth. He convened an international conference several years ago which was devoted to denying that the Holocaust ever occurred. And even though he, on behalf of Iran's leadership, claimed that their efforts to obtain nuclear power are peaceful, he also publicly suggested that Israel should be 'nuked.'

Israel's leadership is firmly convinced that Iran, even with its new, supposedly 'more moderate' president, is pursuing nuclear capacity, which they feel will be used against Israel. Iran already has the missile capability of striking Israel, and so Israeli leadership is committed to preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear bomb.

A development which is perhaps not quite as well-known as Iran's irrational genocidal hatred for Israel is the fact that Russian and Iran have become increasingly linked to one another, both economically and militarily.

If we had the time, I could quote dozens of headlines that confirm this, such as these: "Putin Defends Arms Sales to Iran, Syria"; "Russian Agrees to \$1 Billion Arms Deal with Iran"; "Kremlin Ready to Defend Iran." We know that Russia and Iran are united in support of Assad and Hezbollah in the tragic Syrian civil war, as well as in their opposition to Israel.

It is also a fact that Russia has long desired to invade Israel. She was on the side of Egypt in the Suez war. She supported the Arab nations in the 1973 Yom

Kippur War. When Israel dislodged the PLO from Lebanon in 1982, they discovered vast quantities of war materiel (including 1 million military uniforms) in containers with Russian language markings, hidden in huge underground caverns beneath schools, hospitals and residences throughout Lebanon. In fact, it took the Israelis almost six months to transport all of the captured equipment and munitions back to Israel. It was apparent that the mammoth weapons stockpile was created with the intention of invading Israel.

I had opportunity to have this information confirmed to me personally by Israeli Defense Colonel Yehuda Levi, whom I heard speak at a Vancouver event. In a public Q & A session following his speech, the Colonel answered my question about the captured armament by declaring that it was a true report.

Many felt that after the collapse of the USSR in the late 1990s Russia would be unable to have any impact in the Middle East. That is no longer the view. Russia is very much a player in that biblically significant region. Putin has been rebuilding Russian military proficiency, and more importantly—in terms of Ezekiel’s prophecy—he has been (as we’ve already noted) very actively developing ties with Iran. He has made several state visits to Iran recently and has publically warned the U.S. and Israel of what he called “grave consequences” if any military action was taken against Iran or Iran’s proxy in Syria.

Then as recently as a couple of years ago, it was learned that Libya, Sudan and Eritrea (all part of Ezekiel’s Cush) have been strengthening ties with one another and with Iran. At the same time Russia has been selling arms to both Eritrea and Ethiopia, another part of ancient Cush.

I am no prophet, and so I do not pretend to be able to predict what will be the immediate outcome of these significant events. Nor do I feel that I can be

dogmatic about the possibility of a 'Psalm 83 War', though I believe that it is very plausible, and I urge you to be sure to pick up your copy of the handout. And who can predict what will happen in the volatile Middle East?

But no one can deny that it definitely appears that the pieces are coming together for the fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy about an invasion of a regathered Israel, by a confederacy of Islamic nations, led by Russia. And if, as many scholars believe, the Rapture occurs before that invasion, we could be very near to the time when we'll hear the trumpet and meet the Lord in the air.

By the way, I repeat what I have said several times before: There are no signs which need to be fulfilled prior to the Rapture. All of the prophetic signs relate to the Revelation. Since the birth of the Church, the Rapture has always been seen as being imminent, which simply means that it could occur at any moment. But since many indicators would lead us to feel that we are coming near to the Revelation (which comes seven years after the Rapture) it must be obvious that we are that much nearer to the snatching away of the Church.

If, indeed, we are very near, **SO WHAT?**

Well, in what kind of spiritual state would you like to have Christ find you when He comes for His own? Would you be happy to have Him find you living a carnal, self-centered, bitter kind of materialistic existence, perhaps marked by unresolved issues with other people, whether those 'other people' are your spouse, your children, your siblings, your parents? Would you like to have him find you addicted to TV, or to the Internet—with its readily available porn, or to violent ungodly computer games, or other spiritually unhealthy entertainment? Would you want to have Him find you at odds with a Christian brother or sister over some unimportant issue?

Wouldn't you really rather have Christ find you deeply in love with Him, and demonstrating that love by obeying His commands, by loving the brotherhood, and by looking for Him to come? It was said of the saintly Horatio Bonar, a Christian leader of another era, that each evening before he retired for the night, he would look at the sky and say "Perhaps tonight, Lord." And each morning he would again look up and ask "Perhaps today, Lord."

Remember that there is a crown promised to those who love our Lord's appearing. In 2 Timothy 4:8, the Apostle Paul speaks of "*...the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of His return. And this prize is not just for me, but for ALL who love [that is who eagerly look forward to] His coming.*"

So, what thought comes to your heart and mind as you think about the Rapture, and the fact that it could occur at any moment? Is it...

...anxiety over loved ones?

...fear and uncertainty about your own spiritual state? Or

...joyful anticipation over the prospect of meeting our Lord?

I believe that the answer to that question will tell you and me whether or not we are in the right spiritual space in relationship to the return of Christ. Allow me to share a personal testimony in this regard.

I was born again at the age of five, thanks to the influence of godly parents. I grew up in a fine Christian home in which the Word of God, prayer, church attendance and Bible teaching was the pattern of life. However, as a young teenager I strayed away from the Lord. Thankfully, I was spared the sad experience of getting into overt sin. I never even got away from the church—in fact, I was a

leader in our very small youth group. But, I was backslidden. I was not loving the Lord or obeying His commands. I even dated a non-Christian girl for a time, and certainly had no Christian testimony at school.

Now, during those backslidden days, I often felt very anxious about the thought of the Rapture. I used to wonder: “If Jesus came, would He take me with Him?” In our small home, my bedroom was on the second floor, and regularly after going up to bed, I would strain to listen for sounds of my parent’s activity downstairs. If I couldn’t hear anything for some time, I would frequently invent excuses to go downstairs for some reason or other, just to see if my parents were still there, or if they had been raptured—and I was left to face the horrors of the Antichrist and his godless reign.

Let me tell you, that’s a miserable way to live. I’m eternally grateful for parents who prayed, and for a pastor who came alongside me and led me to deal with my backsliding. Subsequently, on my 16th birthday, I wrote out a commitment to the Lordship of Christ in my life, which (though I have not always experienced such) has been the basis of my life in the almost 65 years since.

So, again I ask: How would you like to have Christ find you when He comes? I John 3:2-3 says...

“Everyone who has this hope [that when Christ appears we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is] purifies himself even as [Christ] is pure.”

If we really do love Christ and long for His appearing we will give ourselves to obeying His commands in the power of His Spirit. We will live Spirit-controlled lives, righteous lives and godly lives, allowing the Spirit of Christ to produce in us

the wonderful fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.

And, should there be someone here tonight who is not absolutely certain that you have been born again, may I say to you that it is absolutely essential that you take the ABC steps to salvation, and thus become ready to be raptured when Christ comes.

Whatever God, through His word and by His Spirit, may have said to you tonight in terms of some action that you need to take, I urge you to respond to His voice.