



## Russian Bear Is on the Move

By Alfred B. Davis

The Russian Bear is on the move. As I write this, Russia is invading the Ukraine. They have carried out missile strikes and air raids on Ukrainian infrastructure and military command and control centers and are pushing into the outskirts of Kyiv. At the same time, Russia has expanded and modified its naval base in the Syrian port of Tartus, mounted the largest Russian naval deployment to the Mediterranean Sea since the Cold War, and deployed Long-range, nuclear-capable Tu-22M3 bombers and MiG-31 fighter jets carrying the latest Kinzhal hypersonic cruise missiles to its huge Hemeimeem air base in Syria's coastal province of Latakia, ostensibly to support a series of military exercises and drills in Syria and the eastern Mediterranean.

Russia's military movements and saber rattling have captured the world's attention, prompting many to wonder how this might tie into Bible prophecy and if we could be seeing the start of the prophesied Gog/Magog invasion of Israel in Ezekiel 38. This prophecy begins with a discussion of the invading nations in verses 1-6:

"And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, And say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords: Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet: Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee."

Now, when you first look at this passage you may not recognize too many of the nations mentioned right away. That's because the Bible uses the names of various people groups existing in Ezekiel's day instead of the modern place names. However, if we identify who these people groups are and where they were located, we can identify the modern nations represented by those groups.

First, we see "Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal" named. Gog is identified with the land of Magog and further described as the "chief prince of Meshech and Tubal". The word translated as "chief" comes from the Hebrew word, rosh. The Hebrew scholar Gesenius (1786-1842) identified rosh in his ancient Hebrew lexicon with Russia, as have other scholars. Consequently, it appears that Gog is a leader out of rosh, or Russia, who heads up the coalition of nations that invade Israel in Ezekiel 38.

Magog, along with Meshech and Tubal, is mentioned in Genesis 10:2 as being a son of Japheth, one of Noah's three sons. Magog's descendants migrated north of the Black and Caspian seas and the Caucasus Mountains to settle in the northern regions of central Asia. There they became known as the Scythians. Historians and archaeologists have determined that the Scythians, at their height, controlled an area from Ukraine in the west through Siberia in the east, north of Mongolia, and Iran. In other words, the land of Magog appears to represent Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan.

The descendants of Meshech also migrated north and appear to have intermingled with the Sythians. They became known as the Moschi and then later as the Muscovs. Gesenius and others claim that Moschi and Muscov are derived from Meshech and gave rise to the name of the capital of Russia: Moscow.

Tubal's descendants also migrated north. They wound up in the area of modern-day Georgia and in southern and central Russia. In fact, the name of the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, is derived from Tubal, as is the name of the river Tobol and the city of Tobolsk in central Russia.

Persia is the ancient name for modern day Iran and was commonly in use up until 1935. In fact, early maps produced after 1935 frequently had Persia in parenthesis under the name Iran since that is the name most people associated with that country.

Ethiopia in the Bible referred to the area south of Egypt, beyond the upper cataracts of the Nile River, about where the Aswan Dam is located. The second century Alexandrian geographer Claudius Ptolemy produced a map of the Nile River which shows Ethiopia encompassing the areas of today's Ethiopia, Sudan, Kenya, Somalia, Djibouti, and Eritrea.

Libya, like Ethiopia, also consisted of a much greater geographic area than what modern maps show as Libya today. In the Bible, Libya essentially referred to all of North Africa, between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sahara Desert. Ptolemy's map of the Nile River shows Libya extending west of both Egypt and Ethiopia. Consequently, we see that the Libya of Ezekiel 38 covers the modern countries of Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. If Ptolemy's map is accurate, it could also include Chad, Niger, Mali, Mauritania, and other sub-Saharan countries.

Gomer represents a large group of people who initially settled in the area of modern-day Turkey. Gomer's descendants then spread northwest, colonizing Central and Eastern Europe. From there they continued to spread throughout Europe, reaching France, the British Isles, and the Scandinavian countries. Other people groups moved in, however, and weakened Gomer's domination of much of Western Europe and the British Isles. Gomer's descendants seem to be best represented today by Germany, the Baltic countries, and Turkey.

Togarmah, according to Genesis 10:3, is a son of Gomer. While most of Gomer's descendants migrated up into Europe, Togarmah and his descendants, primarily the Turks and the Armenians, mostly stayed south of the Black Sea. Consequently, Togarmah is represented today by the countries of Turkey and Armenia.

Now, having identified the countries noted in Ezekiel 38, what can we make of this? Well, the first group, made up of Gog, Magog, Meshech, and Tubal, appears to represent members of the old Soviet Union, such as Ukraine, Georgia, and Kazakhstan, led by Russia. And, when we look at what is happening in eastern Europe and central Asia today, what do we see? Well, we see a leader out of Russia, by the name of Vladimir Putin, who is seeking to control many of the former member states of the old Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

We also can see Putin establishing ties with and exerting influence over the other nations identified in Ezekiel 38; Iran, Turkey, and Germany in particular. With the waning influence of America in the Middle East both Turkey and Iran are cozying up to Russia and becoming more aggressive in the region. Germany is becoming dependent on Russia for energy, potentially giving Putin more influence over Germany than NATO. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Russia is building up its forces in Syria, using the takeover of Ukraine and unrest in Syria as a pretext. All of which could be setting the stage for a Russian led invasion of Israel as prophesied in Ezekiel 38.

However, Ezekiel's prophecy makes an interesting statement about conditions in Israel at the time of the Russian led invasion in Ezekiel 38:10-12: "Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the

desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land."

Notice the description of Israel as a "land of unwalled villages," "them that are at rest, that dwell safely," and "them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates". This is clearly not Israel today. Today, Israel faces enemies on every side, terror attacks from within and without, frequent missile strikes and border incursions, and increasing threats from Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas to wipe them off the map. This leads me to the conclusion that, while Russia may be laying the groundwork for the coming invasion of Israel, it is not likely to happen yet. Something else needs to happen first. Something that will change the situation in Israel dramatically.

A clue can be found in Psalm 83:1-8:

"Keep not thou silence, O God: hold not thy peace, and be not still, O God. For, lo, thine enemies make a tumult: and they that hate thee have lifted up the head. They have taken crafty counsel against thy people, and consulted against thy hidden ones. They have said, Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance. For they have consulted together with one consent: they are confederate against thee: The tabernacles of Edom, and the Ishmaelites; of Moab, and the Hagarenes; Gebal, and Ammon, and Amalek; the Philistines with the inhabitants of Tyre; Assur also is joined with them: they have holpen the children of Lot. Selah."

Again, we need to look at the names given in Psalm 83 to see who they represent today. Edom, also known as Idumea or Esau, stretched from the Dead Sea in the north and south and west into the Sinai Peninsula. This area today is part of Egypt, southern Israel, and Jordan. The Ishmaelites are the descendants of Abraham's son, Ishmael, and today are represented by the Arab people in general. Moab and Ammon, along with the children of Lot are Lot's descendants. They lived mostly in present day Jordan. The Hagarenes were a semi-nomadic people who eventually settled in a region northeast of Ammon and Moab. According to Forester's Geography of Arabia, the Hagarenes settled between the lands of Gilead, Bashan and the Euphrates, which, today, is part of Syria. Gebal is possibly either a reference to an ancient Phoenician city known today as Jebeil or Byblos, located in Lebanon, north of Beirut, on the Mediterranean coast. Or, it could refer to a district southeast of the Dead Sea, which Josephus wrote of about as forming part of Idumea (Edom), which would identify it with Egypt and Jordan. Amalek was the grandson of Esau. His descendants dwelt in the Negev Desert and the Sinai, which is in modern day Egypt and the southern part of Israel. The Philistines occupied an area along the Mediterranean coast known today as the Gaza Strip. Tyre was an important Phoenician city that still exists today in Lebanon. And, finally, we have Assur. Assur, located in modern day Iraq, was the capital of the Assyrian Empire which stretched across today's Syria and Iraq.

It appears, then, that Psalm 83 represents a coalition of nations determined to annihilate Israel. This coalition consists apparently of Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip. Notice, also, that these are the very nations missing from the Ezekiel 38 prophecy. Which leads to the question of why. Did Ezekiel leave them out because he did not want to take the time to list all the nations involved or did he have a more important reason?

Notice that Psalm 83 goes on to indicate, in verses 13-18, that God intervenes in answer to Israel's prayers for deliverance:

"O my God, make them like a wheel; as the stubble before the wind. As the fire burneth a wood, and as the flame setteth the mountains on fire; So persecute them with thy tempest, and make them afraid with thy storm. Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD. Let them be confounded and troubled for

ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish: That men may know that thou, whose name alone is JEHOVAH, art the most high over all the earth."

Now, if Psalm 83 is referring prophetically to a future war, which I believe it is, then it would certainly explain why Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip are not mentioned in Ezekiel 38. They are not mentioned because they no longer exist. They have been destroyed by fire. But how can we be sure? How can we know that Psalm 83 is speaking of a future war rather than past events?

Well, first, we need to remember that God's prophecies are always fulfilled. Although there may be types and shadows and what appear to be partial fulfillments, eventually all prophecy will be fulfilled. So, if we see a prophecy that has not yet been fulfilled, then it must yet be future.

In addition, we can see other Bible prophecies involving the nations of Psalm 83 that have not yet been fulfilled as well. And a number of these prophecies involve these nations being destroyed by fire, just like in Psalm 83. Furthermore, the language in several of these prophecies strongly indicates that nuclear weapons might be involved.

For example, Isaiah prophecies that Babylon (Iraq) will be destroyed "as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah" (Isaiah 13:19) and that, in verse 20, "It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there." Two cities of Moab (Jordan), Ar, which likely is today's Rabba, and Kir, which is now Kerak, are said to be destroyed suddenly, "in the night", in Ezekiel 15. Further, in Isaiah 34:8-10, it is said of Moab:

"For it is the day of the LORD'S vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever."

Likewise, Damascus, in Syria, is foretold in Ezekiel 17:1 to become "a ruinous heap." Verse 14 indicates that the city will be there in the evening and "before the morning he is not."

Egypt is also devastated and abandoned for 40 years. In Ezekiel 29:10-12 we read: "Behold, therefore I am against thee, and against thy rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from the tower of Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia. No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years. And I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate, and her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be desolate forty years: and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries."

Summing things up, then, there is a coming war, foretold in Psalm 83, where a coalition of nations including Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip attempt to destroy Israel but are, instead, destroyed themselves. It may be that they are encouraged to do this by Iran, especially since there are prophecies indicating that a portion of present-day Iran, known as Elam, will be destroyed at the same time as Jordan, Syria, and Iraq.

However, getting back to Russia and their growing presence in Syria, it may be more likely that the real instigator of the Psalm 83 war is Russia, not Iran. After all, Putin has a history of instigating unrest in an area that he has his eyes on and then stepping in to guarantee the safety of Russian interests and people in the area. He did that in Georgia, which is now under his control, and he is doing that in Ukraine. And, with the waning influence of America in the Middle East, he is also doing the same thing in Syria. The next step could be to encourage Syria to reclaim the Golan Heights from Israel. After all, Russia's Deputy Ambassador, Dmitry

Polyanskiy, just told the UN Security Council on February 23, "Russia doesn't recognize Israel's sovereignty over Golan Heights that are part of Syria." At the same time, Putin may encourage Iran to push Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza Strip to step up their attacks on Israel, while launching attacks themselves out of Syria and Iraq with the idea of sparking an Arab-Israeli war, sucking in Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq. Putin could then step in, with Russia's overwhelming military presence in Syria to put a stop to the war and move troops into Israel, ostensibly to provide security and stability to the region.

Unfortunately for Putin, I do not think that it will work out quite that way. Instead, it may be that the war becomes a bit more intense than he plans and he loses control of the situation. Rather than simply reclaiming the Golan Heights and, perhaps, the West Bank, it may be that Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gaza Strip decide instead to wipe Israel from off the face of the earth as it says in Psalm 83. They may say to themselves, "Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance (Psalm 83:4)". Israel, facing possible annihilation, may unleash its nuclear arsenal against its enemies, raining fire and destruction down on them.

In the process, according to Isaiah 17, Israel is nearly destroyed yet survives. In fact, Isaiah 17:4-6 tells us: "And in that day it shall come to pass, that the glory of Jacob shall be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh shall wax lean. And it shall be as when the harvestman gathereth the corn, and reapeth the ears with his arm; and it shall be as he that gathereth ears in the valley of Rephaim. Yet gleaning grapes shall be left in it, as the shaking of an olive tree, two or three berries in the top of the uppermost bough, four or five in the outmost fruitful branches thereof, saith the LORD God of Israel."

However, before Putin gets a chance to move in and claim the spoils, it could be that someone else steps forward with a plan to guarantee the safety and security of Israel. The world, shocked by the nuclear devastation unleashed in the Middle East, rallies around this plan, sidelining Putin for a time. Israel, its military and population depleted, willingly agrees to lay down its remaining weapons and accepts a seven-year security plan. It then becomes the "land of unwalled villages" populated by "them that are at rest, that dwell safely, ... dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates" described in Ezekiel 38:11, thereby setting the stage for the Ezekiel 38 Gog/Magog led invasion of Israel. But, before someone steps forward with a plan to guarantee the safety and security of Israel, the Bible tells us that the born-again Christians must be taken out of the way.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul writes about an individual, whom he refers to as "that man of sin ... the son of perdition" in verse 3. This is the same person that John calls "the beast" in the Book of Revelation, and that Daniel refers to as "the prince that ... shall confirm the covenant with many for one week" in Daniel 9:26-27. (The week in Daniel 9 is actually a week of years, corresponding to the seven-year Tribulation period.) Interestingly, Paul, John, and David all speak of this person desecrating the rebuilt Jewish temple in Jerusalem, apparently by claiming to be God during the mid-point of the Tribulation.

However, this person, who is frequently called the Antichrist, cannot be revealed until something else happens. Paul puts it this way in 2 Thessalonians 2:6-10:

"And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved."

This Scripture tells us that the "mystery of iniquity" is already working in the world. In fact, the Devil is working feverishly to bring forth "that man of sin ... the son of perdition," referred to here as "that Wicked" to power. But

he is unable to do so because he is being actively restrained by the one whom Paul says, "will be taken out of the way." This restrainer is none other than the Holy Ghost, who indwells Believers at salvation.

Look in 1 Corinthians 3:16 where Paul writes that we are "the temple of God" and that the Spirit of God dwells in us. He also says in Romans 8:9 that the Spirit of God dwells in Believers and that "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." The Spirit of God, otherwise known as the Holy Ghost, indwells Believers imparting spiritual gifts and empowering us for His service. Part of that service, according to Matthew 5:13-16, involves being salt and light in the world. As salt, we help impede spiritual decay and give flavor to the society around us. As lights we allow the light of God to shine through us into the spiritually dark world around us. When we are removed the work of the Spirit of God through us will cease and the world will quickly descend into spiritual decay and darkness.

We know that the Believers will be taken out of the way when the Spirit of God is "taken out of the way" because we are sealed by Him until the day that we are delivered into God's presence. Or, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 1:13-14:

"In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."

Consequently, when the Holy Ghost is taken out of the way, the Believers will be taken out of the way too. This event is called the Rapture and it is described for us in 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 and in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. And, when that takes place, the mystery of iniquity will come to fruition and the Devil will bring forth the Antichrist as a global peacemaker and world ruler. Should the Rapture take place during the time of the Psalm 83 war, which will no doubt be a time of worldwide unrest and turmoil, it might make it easier for the Antichrist to deceive those left behind and convince many that he is the promised Messiah.

And, if the time of the Rapture is near, that might explain why a number of rabbis in Israel are claiming that Messiah is here and that they have met with him, but he is waiting until the time is right to reveal himself to the world. Furthermore, it could mean that the Revelation of the Antichrist coincides with the opening of the first seal in Revelation 6:1-2 where John writes:

"And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see. And I saw, and behold a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer."

Russia, though, may try to take advantage of the situation before the Antichrist can fully consolidate his power and decide to make his move on Israel, possibly corresponding to the red horse of war in Revelation 6:4:

"And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword."

So, while the Russian Bear may be on the move, what we are seeing today is not the prophesied Ezekiel 38 invasion of Israel. However, we may be seeing the geopolitical stage being set for that invasion. And, if that is the case, we are getting closer than ever to the catching away of the born-again Christians, which makes it all the more important to be sure of your salvation.

Time is short and getting shorter. As Jesus said in Luke 21:28:

"And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh."