

The King of the North

by John F. Walvoord

John F. Walvoord's sermon explores the prophetic significance of Russia's role as the king of the north in the end-time conflict involving Israel.

Scripture: Ezekiel 38:6, Ezekiel 38:21, Daniel 9:26, Daniel 11:36, Daniel 11:40

Topics: "End Time Prophecy", "Eschatology"

Description

John F. Walvoord preaches about the prophetic significance of the great world conflict predicted in the Scriptures, involving a revived Roman Empire, a ten-nation confederacy, and a major battle in the Holy Land. The Scriptures outline three major crises: the rise of a Roman ruler, a battle involving Russia and other nations from the north, and a rebellion against the Roman ruler at the end of the great tribulation. The invasion from the north, possibly led by Russia, is described in Ezekiel 38 and 39, depicting a military invasion of Israel and the subsequent destruction of the invading army by divine intervention.

Transcript

The Northern Confederacy

In the warfare that characterizes the end of the age, the Scriptures predict a great world conflict which eventually involves all the nations of the earth. In the Scriptures that portray these stirring events, three major crises may be observed. First, a crisis in the Mediterranean area leads to the formation of the revived Roman Empire composed of a ten-nation confederacy. This is occasioned by the rise of the Roman "prince that shall come" (Daniel 9:26) who subdues three of the kings and secures the submission of the seven remaining rulers. His successful conquest of these ten kingdoms, outlined in Daniel 7:23-26, makes the Roman ruler supreme in his control of this revived form of the ancient Roman Empire.

The second phase of the struggle is recorded in Ezekiel 38 and 39. The great battle there described may be the forerunner of the expansion of the Roman Empire from domination of the Mediterranean area to the role of a world empire embracing all nations of the earth (cp. Daniel 7:23; Revelation 13:7, 8). The third phase of the world struggle is at the end of the great tribulation period just before the second coming of Christ, when major sections of the world rebel against the Roman ruler as their leader. A gigantic world war ensues with the Holy Land as its focal point (Daniel 11:40-45; Revelation 16:12-16).

Expositors are by no means agreed as to the precise details of these events or their place in the sequence. It is possible, however, to be sure about such facts as the geographic origination of military

forces which converge upon the Holy Land, described as coming from the north, the east, and the south. All of these forces seem to be in opposition to the Roman ruler who may be called the king of the west, although the Scriptures never assign him this title.

The prophet Daniel in his summary of the world struggle which ends the age declares: "And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass over" (Daniel 11:40). The reference to the king of the north in this passages raises the question concerning Russia and other countries to the north of the Holy Land which figure in this final world struggle. A major contribution to this subject is found in the prophecies of Ezekiel concerning a great invasion of the Holy Land from the north in the end time.

The Rise Of Russia In The Twentieth Century

One of the significant aspects of modern life which all have observed in the last quarter of a century is the remarkable rise of Russia to a place of world prominence. At the close of World War II, Russia as a nation was crushed, its manpower destroyed, its cities in ruin. It was a nation that would have been utterly defeated if it had not been for American help. Since World War II, Russia has recovered and has become a prominent nation with world-wide influence which few nations have ever achieved. Today, Russia is one of the principal competitors of the United States of America for world fame and world leadership. Through the instrument of communism and nations which share Russia's convictions on communism, almost half of the world's population is in some sense or other in the Russian orbit. Such a phenomenal rise of a nation so godless and blasphemous must have some prophetic significance.

Does The Bible Contain Prophecy About Russia?

In the study of prophecy, care must be taken not to create doctrine without proper Scriptural support. Many aspects of prophecy in the Bible may be understood only partially. There are great themes of prophecy, however, which do not rest on isolated texts, but upon extended portions of the Word of God. As these Scriptures are studied, some settled conclusions can be reached regarding the main movements of God in the prophetic future.

The word Russia is not found in the English Bible, and at first glance it would seem that there is nothing in the Bible that would give any information about Russia. A more careful investigation, however, reveals that there are two long chapters in the Bible which seem to concern themselves with the nation Russia, with certain other portions of Scripture which cast added light upon the subject. Not only has the Bible something to say about Russia, but what it reveals is of tremendous significance in God's prophetic program.

In Ezekiel 38 and 39, a description is given of a war between Israel and a nation which many have identified as Russia. The two chapters mentioned describe the invasion of the land of Israel by the armies of Russia and the nations that are associated with her. The Scriptures are plain that this is a military invasion and reveal many details about the situation existing at the time of that invasion. The dramatic outcome of the battle is the utter destruction of the army that invades the land of Israel. Written by the prophet Ezekiel, who himself was in exile from the land of Israel, this prophecy was inspired by the Spirit of God. A natural question can be raised, however, inasmuch as this was written some twenty-five hundred years ago, whether this passage has already been fulfilled.

The land of Israel has been the scene of many wars, and invasions have come from various parts of the world, north, east, and south. Many times the march of soldier's feet has been heard crossing the little nation of Israel. The Bible records some of these wars and some of them have occurred since the canon of Scripture was closed. It would be difficult to examine the details of all these wars; however, if one did, he would find that none of them correspond to this prophecy. There never has been a war with Israel which fulfills the prophecies of Ezekiel 38 and 39. If one believes that the Bible is the Word of God and that it is infallible and must be fulfilled, the only logical conclusion is that this portion of Scripture, like many others, is still due a future fulfillment.

The Identification Of Russia

In beginning the study of this chapter, it is necessary to establish beyond any question that this passage deals with the nation Russia, inasmuch as the term itself does not occur. There are a number of important factors which lead to the conclusion that the only nation which could possibly fulfill the specifications of these two chapters is the nation Russia. In the study of this chapter the American Standard Version will be used because of its clarification of certain difficult passages.

First of all, it is important to note the geographic description which is given. The terms "king of the north" and "king of the south" were used in Daniel 11:5-35 to describe the rulers to the north and south of Palestine who engaged in constant warfare in the second and third centuries b.c. This is now fulfilled prophecy. The king of the north and king of the south of Daniel 11:40-45, however, are future rulers involved in warfare in the end time. This is still unfulfilled prophecy. Ezekiel 38 and 39 fit into this future picture.

According to Ezekiel, the invading armies come to the land of Israel from "the uttermost part of the north" or as we would put it from the far north. In the Authorized Version the expression is translated merely "from the north," but in the more literal translation of the Hebrew found in the American Standard Version it is rendered, "the uttermost parts of the north," i.e., the extreme north. The important point is that it designates not merely the direction from which the army attacks Israel, but specifies the geographic origination of the army from a territory located in the far north. The house of Togarmah, one of the nations that is associated with Russia in this invasion, also comes from "the uttermost parts of the north" (Ezekiel 38:6).

A similar statement concerning the invader is made in verse 15, "Thou shalt come from thy place out of the uttermost parts of the north, thou, and many peoples with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company and a mighty army" (asv). Again in Ezekiel 39:2, God says to them, "I will turn thee about, and will lead thee on, and will cause thee to come up from the uttermost parts of the north; and I will bring thee upon the mountains of Israel" (asv). Three times in these chapters this army is stated to come from the extreme north.

If one takes any map of the world and draws a line north of the land of Israel he will inevitably come to the nation Russia. As soon as the line is drawn to the far north beyond Asia Minor and the Black Sea it is in Russia and continues to be in Russia for many hundreds of miles all the way to the Arctic Circle. Russia today spreads east and west some 6,000 miles, and one cannot escape Russia if he goes north of the Holy Land. On the basis of geography alone, it seems quite clear that the only nation which could possibly be referred to as coming from the far north would be the nation Russia. The suggestion that the nation is ancient Assyria revived is rendered improbable by the geographic description.

As the Scriptures are further examined, not only geographic data but also some confirming linguistic evidence is discovered. In the opening portion of Ezekiel 38, in verses 1 through 6, some names are mentioned which identify the invaders. This portion indicates that the Word of the Lord came to Ezekiel saying,

Son of man, set thy face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal: and I will turn thee about, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in full armor, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them handling swords: Persia, Cush and Put with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer, and all his hordes; the house of Togarmah in the uttermost parts of the north, and all his hordes; even many peoples with thee (asv).

Most of the terms in this portion of Scripture are quite strange to us and do not immediately connote anything relating to Russia. Certain facts are discovered as the passage is examined more particularly. This portion of Scripture is a message from God delivered by the prophet Ezekiel, directed to a person whose name is Gog, who is described as of the land of Magog and apparently the ruler of this land. The term "Magog" is mentioned in Genesis 10:2. There we learn that Magog was the second son of Japheth, the son of Noah.

Magog is best identified with the Scythians, a people descended from Magog. The ancient historian Josephus makes that identification and we have no reason to question it. The Scythians apparently lived immediately to the north of what was later to be the land of Israel, then some of them emigrated north, going all the way to the Arctic Circle. In other words, their posterity was scattered precisely over the geographical area that today is called Russia.

In Ezekiel 38 Gog is described as "the prince of Rosh" (asv). The Authorized Version expresses it as the "chief prince." The translation, "the prince of Rosh," is a more literal rendering of the Hebrew. "Rosh" may be the root of the modern term, Russia. In the study of how ancient words come into modern language, it is quite common for the consonants to remain the same and the vowels to be changed. In the word "Rosh," if the vowel "o" is changed to V it becomes the root of the modern word, Russia, with the suffix added. In other words, the word itself seems to be an early form of the word from which the modern word, Russia, comes. Genesis, the famous lexicographer, gives the assurance that this is a proper identification, that is, that Rosh is an early form of the word from which we get Russia.

The two terms, "Meshech" and "Tubal," also correspond to some prominent words in Russia. The term "Meshech" is similar to the modern name Moscow, and "Tubal," obviously, is similar to the name of one of the prominent Asiatic provinces of Russia, the province of Tobolsk. When this evidence is put together, it points to the conclusion that these terms are early references to portions of Russia, and therefore, the geographic argument is reinforced by the linguistic argument and supports the idea that this invading force comes from Russia.

As the prophecy is examined further it becomes obvious that the invaders utterly disregard God, because any nation that attacks the nation of Israel by so much is disregarding the Word of God. The godlessness of the invading army attacking Israel also points the finger to the nation Russia. On the basis of these three arguments, the geographic argument, the linguistic argument, and what might be called the theological argument, it may be concluded that the reference is to the nation Russia. In fact, there is no

other reasonable alternative. Russia is today the only nation which seems to fit the picture.

A number of nations are associated with Russia in the invasion, but not too much is known about them. Persia, of course, is in that general area. Gush is another name for Ethiopia, which poses a problem because today Ethiopia is to the south. The term Cush may have been applied to other geographic areas, including that to the north of the land of Israel. The term, "Put," is a difficult expression about which little is known. In verse 6 the term, "Gomer," is identified by most as referring to the ancient Cimmerians, a portion of whom lived in what today is called southern of western Germany. Togarmah is commonly recognized as referring to the Armenians, who at one time lived immediately north of the land of Israel, and they, too, to some extent emigrated to the north. The nations which accompany Russia, for the most part, fit properly into the picture of assisting Russia in this invasion of the land of Israel.

The Predicted Invasion Of Israel

The actual invasion is described in Ezekiel 38:8-12. Some of the distinctive facts mentioned about the particular situation which will exist when this war begins are of utmost significance in the light of the world situation today. In this passage the "thou" refers throughout to Russia or to Gog. The term "they" is used to refer to Israel. Beginning in verse 8 and continuing through verse 16, the passage reads as follows:

After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, that is gathered out of many peoples, upon the mountains of Israel, which have been a continual waste; but it is brought forth out of the peoples, and they shall dwell securely, all of them. And thou shalt ascend, thou shalt come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy hordes, and many peoples with thee.

Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: It shall come to pass in that day, that things shall come into thy mind, and thou shalt devise an evil device: 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 securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates; to take the spoil and to take the prey; to turn thy hand against the waste places that are now inhabited, and against the people that are gathered out of the nations, that have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the middle of the earth. Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take the spoil? hast thou assembled thy company to take the prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take great spoil?

Therefore, son of man, prophesy, and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord Jehovah: In that day when my people Israel dwelleth securely, shalt thou not know it? And thou shalt come from thy place out of the uttermost parts of the north, thou, and many peoples with thee, all of them riding upon horses, a great company and a mighty army; and thou shalt come up against my people Israel, as a cloud to cover the land: it shall come to pass in the latter days, that I will bring thee against my land, that the nations may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog, before their eyes (asv).

Invasion After Israel's Regathering

Some highly significant facts are given in the above passage concerning the precise situation existing when the invasion takes place. There are a number of references to the fact that the people of Israel are back in their ancient land. This of course is of tremendous importance because it is only in our generation that the people of Israel have gone back to their ancient land. In a.d. 70, Titus, the Roman general, conquered Jerusalem, utterly destroyed it, and killed up to a million of the Jews. Roman soldiers later

systematically went throughout the entire land of Israel destroying every building, sawing down or uprooting every tree, and doing everything they could to make the land totally uninhabitable. The result was that the land of Israel lay in waste for several generations. The children of Israel from that day to this have been scattered over the face of the earth.

At the close of World War II the children of Israel began to return to their ancient land in large numbers. Some had gone earlier, but they were few in number. They built up their strength and numbers until finally they were recognized as a nation in May, 1948. At that time one million Jews were back in their ancient land, the largest return since the days of the Exodus. In the years since, their number has doubled, and today there are two million Israelites under their own flag, speaking the Hebrew language, and reviving and restoring their ancient land to a scene of fertility, wealth, and prosperity. These facts are tremendously significant, for the return of Israel has occurred in our generation.

Ezekiel's prophecy obviously could not have been fulfilled prior to 1945, for the nation Israel was not regathered to their ancient land. Until our generation, Israel's situation did not correspond to that which is described in Ezekiel's passage. Ezekiel's prophecy of twenty-five hundred years ago seems to have anticipated the return of Israel to their ancient land as a prelude to the climax of this present age.

Invasion After Rebuilding Of Cities

Another important aspect of the prophecy is found in verse eleven where it states that the people of Israel will be dwelling "securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates." It was customary in ancient times, whenever a city prospered, to build a wall around it. One can go to ancient lands and see the ruins of walls around most important cities. They would, at least, have a fortress with a wall around it to which they could retire if the houses themselves were scattered and a wall about the houses was impracticable. In other words, it was customary to build walls about cities. In our modern day, this custom has been discontinued for the obvious reason that a wall is no protection against modern warfare.

If one goes to Israel today, though one can see many fabulous cities being built and marvelous developments taking place, one will not find a single new city with a wall built around it. They are cities without walls. How did Ezekiel know that at a future time the war situation would be such that cities would be built without walls? Of course, the answer is a simple one. He was guided by the inspiration of God, and it was not a matter of his own wisdom. But in this scene he is describing a modern situation, something that could not and would not be true back in the days of old, before Christ. This detail is very important because un-walled villages point to Israel's situation today.

Invasion At A Time Of Israel's Prosperity

A third feature may also be observed. This portion of Scripture is explicit that one of the reasons why Russia wants to conquer the land of Israel is that it had become a land of great wealth. Russia comes to take a prey, to take silver and gold, and the wealth that has been accumulated (cp. Ezekiel 38:12, 13). Until our generation, the geographic area of the land of Israel was anything but something to be prized. It did not have any wealth; it was a land that was strewn with stones; a land that was backward as far as civilization is concerned. Many of the areas that at one time were fruitful in Bible times were unused prior to Israel's reclamation. The land was eroded and useless as far as agriculture is concerned.

Since the Israelites have gone back to their ancient land, they have done fabulous things. They have taken rocky fields, gathered the stones in piles along the edge, and cultivated and irrigated the ground and made it to bring forth abundantly. They have reclaimed swamps where mosquitoes and malaria made civilization impossible before. In fact, the first people that tried to do something about it lost their lives because of the unhealthy situation. These former swamps are today one of the richest areas of farm land in the entire world. It is almost incredible what has occurred there since 1948. They have spent money, they have put forth extreme effort, and from one end of Israel to the other tremendous progress is in evidence. The result is today that Israel is beginning once again to be a nation that has wealth. A great deal is being exported to other countries, and money is beginning to flow back to the little nation of Israel.

In addition to agricultural wealth, there are some factors that Ezekiel did not know which we know today. One factor is that to the east of the land of Israel are tremendous oil reserves. One of the largest and richest oil fields in the entire world is in the Middle East. It is outside the present geographic area of Israel, but the nation that wants to control that oil land must control the nation Israel. It is obvious that the tremendous oil reserves of the Middle East are one of the prizes that Russia wants to secure.

Another aspect of wealth which has come to light in modern times is the chemical value of the Dead Sea area, where water has evaporated for centuries, leaving its mineral deposit. Israel has established a plant at the south end of the Dead Sea and is reclaiming the chemicals. Millions of dollars of those chemicals are being shipped, and they have just begun to tap this wealth. Ezekiel anticipated the time when the land of Israel would be fabulously wealthy.

Military Importance Of Israel

In addition to all these factors, it is obvious that the geographic location of the Middle East, being as it is a hub between three major continents--Europe, Asia, and Africa--is of tremendous strategic importance to any nation that wants to dominate the world. The geographic significance of the Middle East alone would be worth a real effort on the part of Russia to have this portion of the world under its control. Again Ezekiel anticipates today's situation.

The Destruction Of The Invading Army

When the Russian army comes down upon this land they are met with complete and utter destruction. Strange to say, as we examine the Scriptures, we do not find them being destroyed by an opposing army, but rather it seems to be by divine intervention. Somehow God by His own power destroys the army. In Ezekiel 38:19, 20 a description is given of earthquakes, mountains falling, and other disturbances which hinder their progress.

Then God declares:

And I will call for a sword against him unto all my mountains, saith the Lord Jehovah: every man's sword shall be against his brother. And with pestilence and with blood will I enter into judgment with him; and I will rain upon him, and upon his hordes, and upon the many peoples that are with him, an overflowing shower, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. And I will magnify myself, and sanctify myself, and I will make myself known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am Jehovah (Ezekiel 38:21-23, asv).

The army's destruction is portrayed in Ezekiel 39:4 ff. God declares: "Thou shalt fall upon the mountains of Israel, thou, and all thy hordes, and the peoples that are with thee: I will give thee unto the ravenous birds of every sort, and to the beasts of the field to be devoured." In other words, the army is completely destroyed, and the means used are earthquakes, hailstones, fire and brimstone. It seems also that parts of the army begin to fight each other, so that every man's sword is against his brother.

Some natural questions are raised about this. Some have suggested that the description of hailstones, fire and brimstone might be Ezekiel's way of describing modern warfare, such as atomic warfare. There is a possibility that Ezekiel was using terms that he knew to describe a future situation for which he did not have a vocabulary. The language of Scripture indicates, however, that the victory over this invading horde is something that God does. It is God, Himself, who is destroying the army.

In any case, regardless of the means, the army is completely destroyed and chapter 39 goes on to describe the aftermath. For months thereafter they have the awful task of burying the dead. For a long period after that men are given full-time employment as additional bodies are discovered, and the process of burial continues. Attention is also directed to the debris of the battle. It is used as kindling wood for some seven years. The general character of this battle and its outcome seems to be quite clear, even though we may have some questions and problems about the details.

Time Of The Invasion

One of the principal questions one could ask about this battle is, When is the battle going to occur? It has not occurred in the past. What indication do we have in this portion of Scripture that the battle will occur at a specific time? Unfortunately, varying opinions have been offered by capable Bible scholars on this point, and there has been considerable disagreement. Some have felt that the battle will take place before the rapture, others believe it will take place in connection with the battle of Armageddon, or the battle of the Great Day of God Almighty, at the end of the great tribulation. Some place it at the beginning of the millennium, as an act of rebellion against Christ. Some find it at the end of the millennium, for there is a reference to Gog and Magog in Revelation 20. Others put it in the earlier part of Daniel's seventieth week, just before the great tribulation.

It will not be possible to consider all these views in detail, but there are some hints that provide a good clue as to when this battle will take place. One of the hints given is that the battle takes place at a time when Israel has been regathered into their ancient land, and are dwelling securely and at rest. There are not too many times when Israel is at rest in God's prophetic program. They have been scattered and persecuted over the face of the earth, and not even in the future will Israel have many periods of rest.

Certainly Israel is not at rest today. Israel is an armed camp, living under a truce with their Arab neighbors about them. Their enemies would drive every Israelite into the Mediterranean Sea and kill them if they could. The reason that they do not is because, humanly speaking, Israel has a good army which is more than a match for its neighbors. Today an armed truce and a no-man's land separate Israel from their enemy.

Every young Israeli man is required to have two and one-half years of military training and every young woman two years of military training. While the women are trained for jobs that are not necessarily of combatant type, they also learn to use weapons, so that if they need to fight, they can. After military training, many of them are settled in villages near the border, where they can serve a double purpose--following their occupation, whatever it is, and serving as guards for the border of Israel. Israel's

state of unrest does not correspond to Ezekiel's prophecy. If Russia should invade the Middle East today, it would not be a fulfillment of this portion of Scripture. That has to take place when Israel is at rest.

One point at which Israel will be at rest is in the millennial kingdom. But we are told expressly that, in the millennial kingdom, there will be no war (Isaiah 2:4), and only when the rebellion occurs at the end of the millennium when Satan is let loose (Revelation 20:7-9) does war break out. Certainly Israel is not going to be at rest under these circumstances either, once Satan is let loose.

Some have suggested that Israel will be at rest in the period of great tribulation, and that the prophecy of Russia will be fulfilled at that time. In the time of great tribulation, Israel will not be at rest, for Christ told them to flee to the mountains to escape their persecutors. Therefore the invasion described by Ezekiel could not be a part of the battle of Armageddon, or the battle of the Great Day of God Almighty.

There is only one period in the future that clearly fits this description of Ezekiel, and that is the first half of Daniel's seventieth week of God's program for Israel (Daniel 9:27). After the church has been raptured and saints have been raised from the dead and the living saints have been caught up to be with the Lord, a confederacy of nations will emerge in the Mediterranean Sea. Out of that confederacy will come a strong man who will become its dictator (discussed in previous chapters). He is described in Daniel 9:26 as "the prince that shall come." He will enter into a seven-year covenant of protection and peace with the people of Israel (Daniel 9:27).

Under that covenant, Israel will be able to relax, for their Gentile enemies will have become their friends, apparently guaranteed their borders and promised them freedom. During that first three and one-half years, we have the one time when regathered Israel is at rest and secure. Apparently Russia will invade the land of Israel during that period, possibly toward its close, and the Scripture will then be fulfilled.

Problems Of Interpretation

There are some other problems in the passage which merit study. A reference is made to bows and arrows, to shields and chariots, and to swords. These, of course, are antiquated weapons from the standpoint of modern warfare. The large use of horses is understandable as Russia today uses horses a great deal in connection with their army. But why should they use armor, spears, bows and arrows? This certainly poses a problem.

There have been two or more answers given. One of them is this that Ezekiel is using language with which he was familiar--the weapons that were common in his day--to anticipate modern weapons. What he is saying is that when this army comes, it will be fully equipped with the weapons of war. Such an interpretation, too, has problems. We are told in the passage that they used the wooden shafts of the spears and the bow and arrows for kindling wood. If these are symbols, it would be difficult to burn symbols. However, even in modern warfare there is a good deal of wood used. Possibly this is the explanation. We are not in a position today to settle this problem with any finality.

A second solution is that the battle is preceded by a disarmament agreement between nations. If this were the case, it would be necessary to resort to primitive weapons easily and secretly made if a surprise attack were to be achieved. This would allow a literal interpretation of the passage.

A third solution has also been suggested based on the premise that modern missile warfare will have developed in that day to the point where missiles will seek out any considerable amount of metal. Under

these circumstances, it would be necessary to abandon the large use of metal weapons and substitute wood such as is indicated in the primitive weapons. Whatever the explanation, the most sensible interpretation is that the passage refers to actual weapons pressed into use because of the peculiar circumstances of that day.

The Future Of Russia

The general character of the passage, the nature of the war, the invasion when it comes, and the outcome is, however, perfectly clear. What significance does it have to the modern scene? First of all, if we understand the passage correctly, Russia, instead of being a nation which is going to dominate the whole world, is headed for a tremendous military defeat. It is not possible to predict what is going to happen between now and the time this battle takes place, but the Bible seems quite clear that there is no room for a Russian-dominated world empire. The Bible prophesies only four world empires. The empire of the great tribulation period which will come as a form of the revived Roman Empire, is the final form of the fourth empire of Daniel, not a Russian Empire. This, in turn, will be succeeded by the millennial reign of Christ.

The passage seems to confirm that Russia, instead of becoming a world power that is going to dominate the whole world, is instead headed for an awful defeat, a judgment from God because of its blasphemy and ungodliness. If this becomes true during the time of the seventieth week of Daniel, it may explain something that otherwise might be difficult.

The Emergence Of A World Empire

We know that in the last half of Daniel's seventieth week there will be a world government headed by the ruler of the Mediterranean confederacy. The question is, how does he forge this world empire so quickly and so easily, and apparently without fighting for it? We learn in Revelation 13:4 that the question is asked, "Who is able to make war with him?" i.e., with the Beast. The answer is that nobody is able to make war with him. It should be obvious that if Russia and her satellites are destroyed as military powers, the other side of the balance of power, represented by the Mediterranean confederacy, is then in a position to dominate the whole world. Nobody is able, for at least a time, to contest their right to rule.

The destruction of the Russian army may be the preface to the world government which will sweep the world during the last half of Daniel's seventieth week and be in power at the time Christ comes back to establish His millennial kingdom. These two portions of Scripture, while they concern themselves with a future war, are of tremendous significance as we face the present world scene and the dominance of Russia as a military power. We can trust that God, in due time, and perhaps sooner than we think, will bring these Scriptures to their sure conclusion and fulfillment.

The Emergence Of A World Religion

There is another aspect of the problem that is worthy of careful consideration. What is the relation of all this to what we today call communism? It must be recognized that communism and Russia are not synonymous, for there are nations which are communistic which are not necessarily following Russia's leadership. Communism is a form of political philosophy; it is a form of religion. It is an ideology which is not limited to the Russian nation even though Russia has provided the major spark for it.

Communism is an atheistic religion--a religion denying that God exists, a religion denying that there is anything that is supernatural, a religion that recognizes only material force. If these facts are kept in mind,

it becomes a most significant fact that in the false religion which will sweep the world during the time of the great tribulation there are precisely the same elements present.

The false religion at the tribulation time is described in Daniel 11:36-38. This portion of Scripture describes the king who shall do according to his will, i.e., an absolute ruler. The king is believed by many to be the future world ruler of which the Scriptures speak, as indicated in previous discussion. He may be "the prince that shall come" of Daniel 9:26. In Daniel 11:37, it states of this ruler, "Neither shall he regard the gods of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall magnify himself above all" (asv). In other words, this ruler will push aside any previous kind of religion, any god which had been previously worshiped, and in their place he will put himself as the object of universal worship.

In explanation of this, it states in Daniel 11:38, "But in his place shall he honor the god of fortresses" (asv). In the Authorized Version it is translated, "the god of forces," but the word "forces" represents military forces. It is a recognition of the power to make war. This Scripture reveals, in a word, that the only deity this man will recognize and respect is the power to make war. He is an absolute atheist, an absolute materialist.

It should be clear that the rapid rise of communism in our generation has swept within its folds almost half of the world's population, a phenomenon without parallel in the history of the world. While the ultimate false religion will not be communism in the form we know it today, communism may very well be the forerunner and preparation for the future world religion that will sweep all the world during the time of the great tribulation.

Millions of young people today are being systematically taught atheism, denying that any God exists. They are taught to give their complete allegiance to their political leaders, and to die, if need be, for the cause that this represents. Certainly, as they are being conditioned, brainwashed, trained to think this way, the ground is being prepared for the future atheistic, blasphemous worship of Satan's man--Satan's substitute for Christ who alone has the right to rule as King of kings and Lord of lords.

In the rise of communism, something different from the rise of Russia can be seen. While the Scriptures seem to indicate that Russia as a political power will go down, the philosophy and the godlessness and the atheism which it has spawned in our modern day seem to be just the beginning of that which some day will sweep the entire world.

Those who have put their trust in the Lord Jesus can certainly have a wonderful refuge in the Word of God in facing these facts. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming first to take His body, the church, out of the world in the translation of the living and resurrection of the dead in Christ before these things come to their consummation, before Russia attacks the land of Israel, before this godless religion sweeps the world. But the very fact that these forces are in the world today, Russia, a great nation, poised to the north of the Holy Land, Israel in its place, already a nation of wealth and significance and a prize to be sought, indicates that the end may be near. Ezekiel described the building of cities without walls and anticipates a time when Israel would be secure and at rest. We see today the remarkable preparation for events which will take place after the rapture of the church. God is setting the stage in Israel, in Russia, and in communism for world events that will end the age.

We certainly must realize that this situation is not going to remain static, that it is rapidly moving to a consummation. In that consummation we believe the first important event will be Christ's coming for His own. If there ever was a generation of Bible-believing Christians who had a right to look forward to the

coming of the Lord momentarily day by day, on the basis of what they see in the world, it is our present generation. Even unbelievers are telling us today that things cannot go on as they are much longer.

An interesting commentary on the widespread expectation of a coming world climax is found in the present tension between Israel and the Arab world. The efforts of Israel to secure a peace have been unavailing because of fanatical opposition on the part of the Arab world to any sort of a settlement with Israel. Any Arab ruler who would attempt to negotiate with Israel would be in danger of assassination even as one king of Jordan has already been killed. Jewish leaders, however, are still longing for the day when peace can be consummated. One of their leaders made the statement in the hearing of the writer to this effect, "Sooner or later there will rise someone who will make a covenant with the people of Israel, and as soon as he does it, while he may be very unpopular before he does it, he will be hailed as a hero and as a leader in the Middle East."

In Daniel 9:26 there is the prophecy of "the prince that shall come" who will make a covenant with Israel. We cannot presume that the covenant Israel hopes for today is necessarily Daniel's covenant, but it might be. When this Israeli leader was asked when this might come about, he replied, "It could be any day." This coming from the lips of one who is not of the Christian faith and who does not know the prophetic Scriptures was certainly almost prophetic in its character. The hour of the Lord's return may indeed be very, very near.

The rise of Russia and the widespread power and influence of communism are two important factors pointing to the conclusion that the stage is being set for the end of the age. The future invasion from the north obviously fits into our contemporary scene and adds its important evidence that time is running out and that the nations will soon move into their final crisis.

The invasion pictured in Ezekiel 38 and 39 is probably, however, not the last invasion of the king of the north. As previously indicated in Daniel 11, there is evidence that the king of the north will again come upon the Holy Land. According to Daniel 11:40 a series of actions will take part in the great battle and world struggle which will be under way at the very time that the Lord Jesus Christ returns in power and glory. As this event takes place several years after the debacle of Ezekiel 38 and 39, it appears that the king of the north is able by that time to put another army in the field and again becomes a factor in the struggle with the Roman ruler. Details of the second invasion are not given, however, except the mention in Daniel 11 and intimations that an army comes from the north in the very last days of the age.

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