

# The Russian Invasion of Israel

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Scripture reading: Ezekiel 38:1-16; 39:1-12

The Bible prophesies a big end-time war which will be waged against Israel by an alliance of countries under the leadership of Russia. The mere scale of this military operation indicates that it will be pursued as a “final solution” to the Jewish problem with a view to replacing Israel with an Islamic caliphate controlled from Jerusalem. If this scenario is realised, Israel’s hopes will be thwarted of remaining in control of Jerusalem while awaiting their Messiah to appear on the Mount of Olives, judge their enemies and to restore the throne of David in Jerusalem. The kingdom which Islam envisages is quite different to the one in which Israel features, and the Muslims are prepared to share their wealth and political influence with a super power like Russia if it will assist them to achieve their objective – quickly and decisively with overwhelming force.

According to Ezekiel 38 and 39 various countries in the Middle East, Eastern Europe and North Africa will, under the leadership of Russia, engage in a fierce battle against Israel to bring this country down and wipe it from the world map. In terms of the etymology of national and place names which are used in these two chapters, most of them can be directly related to modern countries – at least as far as the major role players are concerned:

*The land of Magog.* Genesis 10 tells us that Magog was a grandchild of Noah. The descendants of Magog lived to the north of the Caucasus Mountains in the present Russia, and are the most important ancestors of the Russians.

*The prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal.* Rosh or Rush was one of the tribes that descended from Magog, and they lived near the Volga River for a long time. Meshech and Tubal were younger brothers of Magog (Gen. 10:2) and also settled in the area known as Russia today. Meshech was the father of the Moschi, from which the noun “Moscow” is derived. Tubal is the founding father of the Tibereni who lived on the shores of the Black Sea.

*The far north.* Moscow, the Russian capital, is due (yet far) north of Jerusalem. The Assyrians, ruled by the king of the North, lived just north of Israel (cf. Dan. 11:40). Russia, however, is described as the country which is in the far North.

The prophecy in Ezekiel 38 and 39 clearly applies to “the latter days” and was therefore not fulfilled during Old Testament times. Neither is it a symbolic or allegorical description as it specifically refers to an attack against the restored people of Israel, whose land “had long been desolate” (Ezek. 38:8). Israel was restored from their international dispersion in 1948, while Russia has only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century become a superpower who can arm other nations and take the lead in waging a major war.

Since 1948, Israel has grown remarkably and also built up a very strong defence force. Ezekiel describes the restored Israel as a land of open villages, without walls and having neither bars or gates, where people dwell safely. However, because of all the threats posed by hostile nations around them, as well as thousands of radical Palestinians in their midst, Israeli’s do not really dwell safely. But it is true that they do not, as in ancient times, build walls around their cities for security purposes. The many kibbutzim also lie open on all sides. According to a Messianic Jewish scholar, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, the word “safety” is actually the Hebrew word “betach” which suggests a “false confidence and security”. That means that Israel is simply living in the land in a false confidence of their current military strength and its ability to ward off attacks. The sudden and unexpected Russian invasion will therefore be a big surprise and disillusionment to Israelis.

Ezekiel mentions the following allies who will join Russia in its invasion of Israel to bring an end to the Jewish occupation of the land:

*Persia*. The name of Persia was only changed to “Iran” in 1935. After the Islamic revolution led by the Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979, this country became strongly anti-Israel, with political as well as religious leaders making repeated calls for the extermination of the Jewish state. Russia has concluded a military treaty with Iran and also supplies scientific and technological aid to them in the field of nuclear research. Israel and various other countries fear that Iran aims to develop nuclear weapons for the purpose of destroying Islam’s enemies. Iran also arms and financially supports terrorist groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza, who are both committed to bringing Israel down.

*Libya* (*Put* in Hebrew) is an Islamic country which has fallen into anarchy after deposing Colonel Gadhafi during an uprising. The warring Islamic factions in Libya have one thing in common and that is their common hatred of Israel.

*Ethiopia* (*Cush* in Hebrew) experienced radical changes after the death of Haile Selassie in 1974 by first becoming a communist country which was later transformed into an Islamic state. However, ancient Cush had wider boundaries which also included the present Sudan. It is evident that in North Africa there are various Muslim countries that are strong candidates for a Russian alliance against Israel, with the view of establishing an Islamic caliphate in the Middle East.

*Togarmah* and *Gomer*. These two ancient peoples inhabited parts of Asia Minor, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and it is not clear with which of the modern nations in this region they have a direct relationship. There are various possibilities, such as Turkey as well as Muslim states in the former USSR. In due course it will become evident which countries will enter into an alliance with Russia. At any rate, apart from the five allies of Gog described by Ezekiel he also refers to “many people” who will be with Russia, without identifying them (Ezek. 38:6). It is obvious that a large number of countries – possibly all Muslim – who are intent on obliterating the Jewish state, will participate in the attempted destruction of Israel under the command of Russia.

The leadership role of Russia is not only due to their strong defence force and advanced weaponry, but the Lord destined this situation to punish Russia: “Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you O Gog” (Ezek. 39:1). The reason for divine retribution against Russia is because they have played a big part in promoting hatred of the Jews while also, since 1948, supplying vast quantities of weapons to the enemies of the Jewish state. Furthermore, they offered military training to militants from Arab states. They do not even hesitate to assist Israel’s biggest enemy (Iran) in obtaining nuclear technology, thereby endangering the future existence of Israel. The judgements against Russia constitute the beginning of an extended range of judgements of the Lord during the coming tribulation period, which strengthens the supposition that this invasion will occur after the rapture.

As far as religion is concerned, the Russians themselves do not lean towards Islam in any large numbers, but they fully realise that if they assist Islam to achieve their eschatological dream of a global caliphate in the Middle East, Russia may largely benefit through extended power and influence in this strategic part of the world, and maybe also in the acquisition of oil riches. Religiously speaking Russia is in a kind of no-man’s land. They are no longer committed to atheism as was the case during more than 70 years of communist domination but (except for relatively small groups of evangelical believers) they do not know true Christianity. Since their newly-found freedom in 1990, large numbers of Russians joined the Russian Orthodox Church, but the evangelical character of this church is dubious.

In an article in *The Economist* of 31<sup>st</sup> July 2015, titled *Russians feel less positive towards religion now than they did in 1990*, it is stated, among others: “Over the quarter-century since the collapse of the Soviet system, Russian feelings about religion have changed a lot. In Soviet times, the state expected and encouraged citizens to be atheists. Now a loose affiliation to a

religious faith has become the national default mode; a plurality of Russians tell pollsters they are Russian Orthodox, while significant minorities identify with Islam, Buddhism or Judaism. But a survey published a few days ago showed [that] ... the general effect of religion on human welfare is viewed in much bleaker terms than in 1990. The proportion of people who think religion does more good than harm to society has slumped from 61% to 36% while the share detecting more harm than good has risen from 5% to 23%.”

Russia is clearly involved in the Middle Eastern conflict to advance selfish considerations such as the expansion of its power, and will have no problem to sacrifice Israel if it is deemed beneficial to them. However, they don't realise that by doing so they will help to establish an antichristian kingdom in the Middle East which will be diametrically opposed to God's kingdom and Israel's role in this kingdom. Russia will be punished for this act of rebellion. The Lord says that Gog will be led out of his country with hooks in his jaws to participate in the war in Israel. Through circumstances they will therefore be forced to go beyond only playing an indirect role as they will also physically assist their Arab and other allies in their war against Israel. When they actually make this evil move, Russia and its allies will have a fatal appointment with their destiny. The Lord said to Gog: “You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the people who are with you” (Ezek. 39:4).

### **A dangerous alliance with Islam**

Russia does not realise that a military and political alliance with any of Islam's factions is not only an act of opposition against Israel and the God of the Bible, but also a joining of forces with the kingdom of darkness. Anyone who becomes involved with this campaign, promotes the objectives of radical Islam and only expedites his own ruin. Russia has already overstepped this dangerous boundary and is now being pulled deeper into an unholy war by hooks in its jaws. The fatal decision which they made was to conclude a military treaty with Iran and Syria, which obligates them to render assistance in the event of any attacks against these two countries. Still more, it involves Russia with the subversive politics of power which is perpetrated by these two countries – not only against Israel and its allies but also against other factions of Islam. The infighting in Islam is very serious and has already given rise to bloody civil wars. Various Arab states were involved with battles of this nature, but the biggest one of them all is presently being waged in Syria, and Russia is deeply involved.

The two biggest religious factions in Islam are the Sunnis who comprise more than 80% of all Muslims, and a powerful minority group of Shias who are mainly settled in Iran, Iraq and Syria, with smaller groups in many other countries. *Sunnah* means *Tradition* and refers to the fact that this group observes a collection of traditions (the *hadiths*) which are regarded to be on the same level as the Koran. They recognise all the caliphs who rule in the Muslim world as successors of Mohammad, while the Shias regard the first three caliphs as intruders who wrongfully usurped the position of Mohammad, and whose teachings are also rejected. There is bitter enmity between the Sunnis and Shias.

According to the Shia version of Islam, the 12<sup>th</sup> descendant of Mohammad, known as the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam or the Mahdi, disappeared in the year 941 and went into hiding at the well Jamkaran in Iran. The Shias believe that he will return when the world is filled with oppression, wars and tyranny, and that he will then be the head of a global Islamic caliphate. Iran is waging a fierce ideological (and planned military) battle against all the adversaries of Islam – that firstly includes Israel, but also all non-Islamic states, particularly countries such as the USA and its allies who are supporting Israel and also attacking Islamic targets. Iran believes that the struggle against Islam's enemies should escalate, even to the extent of leading to a world war, and to this end they secured the assistance of Russia, even though Russia does not fully realise what they have committed themselves to. Iran is the largest instigator of terrorism against Israel, and continuously supplies financial support and weapons to groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in the Gaza area of Israel. These groups have already received thousands of

rockets to conduct attacks on Israel, and they continue to do so unabatedly. Syria is the most important thoroughfare for logistical aid to terrorists along Israel's borders. Despite this situation, Russia continues to support and defend the revolutionary minority government in Syria.

The infighting in Islam is just as violent and complicated as their struggle against the non-Islamic world. President Bashar al-Assad of Syria is the leader of a minority of Shias in a predominantly Sunni country. All the opposition groups are Sunnis, and are regarded by Russia as enemies who should be attacked – also the more moderate opposition against Assad's regime. At the most radical end of the opposition in Syria is the Islamic State (IS) who have already occupied large parts of Syria and Iraq and declared it as part of an Islamic State.

Russia has already conducted several attacks on Shia strongholds, but IS responded violently and in October 2015 they planted a bomb in a Russian passenger plane which was on a flight from Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt to St. Petersburg in Russia. The plane crashed in the Sinai Peninsula, killing all 224 passengers and crew on board. In this way Russia got more involved with the struggle between the warring parties in Islam, and committed themselves to large-scale reprisals. Russia is engaged in a highly troubled mission as they bomb all the bases of opposition groups in Syria – also those that are supported and armed by America in an effort to dethrone Assad. This action also puts America and Russia on a collision course.

The multiple jihads ("holy wars") which Islam wage among themselves, and also against everybody outside Islam, is the theme of various books by well-known authors such as the Messianic Jew, Joel Rosenberg. Some of his books are fiction literature but nevertheless based upon very likely scenarios. Among these is a series of books on Iran's jihad against Israel and America, i.e. *The twelfth Imam*, *The Tehran Initiative* and *Damascus Countdown*. Furthermore, there are also *The Last Jihad* and *The Ezekiel Option* in which the Russian invasion of Ezekiel 38 and 39 is depicted. Another author, Joel Richardson, has written the following books, among others: *The Islamic Antichrist*, *Mideast Beast: The Scriptural case for an Islamic Antichrist*, and *When a Jew Rules the World*. In the last-mentioned book Richardson reviews the dangers of anti-Semitism and replacement theology, and also refers to the dispensation of true peace which will dawn after the antichristian struggle against Israel, the return of the Messiah and the restoration of the throne of David in Jerusalem.

However, at the moment we are still in the heat of the battle with its intensity further building up. Russia, America and many other countries are unfortunately busy committing big errors of judgement by becoming involved with any of the parties in the internal Islamic jihad. Apart from the struggle between Sunnis and Shias there are also antagonistic groups within Sunni ranks who are highly hostile towards one another. The Wahhabis in Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt are some of the largest groups in the Middle East. But there are also extremist Sunni groups such as Al-Qaeda and Islamic State who insist on fundamental Islamic reforms such as the strict observance of sharia laws. That involves, among others, the execution of converts from Islam to other faiths, the stoning of unfaithful wives, and the prohibition against the erection of any churches or temples of other faiths in the territory of a Muslim country.

### **Superficial unity in Islam**

The only opportunity for united action in Islam is when they are threatened by a common enemy from outside, e.g. Israel or America. When one considers Russia's allies in Ezekiel 38 and 39, at least those that are mentioned, it is evident that they include both Shia and Sunni Muslims in Eastern Europe, Asia Minor, the Middle East and North Africa. The emphasis will therefore shift away from an internal Islamic faction fights to an external struggle against an enemy from outside their own ranks. The common objective of the establishment of a Muslim caliphate with Jerusalem as its capital, which should be under the control of a descendant of Mohammad, will at least ensure temporary unity of purpose among the warring parties in this faith. All of them are

looking forward to the coming of this conquering militarist, “saviour” and future world leader of Islam.

### **Intervention by God**

The outcome of the Russian/Islamic invasion of Israel will be highly surprising, unexpected and extremely dramatic. The one moment Israel will still be faced by extinction while the invasion grows in size and covers the land like a cloud, and then the Lord will suddenly destroy the invading forces upon the mountains of Israel. Fire will descend from heaven (Ezek. 39:4-6) and a very big earthquake will occur (Ezek. 38:19-23). Everybody will be able to see that it is an intervention by God, and they will give honour to Him for the victory. It will take seven months to bury the corpses of the enemies, while the spoils of war will be burnt for seven years. Israel will probably throw the weapons and other military hardware into furnaces to melt them and then use the iron to manufacture agricultural and industrial implements.

The Lord says that by this act His Name will become known in Israel and also among the nations:

“I will set My glory among the nations; all the nations shall see My judgment which I have executed, and My hand which I have laid on them. So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God from that day forward. The Gentiles shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity; because they were unfaithful to Me, therefore I hid My face from them. I gave them into the hand of their enemies, and they all fell by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I have dealt with them, and hidden My face from them. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will bring back the captives of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name – after they have borne their shame, and all their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, when they dwelt safely in their own land and no one made them afraid. When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies’ lands, and I am hallowed in them in the sight of many nations, then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who sent them into captivity among the nations, but also brought them back to their land, and left none of them captive any longer. And I will not hide My face from them anymore; for I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD” (Ezek. 39:21-29).

It is conspicuous that important phases in Israel’s end-time restoration often coincide with major wars. During the First World War Israel’s territory was liberated from Turkish (Islamic) control and became a British mandated territory. That paved the way for the transfer of the land to Israel to initiate the physical restoration of Jews to their land. During the Second World War, in the midst of great anxiety and distress, Israel as a nation was delivered from their international dispersion and forced to take refuge for survival in the land of their fathers. Immediately following the coming Russian invasion of Israel, and specifically in the light of God’s intervention, Israel and the nations will again recognise the supremacy of God. However, religion without the Messiah, Jesus, is not true religion, and is usually confined to mere ritualistic expressions of faith. When the Messiah returns at the end of the tribulation during the height of the war of Armageddon, the remnant of Israel and the nations will be truly saved and reconciled to God.

Faith in God will nevertheless be almost universally confessed after the miraculous intervention in Israel. This will be a clear shift in mind-set from a secular worldview in which the supernatural dimension was denied, to a mind-set in which divine intervention is fully recognised. However, faith in God without explicit recognition of Christ’s position as the only Mediator between God and man is not true, biblical faith.

### **Serious deception**

Satan will cunningly exploit the destruction of the big invading force in Israel in favour of his own kingdom, thereby trying to maintain the support of the majority of people on earth. He will do that

by revealing the Antichrist and false prophet as global leaders and the custodians of a multireligious new world order, but that can only take place after the true church as the withholder of the Antichrist has been removed from earth by way of the rapture (1 Thess. 4:16-17). The sudden awakening of spirituality after Israel's miraculous delivering will then be used by the devil to instil faith in people's hearts in the false god of this world (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4), as well as a false universal christ.

The Antichrist will endeavour to derive as much benefit as possible from this situation by claiming that he averted a third world war through his action, that he saved Israel from sure destruction, and that he prevented a threatening crash of the world economy. As confirmation of his claim that he was sent and empowered by God he and his second in charge, the false prophet, will perform spectacular signs and wonders in which they will also mimic the fire which descended from God to destroy Israel's enemies. John says the following about the false prophet: "And he exercises all the authority of the first beast [the Antichrist] in his presence, and causes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast. ... He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men" (Rev. 13:12-13).

The Antichrist will also claim that he can establish peace among the nations – also between Muslims and Jews. He will declare Jerusalem as an international city and the Temple Mount as a place of worship for all faiths. The Jews will rebuild their temple there, and it will function alongside the Islamic mosques which will all enjoy full recognition. Israel will be so grateful that their "Messiah" has come and saved them from sure destruction, that they will immediately conclude a covenant with this false "Messiah" (Dan. 9:27; John 5:43). The same will be done by Islam and all other faiths: "And all the world marvelled and followed the beast. So they worshiped the dragon [the false god of this age] who gave authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" (Rev. 13:3-4).

The aftermath of the Russian invasion in Israel will therefore not be the revelation of God's kingdom under the leadership of the true Messiah, but the revelation of Satan's kingdom under the leadership of the false messiah. There will first be another world war before Israel and the nations will be delivered from the spiritual deception of the false messiah, and only then will all of them receive, worship and follow the true Messiah. Zechariah says: "In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east" (Zech. 14:4). The Spirit of the Lord will convict Israel of their sins and they will be completely reconciled to the Messiah. The following is said in a Messianic prophecy:

"And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn. In that day there shall be a great mourning in Jerusalem. ... In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. It shall be in that day, says the LORD of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered" (Zech. 12:10-11; 13:1-2).

On that day the Antichrist and false prophet will be cast alive into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:19-20). The abominable image of the Antichrist will also be destroyed together with other idols that were worshipped in Jerusalem or anywhere else in the world. Subsequently, during the millennial reign, only Christ will be worshipped and the knowledge of the Lord will fill the world as the waters cover the sea (Isa. 11:9). All the nations will worship the Lord in Jerusalem and they will no longer walk after the stubbornness of their evil heart (Jer. 3:17). The same applies to Russia and all the Muslim countries who jointly tried to annihilate Israel. The spiritual character of the Middle East will also drastically change. Isaiah says:

“In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian will come into Egypt and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians will serve with the Assyrians. In that day Israel will be one of three with Egypt and Assyria – a blessing in the midst of the [earth], whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance” (Isa. 19:23-25). It is only Jesus who can make a big and lasting difference in the lives of individuals and nations.

The devil plays a big part as the deceiver of the nations to promote spiritual deception and idolatry. Peace on earth will only prevail when he will be incarcerated in a pit where he will be shut up and sealed “so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished” (Rev. 20:2-3). After his release from the pit he will again wage a big war against Jerusalem and God’s kingdom – on a much bigger scale than the coming Russian invasion of Israel: “Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them” (Rev. 20:7-9).

Interestingly enough, this last rebellion will again be instigated from the present Russia – Gog in the land Magog. This is the country where the first communist dictatorship with its official policy of atheism was founded on 1 May 1917. That evil ideology brought indescribable suffering and death to millions of people – particularly Jews and Christians. Communism has subsequently fallen, but now Russia joins hands with radical Islam in Iran and Syria which are equally hostile towards Christianity and Israel.

When will the nations of the world – also the free world in the West – discover where their salvation is? Post-Christian Europe is on a course which leads away from the only Prince of Peace, and that is the reason why the end-time nations will march against Jerusalem, and by implication also against God’s kingdom, where the Lord will judge them (Zech. 12:2-3; 14:12-13). It is therefore not only Russia that is on a wrong course but, broadly speaking with the exception only of small evangelical groups, the entire world. That is the reason why a time of divine wrath upon the world during the tribulation period of seven years is unavoidable:

“For behold, in those days and at that time, when I bring back the captives of Judah and Jerusalem, I will also gather all nations, and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will enter into judgment with them there on account of My people, My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations; they have also divided up My land” (Joel 3:1-2). The United Nations is virtually unanimous in their view that the territory of Israel and the city of Jerusalem should be divided between Israel and the Palestinians, and in this regard they are completely outside the will of God.

In end-time prophecies, particularly those that relate to Israel, the Lord not only warns Russia against collaboration with Israel’s enemies but He warns all nations of the world against sinful alliances and acts that can lead to their downfall. On the other hand, there are promises of rich blessings to those who bless Israel and honour the Word of God that went out from Israel across the globe. Those who remain faithful to God, His Son and His Word, will inherit His heavenly kingdom.