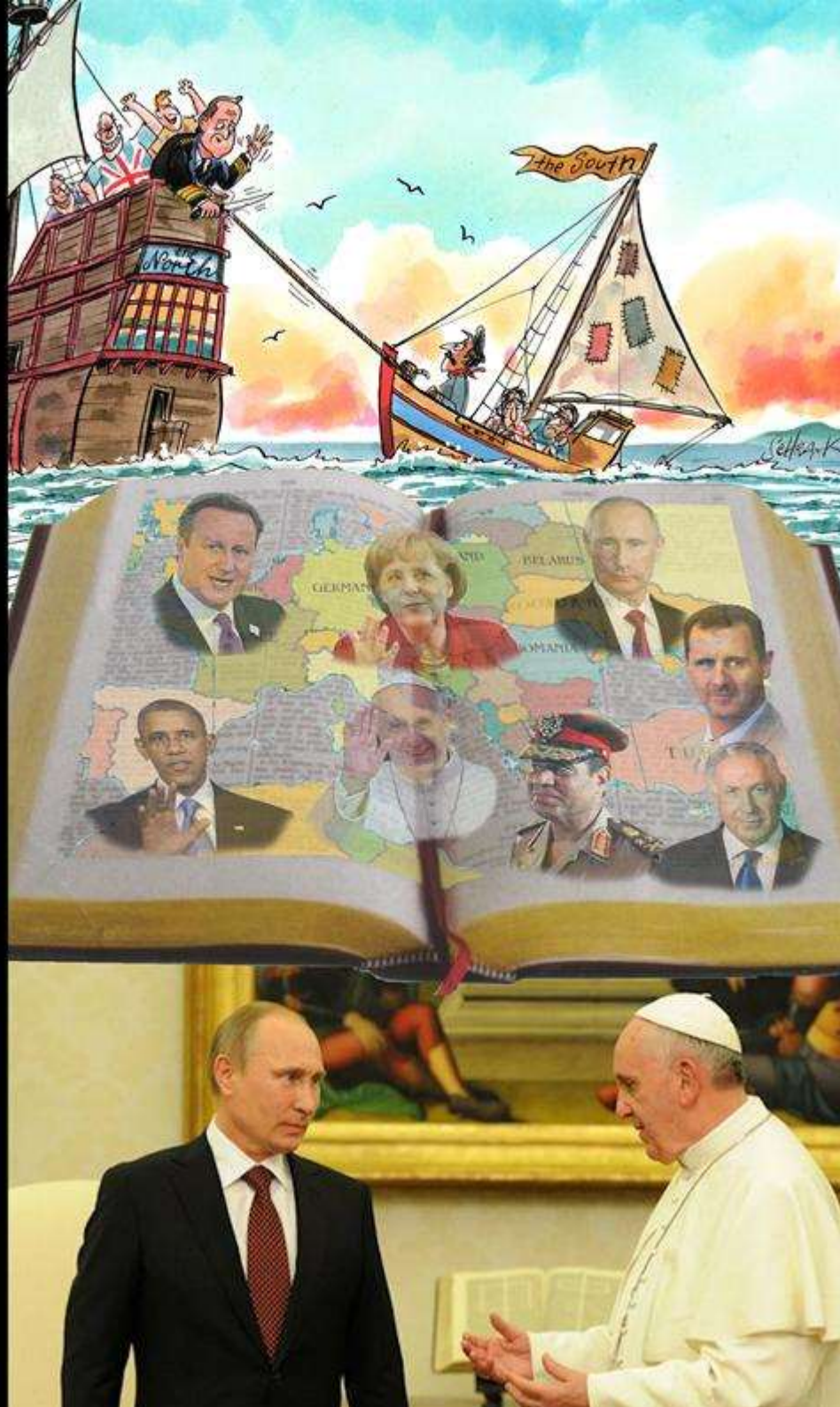


MILESTONES 2013

Don
Pearce



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MILESTONES TO THE KINGDOM

***A Review of the
World Events of
2013 in the Light
of Bible Prophecy***

Don Pearce

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JANUARY 2014

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Preface

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When times are unstable there is opportunity for many new and unexpected events among the nations. The last two or three years have impressed us with this fact and 2013 comes on top of them. Any one of fifty items during the past year would have drawn the attention of our brethren of previous decades. Through the word of the prophets, God has provided a general plan of what to expect in the end times as His saints await the arrival of His Son.

We have been so blessed to have these general plans even if every event of every region doesn't immediately seem to fit the final picture. Let us take note of the rapidity with which things can change and swing around. We began the year with Israel emerging from a cloud of Hamas rockets upon her southern cities, Egypt with no concern for her neighbour and allowing militant bands of Islamists to take over the Sinai; and Iran supplying Gaza with weapons and ammunition through Sudan and Egypt and Sinai. The year closed with the Muslim brotherhood leaders in prison, the Sinai all but settled, the illegal southern tunnels to Gaza closed and Egypt's new military government in evident co-operation with Israel.

In January 2013 the pre-eminent influence in the Middle East was the United States of America, as it has been for the last 20 years or so. A year has past and the voice of the President has hardly been heard on the great matters of the Middle East. The Secretary of State has been fluttering to and fro, to the Middle East, and to Europe but with surprisingly little effect. Where is the voice of the United States? Israel looked to America to support her in the issue of Iran's nuclear weapons plan but in the end saw her old friend sign off on a dialogue with the new President of Iran, together with Russian and European allies. Again America promised action if Syria employed weapons of mass destruction in her civil war with the rebellious opposition. In the end Russia again stole the show, despite the evidence of weapons of mass destruction; and the US was smothered in diplomatic promises. Israel again looked on in horror. Equally disillusioned, Saudi Arabia, the largest customer of American arms sales spoke of buying planes from Russia!

In the indecision of America, Russian President Vladimir Putin has played a remarkable role with apparent success in so many key regions. In the last few months of 2013 he made important agreements with Turkey and with Egypt, he flew into Israel to provide kindly advice on how to extract her newfound wealth of oil and gas, to persuade her not to interfere with his present and intended supplies of energy to Europe, offering alternative options to Netanyahu. In the Syrian crisis Putin's plan carried the day to the humiliation of Mr Kerry of the US, and he polished it off with further arms deals with Syria, promising security to Assad the wicked destroyer of 120,000 lives of his own Syrian people. Russia has solved her problem of naval bases in the Mediterranean with the expansion of docks and facilities

in Tartus, Syrian's second largest port and has grandly increased her fleet for the control and surveillance of the sea of nations.

It is sad to see the willingness of Israel to co-operate with Russia's evil plans. Putin has made many promises to Israel in respect to oil and gas, general trade, security among her neighbours and assured her of protecting the life of Israel! What credibility could we give to the overtures of this Russian leader? Note the times Russia has fuelled the armies of Israel's neighbours whose sole desire is to destroy the nation of Israel. The Arab's military forces have many examples of tanks, guns, planes and rockets that were made and supplied by Russia. And even as Putin was active with Israel, he was tying up commercial and political arrangements with all the original members of the old Soviet Union—Belarus, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Turkistan, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Uzbekistan, Georgia, and others. He has again clarified Russia's dominance of the passage south of the Caucasian mountains, surely Gog's military road to the mountains of Israel.

We see the shades of Gog in all the moves of Putin, not only immediately above Israel, but also in his continuing embrace of Germany, the powerhouse of Europe and in his growing affinity with Pope Francis. In an almost breathless spate of diplomacy Putin has put Russia at the front of world issues, to the west, to the east and to the south.

Was a Czar ever more confident than this man?

Such facts bestir our hearts with the promises made to the fathers of Israel and the solemn words of their prophets.

Our Lord Jesus Christ sees all these events from heaven as we observe them on earth!

Surely our redemption draws near.

We put our hand to the plough for 2014.

Brian Luke

Secretary

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Abbreviations used

EU European Union. Was the Common Market, EEC, then EC, now EU

m = million; **bn** = billion; **GDP** = Gross Domestic Product; **WEB** = World English Bible. Sadly because of copyright we can't use many modern versions. This one is fine. \$1= £0.60; €0.73; AS\$1.12; CA\$1.26; NZ\$1.22 at 1-1-14 rates.
\$1 million = £603,000, \$1 billion = £603,000,000 approx. \$ always US\$.

Author's important notes

I would like to especially thank my family, Bre. Kevin Allison and Alan Clarke and the CSSS for their helpful comments on the draft. It is all put together in the last three weeks of the year, so please bear with its imperfections! *Milestones* quotes extensively from overseas sources, and as **I retain original spellings, etc., check whether it is a quote before blaming the proof-readers!**

Conventional religious terminology is used, sometimes put within “ ”, but often not. Readers will appreciate my understanding on the falseness of many of these terms. Conventional names are used: e.g. West Bank, Palestinians, Pope. Dates are always day-month-year. Any items in **bold** are my emphasis, i.e. not emboldened in the original, unless stated. I am very grateful for items sent in; please ensure date and source indicated.

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Helpful aids. Booklets obtainable from: Bible Magazine agents, CSSS agents or Milestones.

The True Gospel. Defended and Explained by Bro Graham Pearce

This 72 page booklet looks at the Hope of Israel and the meaning of the New Covenant.



World Events & the Coming of Zion's King by Bro Graham Pearce

This 100 page booklet examines most of the scriptural passages concerning the time of the end events and puts them in a logical order. At the same time Bro Graham Pearce looks at some of the newer ideas and show where they fall down when examined by Scripture. For brethren and sisters looking for the return of their Master, it is essential reading.



Milestones Snippets free email news service

Sent out 2 or 3 times a week, these are the items that catch my eye and form the basis of writing the *Bible Magazine* quarterly updates and the annual *Milestones*. See inside back cover for details.

Chapter 1:

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A SYNOPSIS

2013 has proved to be yet another significant year

It almost becomes a cliché; every year brings surprises, but as we get closer and closer to our Master's return, it is thrilling to see the speed of progress towards the picture described by the prophets of old when the nations will gather together to destroy God's people. For 6,000 years the angels have been working so that the stage will be set for this dramatic clash, when the Kingdom of Men stands opposed to the things of Israel's God. Then God's mighty power will be revealed against those who would despise His people. Although we know that the final pieces of the prophetic jigsaw will not drop into place until after the Master's return and the judgment seat, yet the swiftness of the changes we see, encourage us not to lose heart or be discouraged. The fact that many in our community are falling away or appear to lack interest in these things is sad, but not surprising. A lack of faith and vision is a characteristic of the end of each of God's ages in His outworking plan.

Our part is to serve our Lord and Master as diligently as we can, knowing that we must shortly give an answer for our lives. We live in a world which Isaiah characterises as being covered with “darkness” and the people as being covered in “thick darkness”. (ch 60:2 RSV) Few believe in God the Creator, having been deluded by the powerful promoters of evolution, who proclaim a freedom to do what you will, because there is no God. No wonder God's judgments will be so heavy upon a world that chooses not to acknowledge or serve Him.

So what have we seen in 2013?

We have seen the virtual demise of the Muslim Brotherhood, which at the start of the year seemed to be so strong. Their ultimate goal was the establishment of a Caliphate stretching from North Africa to Turkey, involving Israel's destruction and Jerusalem as its capital! At the year-end it is a broken power. It started with its fall from government in Egypt in July and the battering of its bases in Sinai by the Egyptian military who took over power. Their strong ally Hamas experienced the closing of its vital smuggling tunnels on a scale never achieved by Israel—at the hands of the Egyptians. Hamas' power in Gaza is under threat as the inhabitants of this small country suffer from the Egyptian stranglehold on its southern crossing at Rafah. In Tunisia in October the Brotherhood Party stepped down from government. A change of ruler in Qatar where the Muslim Brotherhood had their temporary headquarters has caused the movement to look elsewhere as it falls out of favour with the new ruler. Is this the end of Muslim Brotherhood?

At the start of the year it looked as if President Assad of Syria was on the way out, but at the year-end he is more firmly entrenched and having agreed to give up chemical weapons has taken himself out of the West's firing line. The success in the destruction of these dreadful chemical weapons has proceeded with remarkable speed; whether at the end of the process, Assad will have revealed all his sites, remains to be seen—and difficult to prove. It has added impetus to finding a

solution to this civil war which is in its third year as Assad freely pounds the ‘rebels’ with murderous, shrapnel packed bombs.

Who would have thought at the start of the year we would see Iran agreeing with the US to curb their weapon programme in return for lifting the crippling sanctions imposed by the West? It is not clear exactly what Iran has agreed to, or its willingness to cooperate with the weapon’s inspectors after years of giving them a run-around. Whatever the outcome, it has showed that President Obama would prefer to negotiate rather than flex his military muscles.

This has left Israel and the Gulf States in a difficult position. They feel that they have good reason not to trust Iran, and fear that she will continue down the pathway to a nuclear device. Obama seems to be withdrawing his military from the region. In a remarkable way, as we shall see, Israel has been drawn into working, behind the scenes, with Saudi Arabia in helping the new Egyptian government break the Muslim Brotherhood’s grip on the region and looking at ways of taking matters into their own hands in regards to Iran’s ambitions.

This has led to quite a shift in alignments in the Middle East during this year. To the south, the new Egyptian government is much more aligned with the Gulf States than under the Brotherhood and Israel is happy to see this and has played its part.

At the same time to the north, Iran, Iraq and Syria continue to cooperate and the seeming demise of the Brotherhood is causing Turkey to cultivate ties with Iran. So we begin to see the start of new groupings to the north of Israel and the south and east of Israel—a situation indicated by Daniel so long ago.

Following the break-up of the Soviet Union over 20 years ago, the countries between Russia and the EU are having to decide which way they turn. A German-led EU is keen to expand eastward; Russia is keen to resist this eastward expansion and President Putin is doing his best to thwart these plans. The final outcome has been pre-ordained. The image that King Nebuchadnezzar saw has yet to stand erect on its two legs and feet. We are witnessing the movement of these countries as they attach themselves to the appropriate leg! The division of the Roman Empire in the past guides us to the future situation. Ukraine hit the headlines in its struggle to choose which partner to align with.

Who would have foreseen that this year would have seen the dramatic resignation of Pope Benedict—unprecedented for over 600 years! The new Jesuit Pope has made a dramatic transformation of the respectability of the Roman Church in a very short time. A Roman Catholic writer in the *Daily Telegraph* described the rise in church attendance, especially in Italy and Europe as a ‘real miracle’!

This year we saw the growing power of the *False Prophet* of Revelation 16—the Papacy with Francis at its head; the *Dragon*—Russia led by Putin and the *Beast*—Germany guided by Merkel. Is this all co-incidence? NO! It is the inevitable climax to the ending of man’s misrule which will pitch the powers of man against God’s people. The growing hostility being experienced by the Jews of Europe is a further sign that this day is near.

Let’s take a quick glance back at an earlier Milestones and see what has changed.

Chapter 2:

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36 YEARS OF MILESTONES

Issue 2: Milestones 1978

36 years have passed since my father penned the first issue of *Milestones*. We briefly looked at the contents of issue 1 last year. In the second issue he led with a challenging heading:

What profit is there in prophecy?

We quote the first 2 paragraphs of what he wrote 35 years ago which is as apposite now as when it was then.

Unfolding events in line with prophecy continue as thrilling as in previous years. There is much to write about for 1978. But a word of caution is needful at the beginning. The spirit of 1 Cor. 13, is appropriate to this field of interest. Paul said that though he understood all mysteries and all knowledge, and had not love, he would be as nothing. So in watching prophecy being currently fulfilled, we must be careful not to allow ourselves to be excited and talkative, yet not giving due consideration to the implications of what is happening. The words of Peter are appropriate: *‘Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved (the end of the Mosaic world), what manner of people ought ye to be in all holy conversation and Godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness’* (2 Pet. 3:11-13).

In every age God has graciously given encouragement to His children by the word of prophecy, and our interest in this is very proper. It is a sad thing that today there is so little interest. Although we cannot know precisely when we shall be called to the Judgment, nevertheless seeing the prophetic word written so long ago, fulfilling before our very eyes, we must be impressed that God is not a God afar off, and that He is controlling the affairs of the world day by day; and, moreover, His purpose must very soon reach its completion. If we are giving attention to these things, we are more likely to maintain a right perspective on this present world, and realise that we must not be engrossed in that which is about to pass away. The exercising of the mind, comparing the Scriptures, seeking to understand, will help us to keep our minds and hearts focussed on divine matters and away from the world. It will also give us encouragement in seeing the power and faithfulness of God. As prophecy is seen to be fulfilled, we shall be strengthened to trust in Him, and acknowledge that He condescends to take note of our little lives, and that He cares for us.

1978 Pope John Paul II elected

He was elected in October, Milestones was finished in November, so there was little time to assess this new Pope, but the fact that the Pope was no longer an Italian, but from Soviet controlled Poland was seen as very significant.

The implications of changing from an Italian Pope to one from the Soviet-controlled Eastern Europe will take time to be revealed, but they must be considerable. It would seem that the Conclave regarded relations with the Soviet as now of primary importance. As we have already reported, Poland is the first Satellite country where the Vatican and Soviet have worked out a reasonable degree of co-existence, mutual respect, and practical co-operation. It looks as if Pope John Paul II has been chosen as a man that will strike as tough a bargain as possible on behalf of his Church, with the Soviet. He has the advantage of many years of this sort of negotiations; and has seen the worthwhileness of an accommodation with the Soviet.

How this man would change the face of Europe!

Persia threatened by Communist subversion

One of the few pictures was captioned, ‘Soviet-stimulated riots in Iran threaten the Shah’s regime’. An interesting paragraph told of the Communist penetration of the country, aiming to spread Soviet power further into the Middle East.

It is clear that Persia, surrounded on three sides by Soviet influenced countries is subject to mounting pressures and intrigues. The Soviet is very skilful at exploiting the internal unrest of a country, aiming to bring about the overthrow of the Government.

On 16th January 1979, the Shah and the Empress, fled initially to Egypt and Iran came under the control of Ayatollah Khomeini. Again in hindsight we can see what a significant event that that was, turning Iran from being in the Western camp, to being in the Soviet camp, in preparation for the still forthcoming role of being one of Gog’s companions. (Ezek 38:5)

The Israel-Egyptian peace negotiations

Following President Sadat of Egypt’s historic visit to Jerusalem in 1977, Israel and Egypt signed the Camp David accords which involved the very painful step of Israel withdrawing from the Sinai and handing it back to Egypt, with UN buffer troops on the borders. Again in hindsight this peace with Egypt has held with many ups and downs, but still has shaped Israel’s policy to her southern neighbour. In this issue my father looked at some of the prophecies concerning Israel and Egypt in these latter-days.

Bible prophecies and the nations ‘round about’ Israel

There were no descriptions of Israel’s booming economy—Israel was struggling, surrounded by many hostile Arab nations. Israel had in 1978 invaded southern Lebanon in an attempt to break the power of the PLO, but had to withdraw as a further UN peace-force force was put in place, with little effectiveness. Again there was an interesting section on relevant Bible prophecies that spoke of Israel’s later-day neighbours, making the point that these prophecies generally spoke of the final invasion by Gog rather than battles by neighbouring Arabs. One of these (Psalm 83) we will be looking at.

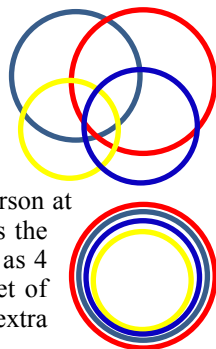
We turn to look at some relevant prophecies for our day.

Chapter 3

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CONCENTRIC PROPHETICAL CIRCLES

Yes, I know it is a strange heading, but hopefully it will enable us to understand the fascinating situation that is rapidly unfolding. We are used to reading four gospel accounts concerning the life of Lord Jesus. Each is written from a different perspective, each a different length and different author. Some details are in only one gospel, some are shared by all four. Yet they are all records of the same person at the same time period. We can integrate the records to give us the fullest picture of our Master's earthly life. We can view them as 4 separate circles, or we can slot them together to make one set of concentric circles. In addition to the gospels we have much extra information in the Psalms, in the Law and in the Prophets.



Overlapping prophecies of the last days

In the same way we can view the Bible prophecies of the end times concerning the time of Israel's coming destruction in preparation for her Messiah to appear the second time. It will not be this time as the Lamb, but as the Lion, the Saviour of his people in their hour of great distress. We have 5 basic pictures. Daniel 2 has a picture of **one** mighty image standing in defiance of Israel. A **two-fold** summary of the situation is revealed with the graphic description in Daniel 11 of the King of the North and the King of the South. A **three-fold** picture is to be found in Revelation 16, of a Dragon, a Beast and a False Prophet who gather to the land where Hebrew is spoken to meet their end at the Battle of Armageddon. We have a picture of **four** beasts of Daniel 7 which are judged by the Ancient of Days. **Many** nations are described as Gog and his companions come against Israel as described in Ezekiel 38. We also have numerous other pictures throughout the Old and New Testaments that give additional details. So one picture describes a single power, another 2 powers, another 3 and another 4 and yet others have many nations. Are these therefore describing different events? No! They are like the gospels which tell of the situation in Israel at the Messiah's first coming. These prophetic pictures are all aspects of the same end-time event. They are different aspects which we can see developing in their own 'circle'; we are seeing them increasingly overlap as we draw closer to the time of their fulfilment. At the final hour when these prophecies will reach the time appointed by God to begin to be fulfilled, then all these pictures will be found to fit neatly together like a ring of circles.

Why is it so complex? Why not just one prophecy and that's it? Well for a start God delights in complexity. Look at the world around us, there is nothing simple in God's creative works. How much more interesting is the world around us when there is not just one type of bird, but hundreds, or flowers, or trees, or humans—we are not clones but all individuals. And the situation at the time of the end is not simple! It will be the climax of man's misrule upon the earth when the nations gather to eliminate Israel from the face of the earth. It represents the actions of

many parties, all with different agendas. So it needs a complex set of pictures to describe the various scenarios.

It also has an even greater point. It illustrates the greatness of Israel's God. We don't know what tomorrow is going to bring forth, yet here is Israel's God incorporating in the writings of His prophets of 2,000+ years ago, a detailed, complex, picture of the alignment of different nations united in a common aim. It shows the incredible mind of our God. When it has all happened, and Israel are delivered and live in peace and righteousness and the Gentile nations acknowledge their folly and come to recognise Israel's God as the true and living God; then this statement that is repeated so often, will be shown to be true.

*Thus **will I magnify** myself, and **sanctify** myself; and **I will be known** in the eyes of **many nations**, and they shall **know** that **I am Yahweh**.* Ezek. 38:23

How exciting for us to be the generation that sees these things unfold. Let us lift up our hearts in excitement, yet with sobering realisation, that before these circles of prophecy slide into their final place, the Lord Jesus will be back, the judgment will have taken place and immortality bestowed. In the Providence (foreknowledge, the ability to see what is needed and ensure those needs are met) of God, the saviours will in that day have been prepared, in order to go forth with mighty power to save God's people who have been overwhelmed by their enemies and who are crying to their God for help.

The main themes of this year's Milestones

There are five main areas that we want to examine in this year's *Milestones*.

1. A series of prophecies that tell of the trouble ahead for Israel
2. A look over a couple of chapters at the prophecies of the nations that come against Israel
3. Seeing how 1 image and 2 kings and 3 systems and 4 beasts and a multitude of nations are all details of different scenarios which blend into 1 picture
4. To see how these are working out today by looking at
 - a. Changing allegiances
 - b. Changes in the Vatican
 - c. Changes in Russia
 - d. Changes in Germany
5. We shall also look at Israel and Britain

As always, we look at these themes with a mix of Scriptural exposition and happenings during the year.

So let's now look at the troubles that these prophecies lead us to expect will face the nation of Israel.

Chapter 4:[Back to Contents](#)**SOME PROPHECIES OF ISRAEL'S SCATTERING**

Last year we looked at the many prophecies about the time of the end, putting them into a sequence that guides us as to what we expect will unfold, helping us to make sense of current events. This year we want to reiterate the scriptural teaching that Israel is, for one final time, to be scattered from their land at the time of the coming invasion. Then in the next chapter we examine two prophecies. A large one—Daniel ch 2 concerning King Nebuchadnezzar's dream of an Image—and a small one, looking at Psalm 83.

We also want to have a short section on Creation. At first sight that has nothing to do with end time prophecy, but I hope when we come to this section in our final exhortation chapter, we shall see how important this topical subject really is!

Joel chapters 2 and 3

Joel gives details in his 2nd and 3rd chapters of an invasion that involves nations coming against Jerusalem. What dramatic language is used!

And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke.

The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the LORD come.

And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the LORD shall be delivered: for in mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be deliverance, as the LORD hath said, and in the remnant whom the LORD shall call. Joel 2:30-32

Peter in applying these words to AD 70, stops halfway through v32; indicating that its total fulfilment lies in the future. The political heavens are going to be overturned with great fury. The end result will be that Mount Zion and Jerusalem will no longer be a *cup of trembling* to its inhabitants but will be a place of safety for God's people because of the new heavens and earth that will be established here. How this great change is achieved is the message of chapter 3.

For, behold, in those days, and in that time, when I shall bring again the captivity of Judah and Jerusalem,

I will also gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat, and will plead with them there for my people and for my heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations, and parted my land. Joel 3:1,2

So here is a situation of Israel being scattered from their land one last time. Reading carefully the various prophecies it is clear that although we have seen Israel regathered, and a wonderful sign that has been, never-the-less there is to be a brief period when this situation is reversed. In their final hour of testing they are going to find themselves in the hands of their enemies. All the wonderful *works of their own hands* that they have relied on to withstand their foes, will prove of no

value in the face of a sustained onslaught by many nations from afar, determined to solve the Jewish problem once and for all time. The scattering of Israel one more time will complete the humbling of Israel. God's foreknowledge has determined that it will have the required effect. In their calamity they will cry out to their God and He will hear! Saviours are at hand to rescue them.

Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; Prepare war, wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up:

Beat your plowshares into swords, and your pruninghooks into spears: let the weak say, I am strong.

Assemble yourselves, and come, all ye heathen, and gather yourselves together round about: thither cause thy mighty ones to come down, O LORD.

Let the heathen be wakened, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat: for there will I sit to judge all the heathen round about.

Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great.

Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. Joel 3:9-14

Prior to their final scattering, God brings the nations against His people. This may sound odd, but this is exactly what happened when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians. God brought them against His people! It happened again in AD 70.

***The LORD** shall bring a nation against thee from far, from the end of the earth, Deut. 28:49*

As Paul says:

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. Heb. 12:11

So the end result justifies the means. Out of this time of testing there will emerge a holy and a righteous nation who reflect glory to God. This is God's purpose that the earth might be *filled with His glory*. This will be seen reflected in His son; the saints; Israel God's people and ultimately all nations. Joel pictures that God's judgments go forth from Zion. This necessitates the deliverance of Jerusalem from the hands of their enemies.

*The LORD also shall roar **out of Zion**, and utter his voice from **Jerusalem**; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.*

*So shall ye know that I am the LORD your God dwelling in Zion, my holy mountain: then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall **no strangers pass through her any more**. Joel 3:16,17*

It is clear that *strangers* have *passed through her* prior to this deliverance of Israel.

Zechariah's visions of Jerusalem's last captivity

There are some wonderful words in chapter 8:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury.

Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth; and the mountain of the LORD of hosts the holy mountain. Zech. 8:2,3

*Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Behold, **I will save** my people from the east country, **and** from the west country; **And** I will bring them, **and** they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem: **and** they shall be my people, **and** I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness. Zech. 8:7,8*

Without spelling it out, Zechariah paints a picture far removed from the present time. Something has roused God's jealousy and fury; clearly that was because, as the prophet speaks later, the nations have come against His city. Now it is easy to think, 'Surely God will not allow His city to be taken by these Gentile nations'. A careful reading of these passages returns the answer, 'Yes He does'! It is all part of His preparation of the nation. If the instant they are in trouble they are saved, it will not give them opportunity to show their faith. For Jerusalem to be taken by a multitude of enemies and her inhabitants killed, scattered or carried off as prisoners of war; will be Israel's time of extreme chastening. For the Gentiles in occupation, it will be a time to celebrate the victory of Christendom—for most of the nations listed in Ezekiel 38 are 'Christian' countries—over the 'Christ-killers'. It will produce a remnant in Israel who in this day of trial, cry out as never before, for help from their God. In due time that cry will be answered, their enemies destroyed in the land and their Messiah revealed. Israel's heart is not right with God now, but God knows the outcome! What comforting words later in this chapter:

*Yea, **many** people and **strong** nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to **pray** before the LORD.*

*Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a **Jew**, saying, **We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you.** Zech. 8:22,23*

Strong nations! Interestingly Strong's has *powerful* (specifically, a paw) because lions and bears are strong animals. The humbled latter-day Assyrian lion, whom we think of as the Russian bear, will seek to worship Israel's God! God's Plan will result in nations being forced by the coming troubles to acknowledge the greatness of Israel's God.

Zechariah's last 3 chapters form a powerful picture of events when Jerusalem is besieged.

Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling unto all the people round about, when they shall be in the siege both against Judah and against Jerusalem.

And in that day will I make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all people: all that burden themselves with it shall be cut in pieces, though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it. Zech. 12:2,3

True the success or otherwise of this attack on Jerusalem is not indicated in this chapter. When we come to the next chapter we read these verses.

*And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but **the third shall be left therein**.*

*And I will bring **the third part through the fire**, and will **refine** them as silver is refined, and will **try** them as gold is tried: they shall call on my name, and I will hear them: I will say, **It is my people**: and they shall say, **The LORD is my God**. Zech. 13:8,9*

At what time period do these fearful words apply? Some have suggested AD 70 when there was a very great slaughter of Jews. But this can't be the case for it is described as a time of refining and those that escape call upon God's Name and He will acknowledge them as His people. This certainly didn't apply to the Jews sold as slaves at the fall of Jerusalem. And that was over 1900 years ago! Others apply it to the Holocaust, but the figures don't match and those that escaped are not in the happy position of being acceptable to God. Far from it, for the time immediately prior to the coming invasion is described as a time of *trespass* in God's eyes:

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name;

*After that they have **borne their shame**, and **all their trespasses** whereby they have **trespassed against me**, when they dwelt safely in their land, and **none made them afraid**.*

*When I have brought them **again** from the people, and gathered them out of their **enemies' lands**, and am **sanctified** in them in the **sight of many nations**;*

*Then shall they **know** that I am the **LORD their God**, which **caused** them to be led into captivity among the heathen: but I have **gathered** them unto their own land, and have **left none** of them any more there.*

*Neither will I hide my face any more from them: **for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel**, saith the Lord. Ezek. 39:25-29*

Note the sequence. Time of peace, followed by them being taken captive, then being regathered, never to be removed again, with Holy Spirit gifts outpoured when Israel shall have been brought into the New Covenant. When will this be? It only makes sense as part of that chastening which does allow their enemies to triumph for a brief time. This period of huge losses reflects God's assessment of those who would repent. As in New Testament times, although many repented and were baptised, it was only a small portion of Judah's population.

Zechariah chapter 14 continues with more details.

*Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and **thy spoil shall be divided** in the **midst** of thee.*

*For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be **taken**, and the houses **rifled**, and the women **ravished**; and **half of the city shall go forth into captivity**, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city.*

***Then** shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. Zech. 14:1-3*

Who is this addressed to? Jerusalem. Her spoil is to be divided amongst her conquerors. Gog comes for a *spoil* and a *prey*, goods and people. Russia has long desired the ever growing skills of the Israeli nation—remember Russian speaking Jews make up about 1/6th of Israel's population. Israel hosts the biggest diaspora of Russian Jews. So their skills will be prized to be taken back home. In recent years we have appreciated the huge spoil that any conqueror of Israel will be able to lay their hands on. It is not hard to picture the great rejoicing amongst Israel's foes in that day when they have control of these things. How long this success will last is not indicated. It could be a year or so. It will appear that the God of Israel has no power, or interest in His people, and that, as the churches teach, Christians are the true heirs of Israel's blessings.

How foolish of man to boast against the great God of Israel! God's judgements will be poured out like a savage storm.

*Behold, the name of the LORD cometh from far, **burning with his anger**, and the burden thereof is **heavy**: his lips are full of **indignation**, and his tongue as a **devouring fire**:*

*And his breath, as an **overflowing stream**, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to **sift the nations** with the sieve of vanity: and there shall be a bridle in the jaws of the people, causing them to err. Isa. 30:27,28*

The context of this passage is of God's judgment against the proud, boastful Assyrian. The angel of God ensured that by the morning *they were all dead corpses!* (Isa. 37:36) The Gogian power of the latter-days is likened to the Assyrian. He too will come to his end. The rest of the chapter describes the various manifestations of God's wrath. The end outcome is that—eventually—the world will learn that Israel's God is the only true God. In the Kingdom Age:

*... it shall come to pass, that every one that is **left** of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles.*

And it shall be, that whoso will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain. Zech. 14:16,17

Ezekiel 39:2-5 indicates that all the enemy armies in the land of Israel will be destroyed, but obviously there will still be people *left* back in their home countries.

(Only the AV in v2 says *leave a 1/6th part*, all other versions follow RV's *lead thee on*.)

Daniel's picture of Israel's invasion

These are matters we looked at last year, but briefly Daniel 11 speaks of the situation at the time of the end. Described in chapter 11:36-39 is the history of the *King* whom history showed was the military might of Rome, the successor to the *little horn of the goat* of chapter 8, which was established by Constantine in the city of Byzantium. This he rebuilt and named after himself—Constantinople, today's Istanbul in Turkey.

The closing verses then describe a latter-day situation of the King of the South pushing at him—the *king* of the previous verses.

And at the time of the end shall the king of the south push at him: Dan. 11:40

This was fulfilled when Britain occupied Egypt and pushed back the Turk out of the Middle East, rolling him back to his borders as they now exist. Was Turkey *the King*? Only in the sense of occupying the territory on which the *King* had his throne. His being pushed back enabled Israel and the other Middle East countries to eventually come into existence, i.e. the present time. It continues:

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. Dan. 11:40

Here is a picture of Gog as the latter-day King of the North, coming against the territory of *the King*—Turkey and then as the remainder of the chapter explains, flowing downwards through to Egypt and taking Israel in the process. The countries of *Edom, Moab and Ammon*, escape capture. This is today's Jordan. It would appear that these are spared for two reasons. One is that they are occupied by powers summarised as Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish who are opposed to this invasion, but also, in God's mercy, here is a place of refuge for fleeing Jews.

The chapter closes with his final destination; having swept down Israel's coastline into Egypt, he comes back to take Jerusalem. There, Gog established his headquarters.

And he shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him. Dan. 11:45

How long a period is not revealed, but *plant* indicates not of a fleeting duration. Jeremiah 45:10 has a similar picture, of the time when Nebuchadnezzar had conquered Egypt and sat in judgement against his enemies. If this were not the case, if Gog came into the land and was immediately struck down by Christ and the saints, then it would not be the darkest period in Israel's history. Nor would it be a time of testing, sorting the wheat from the chaff.

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was

since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. Dan. 12:1

Ezekiel's picture of Israel's downfall

The book of Ezekiel closes with visions of the Kingdom Age and the Temple that is to be built as the centre for Divine worship. They are preceded by a series of chapters (34-39) that contain 7 prophecies to do with the nation of Israel at the time of the end. In these chapters are many pictures of coming troubles for Israel and sections talking of the return to the land. We have to discern, whether these are speaking of the setting up of the State of Israel in 1948, or whether they refer to a yet future gathering, having been scattered yet once more from their land.

Although we can see much in these chapters which we can apply to their homecoming in the 20th century, yet there are aspects in some of the prophecies, like those of chapters 36 and 37, which compel us to recognise that in their total fulfilment, there has to be a re-gathering at the hands of their Messiah, at a time when they recognise him as their Messiah and therefore the scattering they talk about is yet to happen. Some would question why God would scatter His people again having drawn them back to their land. However, it is clear that they are no more prepared for their Messiah's coming than their fellow countrymen of 2,000 years ago. God, in His wisdom, knows that they have to be tested. Under trial, faith is made manifest. If this is the pathway for us, it must be for His nation. The trials to come will reveal their faith or lack of it. God says that the remnant that will be saved in that day will have been prepared so that they accept that their Messiah is none other than Jesus Christ of Nazareth. The details in these chapters add to our understanding.

Also, thou son of man, prophesy unto the mountains of Israel, and say, ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD:

*Thus saith the Lord GOD; because the enemy hath said against you, **Aha, even the ancient high places are ours in possession:***

*Therefore prophesy and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Because they have **made you desolate, and swallowed you up on every side, that ye might be a possession unto the residue of the heathen, and ye are taken up in the lips of talkers, and are an infamy of the people:***

Therefore, ye mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord GOD; Thus saith the Lord GOD to the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes, and to the cities that are forsaken, which became a prey and derision to the residue of the heathen that are round about;

*Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; **Surely in the fire of my jealousy have I spoken against the residue of the heathen, and against all Idumea, which have appointed my land into their possession with the joy of all their heart, with despiteful minds, to cast it out for a prey.***

*Prophesy therefore concerning the land of Israel, and say unto the mountains, and to the hills, to the rivers, and to the valleys, thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I have spoken in **my jealousy and in my fury, because ye have borne the shame of the heathen:***

*Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; I have lifted up mine hand, **surely the heathen that are about you, they shall bear their shame***. Ezek. 36:1-7

A grim picture! But because there will be a faithful remnant who will cry out in their distress, God will hear, God will save.

*And **I will multiply upon you man and beast**; and they shall increase and bring fruit: and **I will settle you after your old estates**, and will do better unto you than at your beginnings: and **ye shall know that I am the LORD**.*

*Yea, I will cause men to walk upon you, even **my people Israel**; and they shall possess thee, and **thou shalt be their inheritance**, and thou shalt no more henceforth bereave them of men.* Ezek. 36:11, 12

So when we come to chapters 38 and 39, bearing in mind the chapters evidently run in parallel, not sequentially, it is clear that there is a period when Gog and his companions are the occupiers of the Land, prior to God's judgements being poured out by God at the hands of Christ and the saints.

Psalm 83—a latter-day picture

Several readers have asked about when Psalm 83 slots in. It was dealt with very briefly 35 years ago in *Milestones 1978*.

This Psalm of Asaph's—the last of his 12 preserved psalms, obviously has a latter-day setting, from the last two verses, yet it is not easy to see when it was initially fulfilled. It is clearly a picture of many nations who had proved to be troublesome in the past, rejoicing in the destruction of Israel. Although we can't find a primary fulfilment that matches all the detail, we can see a yet-to-be fulfilment at the time of Israel's final scattering, which will see Israel restored to favour and the nations to recognise Israel's God of Yahweh.

It opens with a call to God to act because of the treachery of the nations.

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**;* Ps. 83:1-5

We have an echo here of the passage we have just looked at in Ezekiel 36:2. We see that the nations to be listed in the following verses have a serious problem with Israel's God! They hate Him and His people and their hidden ones. So much so that they have banded together to wipe Israel off the map of nations, in order that they might be forgotten! Moreover they are confederate against *thee*, Israel's God. Here are several indications that the coming invasion of Israel is religious in nature, as well as there being an economic element.

The word for *tumult* comes from the word for the roar of waves, a phrase used extensively in Scripture of the nations when angry. Psalm 46:3 uses similar language. Who are Israel's *hidden ones*? Surely it is Israel's God and his myriad of angels. Unlike the gods of the nations which could be seen, idols of wood and stone, Israel's God was hidden from view. Israel as a nation was so different from the other nations in this respect—or at least they were when under good leaders and kings. There's nothing like being different to arouse hostility. We see it today in the fact that Israel chooses to run the nation primarily for the benefit of Jews! This should not be surprising, but it certainly arouses hostile feelings in people today!

So here is a confederacy of nations whose aim is to eliminate Israel's God and to destroy His people from being a nation!

The 10 countries in this confederacy are listed in verses 6-8. The 1st mentioned is

Edom, who was one of Esau's descendants and frequently noted in Bible prophecies as the implacable enemy of Israel.

Ishmael was descended from Abram and the Egyptian slave girl Hagar. They spread from Havilah to Shur. (Gen. 25:18) Enemies too of Israel and associated in Scripture with the Midianites, whose leaders, Oreb and Zeeb, feature in v11

in an incident based on Judges 7:25, whom Gideon slew. **Moab** features in its own right. In the time of ending of the Wilderness Journey and in the time of the Judges they had been foes to Israel. They were finally brought into subjection by David (2 Sam. 8:2), although linked with the house of David via Ruth. The **Hagarenes** seem to be descended from Hagar and therefore relatives of Ishmael. They feature in 1 Chron. 5:10, 19-22 and lived east of Gilead, beyond Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh. They seem to have been very wealthy from the spoil mentioned. **Gebal** was a branch of the Ishmaelites according to Josephus. **Ammon** was descended from Lot's younger daughter and appears in many scriptural passages as Israel's enemies. The **Amalekites** were again descendants of Esau and were greatly cursed when they attacked the stragglers of Israel on their journey to Mt Sinai. (Exod. 17:16) The **Philistines** again feature many times in Israel's early history as enemies, stemming initially from their jealousy of Isaac's possessions. (Gen. 26:14). **Tyre** was the Phoenician capital, and seems to have always maintained friendly links to Israel, which points to a latter-day application where Lebanon of today is armed to the teeth in the hope of eliminating Israel. Finally **Assur** is listed. Initially descended from Shem (Gen. 10:22) they seem to have absorbed the ways of Ham's son Nimrod who established his kingdom in their midst by building Nineveh, which grew to be the capital of Assyria. All these countries have long disappeared and other peoples occupy their territory. Two countries conspicuously absent from the list are Egypt and Syria.



Asaph sees in this assembly of nations the irrational hatred that he had seen in his days and had read about in the Scriptures of his day. He pleads with God to act as He has done in the past. This Psalm is used to this day by Jews in time of trouble, when they call upon their God for help when facing grave challenges. Asaph uses two examples of God's past intervention. The first was of Gideon's victory against the confederacy of the Midianites, Amalekites and children of the east (descendants of Keturah?). Here Gideon's few men put the huge army to rout through the work of the angels, resulting in the two chief princes, Oreb and Zeeb meeting their deaths at the edge of Gideon's sword. The other example was the destruction of Sisera's mighty army at the hands of Deborah and Barak. (Judges 4,5) Both were unexpected, crushing victories, in which the forces of nature were involved, wrought by God to save His people from those:

Who said, Let us take to ourselves the houses of God in possession. Psal. 83:12

Clearly, what follows shows that this is a future application, for they are to be obliterated, in order that nations might understand that this is the work of God in defence of His people Israel. This has not happened in the past, but assuredly will do in the future.

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 YAHWEH, art the most high over all the earth. Psal. 83:13-18

As we noted, two countries that we might expect to be listed—Egypt and Syria—are not mentioned. This fits with our picture that we have painted in last year's *Milestones* and in this; that these countries come under the heel of Gog at the same time as Israel does. The King of the North, having taken Turkey and regained Constantinople and therefore possessing the territory of the King of Daniel 11, comes south, which would involve taking Syria, Israel's coastal plain and Egypt, before turning back to take Jerusalem. It is not difficult to see the nations around Israel, joining in the despoiling of Israel as they did at the time of the Babylonian invasion. They meet their doom with Gog and his companions, on the mountains of Israel. So it is fitting that Syria and Egypt are not mentioned. In the Kingdom Age there will be blessings for Egypt and Assyria (Isa. 19:22-25) and for the true Arabs who repent and submit to Israel's King, they will have possessions allocated to the east of Israel, in a region now barren, but then flowing with rivers, covered in trees a paradise indeed for those who will be brought to honour Israel's God.

These passages speak clearly that there is to be a time of trouble for Israel at the time of their invasion. We now look at Daniel chapter 2.

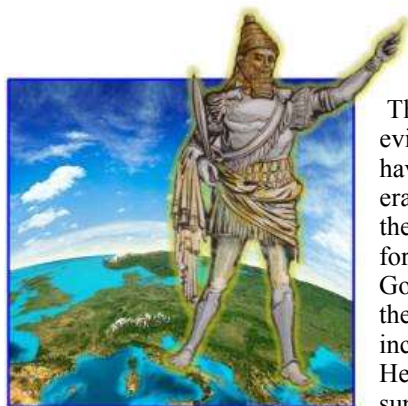
Chapter 5

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WHAT SHALL BE IN THE LATTER DAYS—1 IMAGE

Daniel chapter 2 is one that we all love and know, yet it contains some very relevant information for us as we see it preparing to stand upon its iron-clay feet. This has never happened in its whole existence—indicating exceptional times.

Nebuchadnezzar's Image



Apart from a brief look at this prophecy in Milestones 2010, it is a number of years since we re-examined this major prophecy.

This first prophecy recorded by Daniel is evidently a reflection of the King's pride at having begun the conquest of Israel. He tries to eradicate the things of Israel's God by changing the Hebrew names of Daniel and his 3 friends, for they all incorporated a title name of Israel's God—El or Yah. These were stripped away and they were given Babylonian names that incorporated names of Nebuchadnezzar's gods. He foolishly thought that this would show the superiority of his gods over Yahweh, God of Israel.

Through this dream he was to be brought to realise that the wisdom of Babylon was foolishness with God. God had indeed delivered His people into Nebuchadnezzar's hands, but this was in punishment for Judah's waywardness.

The key verse is:

*But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar **what shall be in the latter days**. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; Dan. 2:28*

So although we are well acquainted with the 4 empires of history spanning many hundreds of years, yet we are to understand that the core of the prophecy is that this is a prophecy about the situation in the latter-days.

When Bro Thomas was asked, 'Does not the Image represent a succession of empires?' he wrote:

The metals in their order do, but not the Image. There are not four images, but four metals in one image. Therefore one image of divers metals, one dominion of divers constituents. *Herald of the Kingdom* 1852

Never, in its history has the image been complete so that it can stand upon its feet in its entirety. This colossus of human pride represents the final and still future picture of the Kingdom of Men as it stands in defiance of God's plan and purpose with His nation of Israel. Its final destiny is to be utterly broken.

*And in the days of these **kings** shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume **all these kingdoms**, and it shall stand for ever.*

*Forasmuch as thou sawest that the **stone** was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what **shall come to pass hereafter**: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. Dan. 2:44, 45*

Not only broken in pieces but evidently ground to powder and blown away.

*Thou sawest till that a stone was cut out without hands, which smote the image upon his feet that were of iron and clay, and **brake them to pieces**.*

***Then** was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, **broken to pieces together**, and became like the **chaff** of the summer threshingfloors; and the **wind carried them away**, that no place was found for them: and the stone that smote the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. Dan. 2:34,35*

Perhaps this indicates a 2-stage process of destruction. A breaking to pieces of the image on the mountains of Israel at the hands of Christ and the saints, followed by a longer period of breaking until it can be blown away—an indication of the subsequent warfare between the Lamb and the nations until all have submitted to his will.

Avenge their blood

The transition from a colossal image to a great mountain that fills the earth speaks to us of a time of great trouble and destruction. These are not ‘happy days’, but sadly gives an indication of the hardness of men’s hearts, who have turned their back on God the Creator and cling to the shifting sands of evolution. One hears criticism from those who have turned their back on the Truth that we glory in such blood-shed. Whilst it will be a time when God avenges the blood of His many saints that had been shed during the time of man’s domination and the millions of Jews who also perished, it is not a matter of glorying. Under the leadership of our Master, in God’s mercy we will be directed to do what is necessary. It will be an **honour** to serve so righteous a judge.

Let the high praises of God be in their [the saints] mouth, and a twoedged sword in their hand;

To execute vengeance upon the heathen, and punishments upon the people;

To bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron;

*To execute upon them the judgment written: **this honour have all his saints**. Praise ye the LORD. Psa. 149:6-9*

If this is the only way to subdue the nations, then God’s foreknowledge is such that this must be the case. As we look out on a world that is characterised by violence

and immorality, the scale of these judgements is not surprising. The picture that Isaiah paints of this time period is one of darkness.

*For, behold, the **darkness** shall cover the earth, and **gross darkness** the people: but the LORD shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. Isa. 60:2*

Not just darkness but *gross darkness*, or as other translations put it, *deep* or *thick darkness*, or *blackest night*! This time period is to be the biggest intervention in human affairs since the time of the Flood. That judgement came when man had been on the earth for a mere 1,600 years or so. How much more widespread is the evil of today.

Isaiah has a dramatic depiction of Christ and his saints travelling up to Jerusalem to pour God's wrath on the nations that have gathered to destroy Israel. It is a picture of the one body, without the support of God's nation ("the people") for indeed it is to the nation's defence that they come.

Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save.

Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat?

*I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for **I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment.***

For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come.

*And I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold: therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and **my fury, it upheld me.***

*And I will **tread down the people in mine anger**, and make them **drunk in my fury**, and I will bring down their strength to the earth. Isa. 63:1-6*

It is not a pretty scene, but we must not be sanitised by the humanism of this world. This is God's viewpoint. If people deliberately come into *His land*, against *His people* of Israel, then they have to suffer the consequences.

As the Psalmist David expressed it:

Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered: let them also that hate him flee before him.

*As smoke is driven away, so drive them away: **as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God.***

*But let the righteous be glad; let them rejoice before God: yea, **let them exceedingly rejoice.** Ps. 68:1-3*

When Nebuchadnezzar's image stands up, its destination is not spelled out in so many words, but it is clear that the great mountain that replaces it is God's Kingdom and we know where that is centred—Jerusalem. So it is clear that the image is representing the collective forces of the nations that come against Jerusalem. Many prophets speak of this time—we have looked at some of them in the previous chapter and there can only be one decisive battle in the land, because the outcome is Jesus as King and Israel his people. So the accounts of the great battle in Israel have to be woven from the several accounts. Each prophet adding a detail, in a similar way to how the four gospels build up a larger picture when fitted together.

The image in the latter-days

Let's see what Nebuchadnezzar's image tells us of the situation in these last days.

We are shown a colossus of a man, standing upon its two legs, clearly in opposition to the things of God. Although headed by a latter-day Nebuchadnezzar,

it is a composite man representing many kingdoms that have come together for one purpose. The feet and toes are a strange mix of iron and clay. (v41, 42) These two materials that form an unstable mix are doomed for destruction. Iron is



clearly the symbol of Rome, so there is a strong Roman element to the nations that make up these feet. Clay—miry clay—takes us back to Genesis 2 and the creation of Adam. Clay is a symbol of humanity. In today's terms we see democracy (clay) mixed with iron of Rome. As can be seen in the so-called democracies of eastern and western Europe, behind the scenes, authoritarian power is wielded. It is to be found in the unaccountable corridors of power in Brussels and in the authoritarian ways of Putin and his colleagues.

But the iron of Rome is seen in more than authoritarian power, it is found in the authority and influence of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. We saw in *Milestones 2011* and *2012* when looking at the later vision of Daniel in chapter 4, where the cut-down stump of the Babylonian tree was banded with iron and brass bands to preserve it until *seven times* should pass over it. As a long-term prophecy *seven times* represent 2,520 years and takes us from the fall of Babylon to our own era, the late '70's, where we have witnessed a remarkable resurgence in the churches. It started in the West with the Polish Pope, John Paul II who is credited to a large extent with the overthrow of communism. This had the effect of liberating the Russian Orthodox Church from



its decades of suppression, and it now flourishes under Putin in a way that must cause envy to Pope Francis! As we shall see, the Pope's agenda is to increase Papal influence in the corridors of power in the EU. We understand from the prophecy of Daniel ch 2 that although the legs and feet constitute the military might of this colossus, (the two legs were the 2 fold division of the Roman Empire East and West) yet the direction comes from its golden, Babylonian, head—a pointer to the religious element. The Papacy and the Russian Orthodox Churches will be playing an important role in causing the nations to come against Israel. For the aim of destroying Israel as a nation is more than just the desire to take a prey; various prophecies indicate a religious crusade against the Jews.

In the day when this colossus stands, it will be an awesome expression of the Kingdom of Men in defiance of the things of God. The nations will speak and act as one. In order for the image to be complete it must have control of the territories of the metals that preceded it. The final territory will be the land of Israel. When, to change the imagery, Gog is in possession of Egypt and the Holy Land then the image truly can be said to be complete and standing up. Its duration of standing therefore would appear to be very short in relation to the 2,600 years of preparation!

The 2 feet and 10 toes



It is possible that at the time when it stands up it will be found to consist of ten kingdoms, corresponding to the 10 toes, although it may just be conforming to human anatomy. However God's knowledge is wonderful and there may be precision, just as we have two arms that corresponded to the dual Medo-Persian Empire and the 2 legs with the eventual East-West division of the Roman Empire. We cannot speculate which these toe nations are and whether 5 from the east and 5 from the west. We see their extension in the detail of the beasts described in Daniel chapter 7. If we put all 4 beasts together we have a total of 7 heads and 10 horns, language picked up in the Beast of the Sea of Revelation 13 with its 7 heads and 10 horns. Unlike the image, which represents east and west united, this Beast represented Western Europe and at that time in history one can name the 10 horn kingdom territories upon which the beast developed.

It is possible that at the time when it stands up it will be found to consist of ten kingdoms, corresponding to the 10 toes, although it may just be conforming to human anatomy. However God's knowledge is wonderful and there may be precision, just as we have two arms that corresponded to the dual Medo-Persian Empire and the 2 legs with the eventual East-West division of the Roman



Other prophecies of Daniel which have latter-day applications are the tree of ch 4 showing the latter-day revival of the Papacy; the little horn of the goat of ch 8 and the King of the North of ch 11 showing the role of Russia.

It is so interesting to see in these latter-days, when once again the Land of Israel is home to a Jewish nation, that the eyes of the world are constantly being brought back to this narrow strip of land at the meeting point of the continents. At the same time we see Europe and Russia, moving to the formation of two strong camps, corresponding to the two feet upon which the Image will stand. Yet, like toes on the foot, within each of those two camps there is a degree of independence, under the overall control of each foot. Toes play an important function in the human body.

Specifically, the toes assist the human while walking, providing balance, weight-bearing, and thrust during the gait. *The Importance of the Toes in Walking*. Janey Hughes, Peter Clark, & Leslie Klenerman.

The individual toes vary greatly from the big toe to the little toe. These two toes both have separate, independent muscles to control them compared to the other three. Yet they work together to form an essential part of the foot. It is a pretty good description of modern nations, varying in size and strength, yet working as part of a 'foot'. The fact that we see two feet forming is a wonderful sign to the times in which we live! They are not North-South feet, but East-West feet, so that either it faces Israel or turns it back to Israel. Although it will be found to have turned its back on Israel's God, we can be confident that what the king Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream would be facing Israel with hostile intent. We shall see as we proceed, the evidence for the formation of the feet and toes today, in preparation for the Image to stand upon the mountains of Israel awaiting the fatal blow upon its iron-clay feet by the stone power of the back-on-earth Christ and his immortalised brethren and sisters.

The future movements of Russia are notable signs of the times, because they are predicted in the Scriptures of truth. The Russian Autocracy in its plenitude, and on the verge of dissolution, is the Image of Nebuchadnezzar standing upon the Mountains of Israel, ready to be smitten by the Stone. When Russia makes its grand move for the building-up of its Image-empire then let the reader know that the end of all things, as at present constituted, is at hand. The long-expected, but stealthy, advent of the King of Israel will be on the eve of becoming a fact; and salvation will be to those who not only looked for it, but have trimmed their lamps by believing the gospel of the kingdom unto the obedience of faith, and the perfection thereof in "fruits meet for repentance". J. Thomas, *Elpis Israel Preface*. p. xxi, 1850

It is clear that the details of the Image provide us with valuable clues as to "what shall be in the latter-days". We shall now briefly look at the other main prophecy 'circles' and see how they speak of the same events and see their gradual alignment today.

Chapter 6

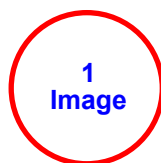
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HOW 1 = 2 = 3 = 4 = ?!

*As we remarked earlier in chapter 3, we have 5 main pictures of end-time prophecies, plus many other smaller ones. Daniel chapter 2 has a picture of **one** mighty image standing in defiance against Israel. A **two-fold** summary of the situation is revealed with the graphic description in Daniel ch 11 of the King of the North and the King of the South. A **three-fold** picture is to be found in Revelation ch 16, of a Dragon, a Beast and a False Prophet who gather to the land where Hebrew is spoken to meet their end at the Battle of Armageddon. We have a picture of **four** beasts of Daniel ch 7 which are judged by the Ancient of Days all at the same time, with different degrees of punishment. We then have several pictures containing a **multitude** of nations; Gog and his many companions of Ezekiel ch 38 or all the nations who come against Jerusalem of Zechariah 12. These 5 different scenarios are however all speaking of the same event—the time of Israel’s yet-to-come invasion and their subsequent salvation. In addition, there are the prophecies of Joel, Malachi, as well as other prophecies in the books of Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation. Just as the 4 different gospels tell of Israel’s Messiah’s first coming—as the Lamb to take away sin, so these end-time prophecies reveal different aspects of Messiah’s second coming—as the Lion of the tribe of Judah to save his people. At that time it will be seen that these different pictures, like our concentric rings that we considered in chapter 3, all merge to build up one picture.*

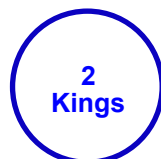
One Image

As we quoted from Bro Thomas, “There are not four images, but four metals in one image.” As we saw, it represents the uniting of the nations in opposition to Israel. It stands upon two feet, indicating to us that for the brief period of its standing, Europe and Russia will be bound together, united in a common aim—that of the elimination of Israel. It will be directed by a Babylonian head of gold. Zechariah’s prophecy of the women in the ephah of chapter 5, shows how Babylon’s power, which combined religion and rulership in one personage, was transferred to Shinar, (“enemies tooth”) the symbolic title for Rome. Here the two roles became separated into a Pope in Rome and Emperor in Constantinople. When the Image stands, Russia will be in possession again of Constantinople and will provide the bulk of the Image’s military might. The spiritual oversight of this crusade will however fall to the papacy in Rome. We expect to see reconciliation between the Orthodox Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. As we saw earlier, where the Image is to stand is not spelled out, but other prophecies and the fact it is to be replaced by *the stone which fills the whole earth*, indicates it is standing in Israel when smitten on its iron-clay feet and broken to pieces.



Two Kings—North and South

Daniel chapter 11:40-45 speaks of a King of the North and a King of the South at the time of the end. This picture is based upon the situation following the death of Alexander the Great, when his



Empire was divided initially under 4 of his generals. But in relation to the Land of Israel, which is of course the concern of Scripture, only two of them, the Ptolemaic to the South and the Seleucid to the North were of concern, with Israel sandwiched in the struggles between them. It is clear that a similar situation is yet to unfold. The King of the South pushes at 'him' (v40), the occupier of the territory of the earlier 'King', (v36) and points to Turkey being pushed back by Britain in the picture from Revelation 16:12 of the *drying up of the River Euphrates*, allowing the State of Israel eventually to be set up. This is followed by the King of the North sweeping down and occupying Egypt, the territory of the King of the South, before taking Jerusalem, which it establishes as its Head Quarters. We see that the King of the South power is swept away by the King of the North, so we finally only have one king. This then matches with those previous two sections. We can see the importance of the reference in Ezekiel 38:13 to the southern powers of Sheba, Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and companions for these as the remnants of the King of the South power, oppose Gog's actions. It also reinforces the picture that the invading power is from the North. Moscow is virtually on the same line of longitude.

Three powers: the Dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet

This is the time-of-the-end picture presented in Revelation chapter 16. The Dragon had appeared earlier in Ch 12 and the Beast, very briefly in ch 11:7, but mainly under different phases, in chapter 13. The Dragon we relate to the occupier of Constantinople, the Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire, known as the 2nd Rome. With that city's fall in 1453, the Dragon power moved to Moscow,

which was extensively rebuilt, modelled on Constantinople. Moscow became the 3rd Rome. This is the present seat of the Dragon power, though in its final stage it will be back in control of Constantinople, known today as Istanbul. The Beasts in chapter 13 are described as the Beast of the Sea, the Beast of the Earth, and the Image of the Beast. The Beast of the Sea was given its power by the



3
powers

Dragon. (v2) The Beast of the Earth spake like a Dragon. (v11). The Beasts are various phases, sometimes concurrent, of the Western Roman Empire. The Beast of the Sea being centred mainly in France in the territory of Gomer, another of Japheth's sons, who migrated to Gaul. The Beast of the Earth, related to the Germanic phase, the Holy Roman Empire, occupying Magog's territory which was adjacent to Gomer's. The Image of the Beast relates to the territory of the Papal States centred in Rome. These were all swept away: the Beast of the Sea a long

time ago and the other two in the time of the French Revolution. Since that time of destruction described in the first 5 Vials of Revelation ch 16, we have a single Beast. (v13) We see this Beast developing in the coming together of Western Europe into what is now the EU. Initially it was driven very much by France in her desire to contain Germany. ‘Gomer’ was the dominant power over ‘Magog’. As time moves on, Germany has become the dominant power and leader of the EU.

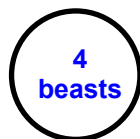
The False Prophet is an apt symbol for the latter-day Papacy. These three powers are causing the nations to turn against Israel. Their official teaching coming out of their *mouths* is described as:

... the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. Rev. 16:14

We can see that these three entities are adding details to the earlier pictures. Although 3 separate entities, they will be working together as one. The Beast and the Dragon are the two legs of the Image and the False Prophet is the Babylonian head. Equally these are the same powers which will be parts of Gog and his companions, and also correspond to the powers that make up the King of the North—for they are all powers located to the north of Israel.

The 4 beasts of Daniel ch 7

We have little difficulty in seeing that the 4 beasts of Daniel 7 relate to the 4 kingdoms of the Image of chapter 2. Although in the past they have existed as separate Kingdoms, just like the image metals, it is clear that this is not the situation at the time of the end. In both chapters it is clear that the 4 kingdoms merge into one for the purpose of defying Israel’s God. So again we have no problem with seeing this as yet another aspect of what the other prophets tell us. It is clear that the 4th Roman Empire was to outlast the others and be the dominant power, but as we see in the next chapter, when the Image stands up, it will cover the territories of all 4 Empires. Daniel 7:11,12 shows that God’s judgements are most severe on the 4th, Roman, Kingdom. It is to be destroyed by the Ancient of Days, whereas the power of the other beasts is taken away, but they are not destroyed. Although they have all despised and persecuted God’s people, saints and Jews, the worst blasphemer is Europe, led by the harlot woman representing the Roman Catholic Church. Hence the judgement poured out on the Beast and the False Prophet is described as *a lake of fire*. (Rev. 19:20)



Gog and his many companions

Here is one great military power, Gog, whose source of power is derived from the fact that he is *of the land of Magog*.

Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal: Ezek. 38:2,3 WEB



We refer readers to *Milestones 2008* and Bro John Allfree’s book *Ezekiel* for the evidence, suffice it to say that we can trace the progress of Magog, who was one of

the sons of Japheth (Gen. 10:2) to the region of today's Germany. Rosh is the ancient name of the area today of Ukraine, from where Russia was eventually colonised and derived its name. Meshech is the ancient name of Moscow and Tubal of the River Tobal which gave rise to the city of Tobolski in 16th century. One is the political capital of Russia, the other, in Siberia, where much of Russia's energy sources are located.

So the leader is of Germany, but prince of Russia. We have reported on the 32 year-old Romanov heir-apparent and his mother in the past. Georgi Romanov or to give him his full title, Grand Duke George Mikhailovich of Russia, is favoured by the people and more especially the Russian Orthodox Church as the one who, if the monarchy were to be restored, would be the Tsar. With a German prince as his father and Russian princess as his mother, he is very much a potential Gog of the land of Magog, prince of Russia, etc. The listed companions are all sons of Japheth, with the exception of Libya (Phut) and Ethiopia (Cush), who are descendants of Ham. The absence of any descendants of Shem indicates that this is very much a coming together of non-Arab nations. Together with Gog, these are mainly Christian countries—Persia (Iran) and Libya being the exceptions.

Ezekiel 38:13 also points to a group of nations—Sheba and Dedan, assisted by the Merchants of Tarshish and her young lions, who oppose this invasion.

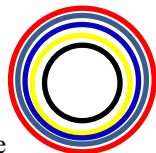
This picture adds details to the previous picture. It is of the same invasion and shows how the Eastern and the Western legs of the Image are shown to be working together with a common aim, the elimination of Israel, just as is shown in the Image prophecy. The main source of military might will come from Russia, assisted by Gog's companions.

There is but one invasion of Israel

All these different pictures will overlap and be seen to be all speaking of the same invasion of Israel. The nations who band themselves together to destroy Israel will be defeated on the mountains of Israel when Christ and the saints come up to save Israel. It is clear that there can be no further invasions of Israel, for Jesus will establish himself as their King. There is no room for an Arab invasion and destruction of Jerusalem. The Arab peoples are destined to be blessed with Israel, when they recognise Israel's King. Their offerings will come up acceptably on God's altar as described in Isaiah 60:6,7. There will be subsequent warfare, but it takes place outside the land, chiefly in Europe when Revelation chapter 17 comes into play, describing the situation following the defeat of Israel's enemies in the Land of Israel, when Europe rallies against Israel's new King. Russia having lost the cream of their army in their defeat in Israel will be a broken power at this time.

Sadly Christendom will resist submission to the Messiah, just as Israel did at his first coming. They will resist to the death.

So we have seen that these are all speaking of the same invasion of Israel. In preparation for this event we shall now look at the re-alignments which are happening, very significantly, just at this point in time!



Chapter 7

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NEW ALIGNMENTS—A CHANGING WORLD

One of the striking features of the past few years is the new alignments between nations, matters which Bible students have long anticipated, but never-the-less pretty amazing to see them happen in such a short period. There are four areas where important shifts are taking place. The first is the change in the territory which was occupied millennia ago by the Persian Empire. We would expect that the nations living in this region would be aligned to the King of the North, rather than the King of the South. The second region of great realignment is of Western Europe. We have witnessed the coming together of much of Europe after the conflict of WWII, into the EU, and at the same time we are seeing the emergence of Germany as its undisputed leader. The third region of realignment is that of the old Soviet nations following the fall of communism in 1991. It has taken many years but we now see Putin busily rebuilding the old Russian Empire. We are witnessing the tug of war over countries in-between these two power blocks, as each side tries to woo countries such as Ukraine to their side. The fourth area is equally exciting to Zion's watchmen and that is the dramatic shift in the Middle East. Just as America was ready to step into the breach caused by Britain's withdrawal from the Middle East following the Suez Crisis of 1956, so now as America realigns her military forces, in part to concentrate on the Far East, Britain seems ready to step back in! This realignment is being driven by the Gulf nations fear of Iran and is forcing the Gulf States to choose whether they want to cooperate with a potentially nuclear armed Iran, or seek to work with Israel, herself a nuclear power. All these changes are what we would expect as each prophetic 'circle' gets closer to its final picture. To see such movements in all these areas is exciting indeed. It confirms the picture in Joel 3:10 of the weak nations seeking strength through banding together to form political and military alliances.

Iraq and Afghanistan, America's and Britain's withdrawals

This is a similar map to that we used in chapter 5, but this time using a modern map with the outline of the



combined extent of the four Empires of Daniel ch 2 and 7. I have left off Britain, which was under Roman control for a comparatively short time, and is not part of

this future confederacy of nations that come against Israel. When Nebuchadnezzar's Image stands on its feet we would expect the majority of the nations on the old territories to be in sympathy with its actions. We expect nations to the north of the area depicted to also be part of the confederacy, indeed it is to be led by Russia! It was just that in the time of the Persian and Roman Empires this was barbarian country and little developed and therefore unconquered. That is why the detail in Ezekiel 38 of the areas that Gog rules over (Ezek. 38:2,3) and his companions (v5,6) is so helpful.

Afghanistan

Following the Sept 11th 2001 attack against the US by al-Qaeda, the US, supported by Britain, launched Operation Enduring Freedom on Oct 7th against the Taliban government who controlled most of Afghanistan and supported the terrorist leader, Osama bin Laden who lived there. Other nations eventually joined in. Like most military interventions, the solution was not simple and after 12 years some of the coalition forces are still there, though they should all be withdrawn in 2014. Casualties have been substantial with over 3,000 soldiers killed and some 23,000 injured. Bin Laden has been killed and the al-Qaeda Head Quarters has left, but it would appear that little American control will remain after the troops withdraw. Iran is taking up the slack. This is part of the King of the North territory, so it is interesting to see the US and Britain having to call it a day; this is not where the angels need to have their presence!

Iraq

In 2003, America and Britain headed a large coalition of countries in what became known as the 2nd Gulf War, to overthrow Saddam Hussain and free the country from his tyrannical rule. Again, it took much longer to achieve, with the last of the coalition troops being withdrawn in 2011. Again there were many casualties, deaths of coalition soldiers were nearly 5,000, with large losses amongst the Iraq fighters and civilians. The allies succeeded in eventually capturing and hanging Saddam Hussain, but the country has been rocked by continuing civil strife, with car bombs a constant occurrence. Once again Iran has moved into the vacuum left by the withdrawal of the coalition forces. It is clear from our map that this was not the ground for Western forces. They did not go in with the intention of allowing Iran to achieve control of Iraq, which is what Iran had been battling for years to obtain; but that seems to be the outcome, as part of the angelic preparation for the standing-up of Nebuchadnezzar's image!

Gulf Region

We will look at this in more detail in chapter 10. In the early 1900's, the wings of the British Empire spread over the majority of the Gulf Region. Following the ending of WWI, much of the region was carved up and eventually gave birth to many newly independent states, including that of Israel. Following the debacle of the Suez Crisis, Britain was forced to ignominiously withdraw her troops from Egypt in 1956. This was followed by troop withdrawals from Yemen in 1967 and finally Bahrain and Qatar in 1971. The sun had set on the British power and in 1973 she joined the Common Market—now the EU. America was drawn into the

vacuum left by Britain's withdrawal and the Gulf Leaders eagerly looked to America to defend them and their oilfields, which were so vital to the West's economy. With the overthrow of the Shah of Persia in 1979 there was a new threat as Iran, Persia, was no longer a friend, but a rival for Middle East influence.

Suddenly the picture is changing again. President Obama is anxious to lessen American involvement in this region. She has just in the last few years become largely fuel independent, with her new ability to tap shale oil and gas on her own territory. Now in his 2nd and last term of office he is wishing to be seen as the man that achieved peace in the Middle East. Following months of secret negotiations, came the trumpeted Geneva Accords which were supposed to be the precursor to a peaceful Iran. Many doubt that this will be the outcome. For the Gulf rulers it is but the final straw that is making them doubt whether they can trust Obama to have the Gulf's interests at heart.

Nor has he learnt from Afghanistan or Iraq. He is hoping to be friends with Iran and to keep Russia out of the Middle East. But Bible prophecy indicates that the West has no future in Iran.

The situation in Iran follows hard on the heels of Britain and America stepping down from a strike against Assad's forces in Syria. Saudi Arabia has been giving backing to the Syrian 'rebel' forces in a bid to overthrow Assad and is dismayed that Assad, although giving up his chemical weapons, is still free to seek to crush the 'rebels'. Before that—and still ongoing—was America's attitude to Egypt. The Gulf States were perturbed that Obama was happy to see President Mubarak deposed and supported the Muslim Brotherhood's bid to power. When Morsi himself was overthrown after only a year in office, America strove to get him reinstated. To the Gulf States and Israel this made no sense. The Muslim Brotherhood is a terrorist organisation, an enemy of Israel and the Gulf!

For the Gulf States the ground has shifted under their feet. I believe that America will continue to support the Gulf States, (it is a very lucrative market for defence sales), but it may well be at a lower level. It is forcing the Gulf States to look at standing on their own feet in the defence of their territory against Iran's aggressive threats. Saudi Arabia is afraid that a nuclear armed Iran will destabilise the region, and is looking to purchase her own bomb from Pakistan.

When we look at the map at the start of the chapter, it is evident that that the Gulf region was never part of the territory of the 4 Empires of Daniel chapters 2 and 7. It would have been mainly a desert region and occupied by nomadic tribesmen. However, we know that in the latter-days this region is occupied by powers which are friendly to Israel, who will be dismayed at Gog's invasion. This is the region of Sheba and Dedan, whom Ezekiel 38:13 tells us will be opposed to the Gogian invasion of Israel. Moreover they are listed before the Merchants of Tarshish and their young lions. As we have seen from Daniel chapter 11, Egypt also comes under the control of the King of the North. The fact that the King of the North takes Egypt indicates that before this event Egypt is not in the same camp as Gog.

This has made the events of 2013 of such interest to Bible students. We see two strands developing, one, the growing cooperation between many of the Gulf States

and Egypt and Israel; the other strand is the movement of Britain back into the Gulf region as a military and a trading partner and as a trading partner with Israel. We shall look at this in greater depth later in *Milestones*.

There is also an interesting grouping within the Gulf States. Faced by an increasingly powerful Iran, Saudi Arabia is endeavouring to beef up the rather loose alliance of Gulf States which was formed in 1981. At their annual get-together in December 2011, Saudi Arabia pushed for them to form a deeper alliance, which has been discussed extensively. At this year's meeting, Saudi was pressing for a political alliance in order to counter the Iranian threat. For the present, this was a step too far for Oman a fairly independent country. Late December, Saudi announced the Gulf States would create a Gulf Union, without Oman at present. They plan in 2014 to establish a 100,000 strong battle force to defend the region. The country most in tune with seeking political union was Bahrain, the site of one of the ancient Dedans! There is still ongoing discussion on enlarging the existing alliance to cover Jordan, Morocco and Yemen.

Russian-EU tug of war

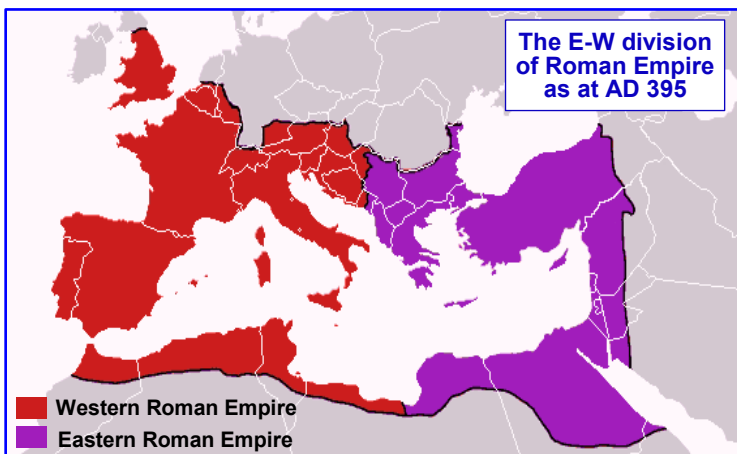
In the West, the EU continues her expansionist policies; Croatia became the 28th EU country on 1 July 2013, having applied in 2003. Several eastern European countries are interested in joining, and Germany has supported such an eastward expansion. This was part of Hitler's aim in WWII; now through peace those goals are being achieved. What is so interesting is to witness how some of these countries are being pulled in two directions. The EU



seeks to have them as members and Russia seeks to bring them back as under the Soviet days. Towards the end of the year Ukraine became the target of this tussle. Again we will look in more detail later, but it appears that Russia has won and the EU has backed down. As shown on our earlier map, the countries of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova were only on the outer fringes of the Roman Empire.

Our interest lies in the fact that, as we considered in chapter 5, the Image of Daniel ch 2 stands upon two feet. Attached to these feet are, of course two legs, which, under the Roman Empire, were divided into an Eastern and a Western Empire,

each with its capital, Constantinople and Rome. It is to be expected that the division of Europe and Russia should follow the same dividing line as in the past, though this can only be a guide as many of these countries lay to the north of the



Empire's borders. Clearly there are some existing EU members that one would expect to be attached to the Eastern leg—Greece, Cyprus and the newly joined Bulgaria and Romania. Also those seeking to join the EU, such as Ukraine, Georgia and Moldavia would appear to be seeking the attachment to the wrong leg! As we saw last year, it is significant that Greece and Cyprus are experiencing great hardship from being members of the euro. Like their fellow southern euro members they are finding out that the euro was formed to suit the Northern countries and Germany in particular. Russia has strong links to Cyprus and would like to increase her links to Greece. In any upheaval in the EU, they would easily be drawn back to Russia. Bulgaria and Romania are not members of the eurozone although they are obliged to be when their economies are right—a distant prospect at the present. Again they could easily return under Russia's wing. We see God's Hand working to ensure that finally they will be attached to the correct leg! God demonstrates His foreknowledge and power to achieve what He has spoken.

Putin's Eurasian Union

Putin has been working to enlarge Russia's influence, to regain control of much of the former Soviet Union, following its break up in 1991. We will examine the details when looking at Russia in chapter 12. It is another significant movement to enlarge Gog's territory so that it once more butts up to Europe in the West and the Middle East in the South. What is at present an Economic Union, Putin is hoping to turn into a more integrated union, modelled on the EU. The 3 founding members are Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia. Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have agreed to join and it now appears that Ukraine is now yielding to Putin's advances to also join. Putin's ambitions are moving a long way towards the finalisation of the Image's Eastern Leg.

At the heart of all these changes lies the nation of Israel. Angelic hands are shaping the world of today for this climax to God's dealings with His People Israel. We will spend the next three chapters looking at significant events in Israel.

Chapter 8

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ISRAEL SEEKS NEW FRIENDS—RUSSIA

In spite of Israel's anxieties over Iran, she appears to be in a stronger position at the year-end than at the start. During the early part of the year Israel held elections, which whilst retaining Mr Netanyahu as Prime Minister, shook up several of the parties, resulting in a new mix in the inevitable coalition needed for government. This year the Tamar gas field came on stream, bringing a much needed source of energy to power her expanding markets, reducing her dependence on expensive imports and more than making up for the loss of gas from Egypt. It was a welcome change of rulership in Egypt from the Muslim Brotherhood, whose avowed aim was to eliminate Israel! Egypt's subsequent attacks in Sinai and the Hamas border zone again brought welcome relief from terrorist threats. In 2013, the final section of the security fence on her southern border was put into place, effectively sealing the southern boundary from anything other than rocket attacks. The Security fence on the Lebanese and Syria borders was also upgraded, making Israel less vulnerable to attack. We begin by looking at her striving to make new friends.

Friends, treacherous friends

Last year we looked at this passage from Isaiah that shows that Israel will make friends with people that turn out to be enemies!

*It will come to pass in that day that the **remnant** of Israel, and those who have escaped from the house of Jacob will **no more again lean on him who struck them**, but shall **lean** on Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.*

*A **remnant** will return, even the remnant of Jacob, **to the mighty God**.*

*For though your people, Israel, are like the sand of the sea, **only a remnant** of them will **return**. A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness.*

For the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, will make a full end, and that determined, in the midst of all the earth Isa. 10:20-23 (WEB)

It is clear from this latter-day passage that there is to be a period before God's time of blessing comes upon them, when they will be trusting in worthless friends who turn out to be enemies that smite them! Isaiah was describing in earlier verses the Assyrian power. (v10, also v24). So we can see in this passage that Gogian Russia, will be friendly to Israel before smiting her. In God's mercy although Israel is scattered as a result, He will gather them back to their land. This fits with the *evil thought* that Gog makes which influences his desire to spoil Israel. (Ezek. 38:10-12)

Here is another prophecy from an earlier chapter in Isaiah. In the well-known chapter 2 we have a wonderful opening five verses describing the Kingdom Age and its blessings. As is often the case, a chapter opening gives an end picture and then spends the rest of the chapter explaining how this end picture is achieved.

This is the case here. The next few verses are in stark contrast to the opening verses. Israel is being condemned for her faithless walk!

Therefore thou hast forsaken thy people the house of Jacob, because they be replenished from the east, and are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they please themselves in the children of strangers.

Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots:

Their land also is full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made: Isa. 2:6-8

Let's examine this sad picture and see how relevant it is to Israel today.

Replenished from the east. This speaks of her friendship with eastern powers. This would appear to be pointing to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States and possibly India. Israel's trade with both areas is increasing.

Soothsayers like the Philistines. Soothsayers, or enchanters, or observers of times. The Philistines claimed special powers to foretell the future, using entrails, bird flight, clouds, stars etc. Trying to look into the future is one of Israel's specialities. Their Mossad spy agency has an amazing reputation to pick up on information and forestall terrorist attacks. They have even interviewed a Christadelphian to see if he could tell them what is going to happen from the Scriptures—which he was able to do!

Please themselves in the children of strangers. AV margin reads *abound with the children....* Other translations *Ally themselves*, or *companions of* or *friends with*, *strangers* or *foreigners*. A picture of a multicultural society, which Israel is, but also indicating alliances with non-Jews. We shall see the friendships that Israel is now seeking with the Vatican and with Russia. Both of which we know from Scripture to be foolish alliances and ones which will prove to be to her hurt.

Full of silver and gold ... no end to their treasures. Again what a striking description of modern Israel, now on the cusp of even greater riches as she further develops her energy sources. It is in sharp contrast to the poverty of the people around her, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinians who choose not to work with Israel.

Full of horses ... chariots. What an amazingly accurate picture recorded some 2,700 years ago of the defences that Israel has, in order to survive. Today we would speak of fighter jets, submarines, Iron Dome, Arrow, David's Sling, UAV's tanks etc., etc.

Full of idol ... work of their own hands ... own fingers have made. What are idols? They are what one trusts in instead of trusting in God. They are dumb, man-made things which detract from *Yahweh who made the heavens* (1 Chr. 16:26). *Stubbornness* is equated with idolatry (1 Sam. 15:23) as is *covetousness* (Eph. 5:5). Many passages speak of Israel being astray from God in the day of their peace and prosperity, indeed God is bringing this time of trouble upon them in order to

punish them for their unfaithfulness. In Israel of today, one sees a people trusting in their own strength to save them. Trusting in God is not at the heart of the nation. True there are some God-fearing Jews, who know their Scriptures, yet even for them their eyes are partially veiled to God's plan with His nation. Among these will surely be the remnant that escape with their lives in the coming conflict and who will turn and recognise their Messiah when he saves them. But for the nation as a whole, they covet the things of this world, they refuse to listen to their God and show supreme trust in the incredible weapons that their fingers have made. This section of Isaiah is a truly amazing summary of Israel today.

Israel and Russia

Let's now look at the friendship that Israel is seeking with Russia. We can confidently expect it to grow, especially in the time beyond the Master's return to his household, but before Russia thinks her *evil thought* and brings the nations down. Israel has strong ties to Russia, as many Israelis have come from the old Soviet Union countries. Israel's population is now just over 8 million of which just over 6 million are Jews; of these about 1 million are Russia speaking. There were

several waves of Russian Jews making aliyah, escaping the poverty and the anti-Semitism they found at home, and establishing a new life in Israel. Israel hosts the 3rd largest Russian diaspora outside the former Soviet Union countries, behind America and Germany and is home to the biggest Russian Jewish diaspora. Most signs in Israel are multilingual, many with Russian as well as Hebrew, Arabic and

English as this manhole cover over a fibre optic cable illustrates. One of the



Manhole cover in Tel Aviv. Warning in English, Hebrew, Arabic and Russian.

political events of 2013 in Israel was the lifting of all charges of fraud and breach of trust against the Israeli Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman. He had resigned in December 2012, with Mr Netanyahu taking over his role. A few days after his acquittal in November, he took up the office again. A Soviet born Jew who emigrated to Israel in 1978, he has had ministerial roles since 2001 and been Foreign Minister since 2009. He has a very good rapport with Mr Putin's government.

According to a *WikiLeaks* cable sent to the State Department from the U.S. embassy in Moscow about Lieberman's visit to Russia in 2009, Israeli deputy foreign minister Yuval Fuchs 'cemented Moscow's impression that the Russian-speaking Lieberman is one of their own,' and said that he created 'a comfortable atmosphere with his Russian interlocutors,' who 'acted as if they already knew him.' A *New York Times* profile of Lieberman published that same year also focused on his relationship with Moscow, noting that he seemed to thrive in Russia 'because he speaks not only the language of Russia, but also that of the Russian leadership.' *TheDailyBeast* 07-11-13

In November, Mr Netanyahu paid his 5th visit to Russia since he returned to power in 2009. He observes President Putin's influence is growing in the Middle East, following President Obama's seeming withdrawal of interest. Both Russia and Israel are concerned at Obama's desire to make peace with Iran and to work with her. Although Russia is friendly to Iran she is wary of her ambitions that would tread on Putin's toes in the region; while Israel fears Iran's aggression.

Russia eyes Israel's energy resources

As we have looked at in previous *Milestones*, Russia is dependent on high energy prices to fund her huge programme of refurbishing her military forces. She takes every opportunity to thwart attempts to reduce dependence on Russia's energy supplies. This is especially so in Europe, who have been concerned for a long time at their dependence on Russian energy sources. For Putin, the energy supplies that lie off the coasts of Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Cyprus represent a considerable threat to Russia's energy plans. Located relatively close to Europe they have the ability to depress prices. Putin's philosophy is that if you can't beat them, then join them. In last year's *Milestones* we looked at Gazprom—Russia's energy arm and biggest company, and very much under Putin's control—attempting to become partners in the development of the huge Leviathan gas field. Although Gazprom had made the highest bid, the American partners in the Leviathan discovery were wary and chose the Australian firm, Woodside Petroleum, instead. Interestingly this has not yet been ratified, leaving the door still somewhat ajar on this particular deal. This deal was put on hold while the Israeli government argued as to how much gas they would allow to be exported, rather than be used in Israel. The advisory panel set up in 2011 to look into this matter recommended in September 2012 that 50% of gas from big fields such as Tamar and Leviathan could be exported, with 40% from smaller sites and 25% from small fields. On this basis, the companies exploiting the Israeli gas fields proceeded. However, the Israeli government took until June of 2013 to accept this report, but cut to 40% the amount they would allow to be exported from the larger fields. They still have not decided where the major on shore production facilities are to be located nor how the gas is to be exported—by pipeline or as liquid gas. At the end of the year, Woodside said that if matters were not settled soon, they would invest their money elsewhere. These uncertainties have also led Noble to postpone, by a year, their further drilling to develop the Leviathan field.

In February, Gazprom signed a 20-year deal to take gas from the Tamar and export it as Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) to the Far East. This would involve the construction of a floating LNG vessel that can turn gas into liquid by freezing it to -162°C, where it occupies 1/6,000 of the space when at normal temperatures. Special refrigerated tanks then transport to the destination. The floating factory ship requires an expenditure of around £8bn! This is a great commitment. At the moment this deal is also on hold awaiting the government's agreement as to how they want the gas transported.

Gazprom, the state-owned Russian natural gas extraction company, has been interested in Israel's natural gas market for several years. But the Middle Eastern state's recent emergence as a natural gas production destination is

making it an even more attractive target. Last week's confirmation that the Israeli government is talking to Russia about the development of Israel's gas fields indicates yet another potential opening for Gazprom. Israel has so far asserted an energy policy independent of Russian influence, but preserving that stance ultimately requires limiting Gazprom's activities.

The announcement of bilateral talks on natural gas is actually a response to an accusation that Russia had already attempted to extract favorable conditions from Israel—a promise to not export gas to Europe in exchange for stopping shipments of certain weapons to the Assad regime in Syria. Europe is Gazprom's biggest customer and accounts for 40 percent of its revenues, but Russia fears Israeli natural gas could cut into that market if export routes to Turkey or Cyprus are connected to other regional pipelines. Given that the market is already shrinking due to Europe's plateauing demand for natural gas, it is not implausible that Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed the deal to Netanyahu. *TheDailyBeast* 07-Nov-13

In reply to a written request by a Knesset member, the Israel government confirmed they were holding talks with Russia over Israel's gas.

'Russian companies are examining options of participating in the development of the Israeli gas economy, and consequently the Russian government is interested in the Israeli gas economy.' *Globes* 29-Oct-13

Russia sends warship to Israel

In May, the Russian Black Sea warship 'Azov' docked at Haifa on a good-will mission. It had been invited to call as part of the Russian May 9th Victory Day celebrations commemorating the surrender of Nazi Germany. The allies signed on May 5th (Victory in Europe Day); an additional signing of the surrender document was held with the Russians in the early hours of 9th May 1945. Many Russian War Veterans now live in Israel and were invited to participate in a ceremony aboard the massive ship.

However, there was another even more important, even historical, reason for the visit—with the looming collapse of the Assad regime in Syria, Russia is on the lookout for new Middle East alliances.

Russia has long maintained a large naval base in Tartus, the second largest port city in Syria. But with Syria's ongoing civil war likely to end in that country descending into factional warfare and chaos, Russia is concerned for its interests in the region.

Israeli officials say that the Arab Spring has changed Russia's view of Israel, and Moscow now understands that in this volatile and unpredictable region, the Jewish state is an anchor of stability.

There was a general understanding that the Azov's visit was not a one-time event, and that other Russian warships would come calling in the near future. Israelis officials did not deny that they are open to further cooperation with Moscow. *Israel Today* 13-May-13

Putin, ‘Russia stands by Israel’

As a sign of Russia’s desire to woo Israel, Mr Putin surprised Mr Netanyahu while on a last-minute visit to Moscow in November, when Mr Netanyahu had gone to urge Russia not to support the movement to prevent Israel having nuclear weapons. The time for Israel to give up its nuclear weapons was after ‘peaceful relations have been established between Israel and Arab countries across the Middle East’ according to a report in the Israeli daily *Ma’ariv*. Mr Putin seemed to be very sympathetic to this viewpoint.

At this point in their hour-and-a-half conversation, Putin surprised the Israeli Premier. ‘Russia will slow all efforts to convene the conference,’ Putin promised Netanyahu, according to *Ma’ariv*. Putin went even further; making it clear to Netanyahu that Russia will not do anything to harm Israel. He added that despite the alliance between Israel and the United States, Russia stands by Israel. *The Algemeiner* 20-Dec-13

Russia and Israel free-trade agreement talks

In December, the Israel-Russia Mixed Economic Committee convened in Moscow, led by Israel’s Russian born Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman. This was the Committee’s 11th meeting, and they agreed to seek a free-trade agreement with Russia’s new customs union, which currently consists of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. Such an agreement would be highly profitable to both sides, as has been the one Israel signed with America in 1985.

The Russians expressed an interest in getting easier access to Israeli high technology, spurring a consensus that any future accord would involve not only a reduction in duties but also cooperation in technology. For its part, Israel said it wanted an easing of restrictions on agricultural and industrial exports to Russia.

Israel’s major imports from Russia include oil and oil products, natural gas, metals, wood and wood products, chemicals and a wide variety of civilian and military products. Israel’s major exports to Russia include cars and transport vehicles, pharmaceuticals, plastics, partially finished metal products, meat, fruit and nuts, medical and optical equipment and iron and steel.

Sources in Israel said that an agreement could be concluded within a year and a half and could lead Israeli exports to Russia to triple within 10 years, from about \$820 million last year. *Haaretz* 10-Dec-13

Summary

As Russia seeks to increase her influence in the Middle East we should expect a greater dialogue between Russia and Israel, as the master chess player strengthens his position on the Middle East chess board. Israel is making dangerous friends which will end in tears; but for Zion’s watchmen, it is another evidence of the foreknowledge of God and His controlling influence on the affairs of men.

We shall now look at the eagerness with which Israel is seeking friendship with the Vatican.

Chapter 9

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ISRAEL SEEKS NEW FRIENDS—THE VATICAN

We continue with our look at Israel's new-found friends by considering her relations with the Vatican, who has been her long-term adversary. Long before the State of Israel had been set up, the Vatican had for hundreds of years persecuted these "Christ-killers". The setting up of a Jewish homeland was a matter of deep concern, especially when it became clear that the Jews wanted to establish this in Israel!

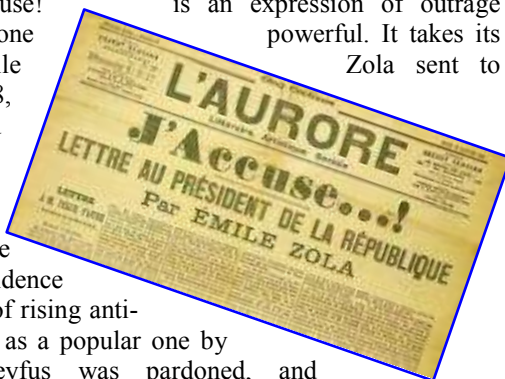
The Vatican and Israel

From a human point of view it makes sense for Israel to make advances towards the Vatican, especially in the light of a much friendlier Pope. For centuries the Roman Catholic Church has persecuted the Jews in Europe and sent Crusaders into the Holy Land. Millions of Jews must have perished at the hand of the Church's followers. Even in recent times, the Vatican has opposed the establishment of a national home in Israel for the Jews. As far as they were concerned, unless the Jews converted and became Christians, they were beyond the pale. Even when the State of Israel was set up, the Vatican wanted and continues to want, to put Jerusalem under international control, rather than have the Israeli government in charge of it. In all fairness to Israel, there has been much more freedom of worship since Israel captured Jerusalem in 1967. Jews, Christians and Muslims live side-by-side, due to the skilled policing by the Israelis.

The history of the conflict between Israel and the Vatican was mapped in the book *Cross on the Star of David. The Christian World in Israel's Foreign Policy 1948-1967* by Uri Bialer. This followed on from the book *The Vatican and Zionism. Conflict in the Holy Land 1895-1925* by Sergio Minerbi. These have now been joined by a book published this year entitled, *The Vatican against Israel. J'Accuse* by Guilio Meotti. The phrase J'Accuse!

and accusation against someone originates from the open letter that Émile Zola sent to the President of France in 1898, protesting at the jailing and subsequent exiling to a penal colony off the coast of French Guiana, of Alfred Dreyfus a French Jew, accused of treason. He pointed out the travesties in the evidence presented at his trial. It was a time of rising anti-

Semitism and the verdict was seen as a popular one by many. Several years later Dreyfus was pardoned, and subsequently cleared of the charges against him. This just gives a flavour of the rather explosive title to this new book. The author accuses the Vatican of seeking to betray Israel at every turn. I quote from the introduction.



“A scandal named ‘Israel’”

For over 100 years, and half a century after the Holocaust, the Catholic Church has been hostile to the creation of a Jewish homeland. Chaim Weizmann, who would become the first president of the State of Israel, complained in 1922, that ‘the Vatican is moving Heaven and Earth against us.’

For the Vatican, an independent Jewish State bearing the name of ‘Israel,’ with Jerusalem as its capital, and a renewal of life in the land of the Bible, has been the most complex theological Christian problem and scandal to Church dogma. A vital Jewish people restored after 2,000 years to its own holy land has raised unresolved questions about the meaning of Church history and teachings.

For sixty years after the Jewish State gained independence in 1948, the Vatican adopted a policy fitting to Israel’s Arab-Islamic enemies: total non-recognition of Jewish statehood and peoplehood. Despite acceptance by every Western nation and even, at one time, by the Communist bloc, Israel was not accorded diplomatic recognition by the Vatican before 1993. But even now that the Vatican and the State of Israel have formal diplomatic ties, the Catholic Church is rarely able even to mention the Jewish State. It is no secret that today Catholic tourist maps and pilgrimage brochures omit the name ‘Israel,’ using instead the sanitized expression ‘Holy-Land’ or even ‘Palestine.’ This is one visible effect of Catholic ‘replacement theology,’ which adopted a de-Judaizing language.

When Pope John Paul visited Israel in 2000, the Vatican requested that the Star of David was removed from the ambulances following the Pope!

However we now have a new Pope and the Israeli leaders are hoping that things will improve. After all, if the Vatican makes friends with Israel, she will cease from supporting the Arab cause and maybe promote peace in the land!

Jorge Bergoglio, then Argentina’s Provincial Superior of the Jesuits, made an inauspicious visit to Israel, arriving in October 1973 at the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War! He was largely confined to his hotel room during his 6 day stay.

Pope Francis invited to Israel

One of the first statesmen to visit the new Pope was Israel’s President, Shimon Peres. He extended a warm welcome to the Pope to come to Israel.

‘I am expecting you in Jerusalem, not just me but the whole country of Israel,’ Peres told the pope in the presence of reporters after 30 minutes of private talks in the Vatican’s Apostolic Palace.

The pope accepted the invitation ‘with willingness and joy,’ a Vatican spokesman said. *Reuters* 30-Apr-13

Later in the year, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his wife visited Pope Francis. Their private session lasted 25 minutes and according to the Vatican statement afterwards:

The talks focused on the ‘complex political and social situation in the Middle East, with particular reference to the reinstatement of negotiations between

Israelis and Palestinians, expressing hope that a just and lasting solution respecting the rights of both parties may be reached as soon as possible.’

They also discussed lingering financial and other questions that have stalled full implementation of a formal bilateral agreement between Israel and the Holy See ‘in the hope that the Agreement which has been in preparation for some time may be concluded forthwith.’ *JTA* 02-Dec-13

Mr Netanyahu reiterated the invitation that had already been made for the Pope to visit Israel. Sarah Netanyahu added, ‘We are expecting you, we can’t wait.’

It is traditional to exchange gifts on such occasions and it is interesting to ponder on what lies behind the choice of gifts. The Pope presented a bronze plaque of the apostle Paul, and is difficult to see the thought behind this, other than Paul was educated in Jerusalem. Netanyahu presented the Pope with a Spanish translation of a book his historian father had written in 1995 entitled, ‘*The origins of the Inquisition*’! He had inscribed it, ‘To the great pastor and guardian of our common heritage.’ His late father was an expert on the Roman Catholic Church’s forced conversion and expulsion of Jews in the 15th century. Was he reminding the Pope of the grim background to the Vatican’s relations to the Jews, with the hope that things might now be better? Mr Netanyahu also gave the Pope a large silver menorah. Just as the Lampstand illuminated the Holy Place, so God intended Israel to be a light to the world.

Pope’s planned visit disappoints Israelis

Late December the details of the Pope’s planned State visit to Israel were released.

Pope Francis will arrive in the Jewish State for a whirlwind visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories on March 25, 2014. The trip will last less than 48 hours, as the Roman pontiff will arrive in the morning hours on Sunday and leave the following night.

Francis will be in Jordan on Saturday and fly on a helicopter Sunday from Amman to Ben Gurion Airport where he will receive the official State reception. During his visit, the Pope will meet with President Shimon Peres and with various religious leaders in Israel.

The Pope will tour Yad Vashem, the Western Wall, and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. Unlike previous pontiffs, Francis will not visit Christian sites in northern Israel.

The Palestinian Authority will be the main beneficiary, as it will gain international prominence. In Israel, officials are still hoping the Vatican will reconsider its decision and have the Pope host a second Mass within the country.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will meet the Pope at Notre-Dame Church in east Jerusalem. At the Prime Minister’s Office, officials are not pleased with the fact that Netanyahu has to come to the Pope, but they have been told that this has been done for previous Popes. *Israel News* 19-Dec-13

With the present arrangements, the Israelis feel slightly snubbed and foresee that the world press will be focusing on the Palestinians, rather than on Israel.

A seat for the Pope at King David's Tomb

This headline in the Jewish newspaper *Arutz Sheva* was designed to shock its Israeli readers. The Cenacle is one of the many issues between Israel and the Vatican. Ranging from property rights to taxes on churches, they have been the subject of many meetings since the Vatican and Israel signed the 'Fundamental Agreement' in 1993. At the start of the year there was optimism that these matters would soon be cleared up, and that agreement had been made over the use of the Cenacle, the alleged building where the Last Supper is supposed to have taken place. The site will have long gone with the destruction of Jerusalem; tradition however, locates it as part of a building which the Jews revere as marking the tombs of the Kings of Judah! Hence the headline!

An historic agreement has been drafted between Israel and the Vatican. The Israeli authorities have granted the Pope an official seat in the room where the Last Supper is believed to have taken place, on Mount Zion in Jerusalem, and where David and Solomon, Jewish kings of Judea, are considered by some researchers, to also be buried.

It is the culmination of a long campaign by the Catholic Church to regain religious stewardship over the place where Jesus is supposed to have broken bread and drunk wine with his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion.

The Catholic Church has long wanted control over part of the area on Mt. Zion so as to turn it into an international religious center for Catholics. The blueprint of the agreement reads as follows: 'The Vatican hands over this use of the Cenacle to the Custody of the Holy Land which will keep the Cenacle open from 6 AM to 8 AM for the celebration of the Holy Mass'.

In the long term, the gesture will increase tensions between Jews and the large assets of the Vatican. The Church has long been working to reduce Jewish rights in Jerusalem and in the Old City. Now, after the Muslim Waqf authority expelled the Christians from the Temple Mount and turned it into a mosque, it's the turn of the Vatican to lay its hands on the Jewish Jerusalem.

The Custody of the Holy Land, the Franciscan order who, with Vatican approval, is in charge of the holy sites, campaigns with the Arabs against Israel.
Arutz Sheva 31-Jan-13

Details that emerged from the June meeting between the two sides spoke of the differences over Church taxes and the Cenacle had been resolved, with Israel retaining ownership, but handing day-to-day control to the Franciscans and that there would be a signing shortly. However there seems to have been little progress since, although talks are continuing.

Israel—the only Middle East place where Christianity is growing

As we shall see in chapter 11, Christianity is under great threat throughout the Middle East. The exception is Israel where they have grown five-fold since 1948,

although in percentage terms they have dropped from 3% to 2% of Israel's total population. Roughly 80% of them are Arab born, the rest mainly from Russian immigration. As well as freedom of worship, they do particularly well under the Israeli education system.

Christian Arabs in Israel appear to represent the most successfully studious sector in the Jewish state, new research shows, as the tiny sector's students are more likely than any other Israeli community to succeed on their matriculation exams.

According to a study published by the Central Bureau of Statistics ahead of Christmas, over the past school year, 70% of the sector's high school students were eligible for matriculation, compared to 50% of Muslim-Arab students, 64% of Druze students, and 61% of students enrolled in the mostly Jewish Hebrew education system. *The Times of Israel* 26-Dec-13

Israel and the Palestinian peace talks

This seems the most appropriate section to look at the peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. These were revived, yet once again, by President Obama during 2013. His Secretary of State, John Kerry, has constantly been shuttling back and forth to press both side to make progress. The talks have taken place in secret, although the Palestinian side have often leaked details of their objections. After little apparent progress, the Palestinian negotiating team resigned, and face to face talks have been halted at least for the time being.

From both sides there is little reason to see any future. The Palestinian leader Abbas has made it abundantly clear that he will 'never in a thousand years' recognise Israel's right to exist as a Jewish State in the Middle East. At the Arab League Summit Meeting at the end of the year he is said to have laid down the following demands according to the Israeli Daily *Ma'an*.

Abbas has set inflexible conditions for such an agreement. Citing Muhammad Sabih, Palestinian Affairs Representative to the Arab League, *Ma'an* says that Abbas will not recognise Israel as a Jewish State, a condition Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has repeatedly described as essential for reaching a final status agreement. In addition, Abbas is said to demand a full Israeli withdrawal from the Jordan Valley within three years, and no residual presence for the Israeli military on the Jordanian border. Israel has said that an IDF force there is crucial for its security and neighbouring Jordan also reportedly favours a continued Israeli presence. Over the weekend Abbas gained the backing of the Arab League over this demand.

Ma'an says that Abbas opposes a demilitarized Palestinian state, another Israeli demand, although Ya'ari said that Abbas will accept a 'state with limited arms', as was discussed in previous talks. *Ma'an* also reports that Abbas is demanding Palestinian control of East Jerusalem in its entirety, including the Old City and its holy sites, which will be unacceptable to Israel. He further demands that any land swaps should be limited. *Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre* (BICOM). 24-Dec-13

As Israel says, how can one negotiate if there is no willingness to recognise the other party? Another problem for Israel is the endemic corruption in the Palestinian Government, which makes it very difficult to build meaningful dialogue. The fact that Hamas and the PLO are divided makes nonsense of a Palestinian State. Hamas leaders are more open and consistent about their desire to wipe Israel off the map!

The Americans are wishing to follow up what they regard as their success in their talks with Iran, by pressurising Israel to compromise and make some deal with the Palestinians. January 2014 is set to be a month when the EU and the Americans aim to force both sides to sign a draft Peace Agreement. The Americans have drawn up a document which has been shown to both sides. It is not intended that there will be face to face meetings, only written queries and comments, according to *Debka*, the Israeli independent intelligence site. It involves building road or rail connections between Gaza and the West Bank and a road from Bethlehem to the north that skirts Jerusalem. As far as Jerusalem is concerned it is to be divided:

East Jerusalem will be divided territorially along the lines of the Clinton Parameters with the exception of the 'Holy Basin,' which comprises 0.04% of the West Bank.

Sovereignty over this ancient heart of Jerusalem, with its unique and historic concentration of Jewish, Christian and Muslim shrines, will pass to an international commission comprised of the US, Israel, the Palestinians, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. *Debka* 20-Dec-13

It also involves swapping land so that the major Israeli settlements on the West Bank remain and land given from Israel in exchange.

So many of the items have been rejected by the Palestinians in the past and with their lack of desire for peace; it is hard to see that these proposals will not join the many previous proposals that have failed to reach agreement. After all, Scripture indicates that at the time of the Gogian invasion, Israel is described as living in *the midst of the land*. (Ezek. 38:12) This surely would indicate that at that point Israel retains control of the central spine of Israel.

The Knesset, the Israeli parliament, is considering a bill that would require at least 80 votes out of a possible 120 to approve of any proposals coming out of the Peace Talks to divide any part of Jerusalem. The bill has been approved by the Ministerial Committee for Legislation in mid-December and will need the Knesset's approval to become law.

Summary

Although making peace with the Vatican seems, from a human viewpoint to be a great idea, yet from God's viewpoint, here are God's people making alliances with the greatest enemy and persecutor of the Truth that has existed. Just like Russia, the master chess-player, the Vatican works long-term, seeking friendships when she is trying to build power, but once in power expect persecution!

We shall look at the Vatican and the Palestinians when looking at the Vatican in chapter 12. In our 3rd chapter on Israel, we turn to look at Israel's more reliable friendships.

Chapter 10

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ISRAEL AND HER OLD FRIENDS

We now consider Israel's friendship with Great Britain. Britain has not been a faithful friend for some time, swayed by the influence of the powerful Arab oil lobby. Now that pressure has largely gone, with energy available from many other sources, Britain is returning to work with Israel, the country she was instrumental in setting up, precisely as Scripture would guide us to expect. We will also look at Israel's relations with some of her neighbours and slot in a section on Israel and her booming economy.

Israel and Britain

This has been a remarkable story which we have looked at in recent *Milestones*; it has been flourishing very much this year. It is exciting because our community has long seen a role for Britain in Israel's affairs. It did look as if Britain had turned her back on Israel, once the State had been set up; but times have moved on.

Israel is now the target of an intense marketing campaign by the British government, having been identified as a key strategic market in *The Department for Business, Investment and Skills (BIS)* strategy paper in November 2011 entitled *Trade and Investment for Growth*. Israel was picked out in several paragraphs and in a list of 18 country-specific items the government wanted to promote, Israel was at No. 5. This item was expanded later (and the emphasis is in the original!)



2.33 The Government will **encourage a stronger partnership between British and Israeli companies** to exploit the potential synergies between Israel's high levels of innovation and British strengths in design, business growth and finance, as well as the UK's own high technology and scientific strengths.

We will redouble efforts for UK-Israel cooperation

The UK Minister for the Middle East is Alistair Burt. He wrote an article in the *Jewish Chronicle* at the start of the year with the above headline.

Minister for the Middle East, Alistair Burt has reiterated the government's commitment to further developing ties between the UK and Israel. In an article authored by Burt for the *Jewish Chronicle*, he highlighted close cooperation in the fields of medicine, life-sciences and hi-tech, which 'creates jobs, expands understanding and improves lives. We will redouble these efforts.'

The minister went on to say that 'Developing our economic partnership goes hand in hand with our unwavering commitment to Israel's long-term security,' acknowledging the dangers that Israel faces from Iran's nuclear programme, instability in Syria and the threat of terrorism, reaffirming 'The British

government is clear: the people of Israel have a right to live peacefully and free from terror.’ *Britain Israel Communications and Research Centre* 04-Jan-13

New numbers show UK-Israel trade is booming

Trade between Britain and Israel is booming. Last year’s two-way trade reached more than £3.81 billion (\$5.77 billion), as compared with the £3.7 billion (\$5.66 billion) recorded the previous year and on track for UK Trade and Investment’s target of topping £4 billion (roughly \$6 billion) by the middle of the decade. Israel remains the UK’s largest individual trading partner in the near East and North Africa.

Israel is one of the top 20 countries investing in the UK, with its investments exceeding those of Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, South Korea and Saudi Arabia.

Israeli goods popular with Britons included fruit and vegetables, which accounted for £82 million (\$124 million) worth of trade, and coffee, tea and spices.

On the flipside Israelis love their British cars, with £130 million (\$197 million) worth of automotive goods exported from the UK to Israel, along with £70 million (\$106 million) worth of industrial machinery and nearly £20 million (\$30 million) worth of iron and steel—an 85 per cent increase on 2011.

Israel also helps keep Britons healthy. Around £1.1 billion (\$1.6 billion) worth of Israeli-produced pharmaceuticals arrived in the UK last year. *The Algemeiner* 15-Mar-13

Figures released in August indicated trade in the first half of the year had increased by 8% over the same period in 2012.

Britain is keen to help Israel develop her gas and oil fields; Britain has accumulated much expertise in extracting gas and oil from deep-water fields. The UK’s Minister of State for Trade and Investment, Lord Green, visited Israel in March at the head of a trade delegation to explore ways in which the two countries could work together on this.

Britain is persuading Israeli entrepreneurs that it makes more sense to come to London to develop their ideas, rather than go to Silicon Valley on the far side of America. Flights are much shorter and the time difference much less between Israel and Britain than with the west coast of America! Various trade bodies have been set up and a constant stream of Israeli entrepreneurs are coming to Britain and UK investors are visiting Israel.

William Hague, the UK’s Foreign Secretary, has done much to transform his Ministry from the Foreign Office, back to its full and proper title, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. His Labour predecessors were blinkered towards Europe. Hague has swung their attention away from Europe, and Israel is one of the beneficiaries. Mr Hague visited Israel at the end of May, to sign a science collaboration agreement, describing the two countries as ‘scientific superpowers’!

But it was apt as well as useful. This century will be won or lost on ideas and scientific advancement, more so than any other. The age of industrialisation has been replaced by the age of information, innovation and intellectual property. Where once economic wars were won through mechanisation, they are now being won through the microscope.

Those leading the charge include Israeli and British ventures. The work of British and Israeli research institutions feeds understanding, which feeds technology start-ups, which feed multi-nationals in areas such as pharmaceuticals, medicine and defence.

The two countries seem a natural fit despite their different backgrounds. Britain is scientific aristocracy, whereas Israel—the new kid on the block—seems to have a natural knack for making science profitable, allowing the world to profit from its science in turn. *JewishOnlineNews* 23-May-13

Mr Cameron's choice of first holder of a new position of Trade and Investment Minister bodes well for greater trade. Ian Livingston is a committed Jew and a strong supporter of Israel. His previous role was as head of British Telecom which he transformed during his tenure.

Mr Cameron is scheduled to visit Israel in February, 2014. This will be his first visit there since becoming Prime Minister in 2010.

We shall look in chapter 14 at Britain's links to the Gulf States. It truly is a remarkable picture that just at this time Britain has become deeply involved in trade with Israel and her Arab neighbours, as required by our long-established understanding of her role in the region as the Tarshish power.

Israel and Jordan supporting each other

Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty in 1994 and there has been generally good cooperation between them. Both see militant Palestinians as a threat, and in the current Peace Talks, Jordan has supported Israel's insistence on keeping a military presence in the Jordan Valley.

Both Jordan and Israel were greatly affected by the constant blowing up in 2011 of the gas pipeline from Egypt to Jordan, with a branch running off it to Israel. With the overthrow of Egypt's short-lived Muslim Brotherhood government, supplies have been restored to Jordan, but the supply comes nowhere near meeting Jordan's growing needs. Now that Israel has supplies from the Tamar field, there are several schemes for Israel to supply Tamar gas and other energy supplies to Jordan. Israel has a gas pipeline that runs to the Dead Sea chemical works at Sodom. Talks are well advanced to build a short extension to supply Jordan's potash plant on the other side of the Dead Sea. This would save Jordan considerable sums yearly on importing coal and oil. At the year end, the deal was said to be very close, having been agreed in principle, and they were close to finalising the details. It would be a small but significant step in Jordan's acceptance of her Jewish neighbour.

Another scheme which has been 2 years in the making is to supply coal to Jordan. Israel imports coal for her power station in Hadera, near to Haifa. The scheme would involve purchasing additional supplies and shipping these by truck into

Jordan to power her cement making plants. These plants are in the north and traditionally had received the coal via Syria, but the civil war there has made this impossible. To import coal via the Jordanian port of Aqaba would be prohibitively expensive. Jordan needs about 400,000 tons annually just for the cement plants; Israel imports about 11 million tons a year, mainly from Russia, South Africa and Colombia. A 4 month pilot project is about to start to truck the coal to Jordan.

There are 3 crossings from Israel into Jordan. The Sheikh Hussein crossing in the north, the Allenby Bridge in the middle and the Wadi Araba Crossing in the south. Israel is currently modernising the Allenby Bridge crossing to speed up exports and extending the operating hours to help with Palestinian exports. The Dutch government has contributed to the costs and the Israeli government has invested £6 million. The new X-ray equipment will allow 30% more goods to pass through, giving a substantial boost to the Palestinian economy which mainly uses this crossing to export to Jordan.

Israel, Jordan, PA to sign trilateral water pipeline plan

In another sign of improving relations, Israel, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority signed the agreement to build the historic Two Seas Canal or the Red-Dead Canal. This was first talked about in *Milestones 1993*! It involves bringing water from the Red Sea, via pipes and canals on Jordanian territory, to the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is shrinking rapidly due to the extraction of water from the Jordan River which is its primary source. The sea level falls about 1 m a year, leaving hotels which at one time were on the edge of the sea, stranded increasingly distant from its shores. The idea is to supply 100 million M³ of sea water a year (about the same flow of today's Jordan) to make up this loss. Because the Dead Sea is now some 427 metres below sea-level, this drop in height will be used to generate electricity, to be used, in part, to run desalination plants. It is planned to supply about 80 million M³ of drinking water for the use of Israel and Jordan.

It has taken so long to come to this stage, because of the cost, the environmental fears and the political situation. Following the historic signing in December, international tenders will be issued and it is hoped to complete in 5 years.

Part of the scheme involves doing a water swap with Israel. It is too expensive for Jordan to ship water to the north of the country, so Israel and Jordan have signed an agreement for Israel to supply more water to northern Jordan from the Sea of Galilee which Jordan will buy at J\$0.3 per M³ and Israel will buy extra water from the proposed Aqaba Desalination plant for J\$1 per M³, which will be much cheaper than it costs Israel to supply water to the Negev along the water carrier networks that brings water from Galilee down the length of the country. So it will be a mutually advantageous scheme.

Israel working again with Egypt

The sudden overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood government of Egypt, in July 2013, just a year after taking office, was an unexpected event. The military leaders who had been the power behind President Hosni Mubarak, who was toppled in February 2012, re-seized power, installing Adly Mansour as President, and Abdul Al-Sisi as Deputy PM and Defence

Minister. Suddenly, Israel now had people she had worked with in the past in control of the country. Egypt's Peace Treaty with Israel, signed in 1979, was never as fruitful as that signed with Jordan, never-the-less it has held through its many years. Although there was not the trade that Israel and America had hoped for, there was quite a high level of cooperation between the governments, behind the scenes. At the time of the Arab Spring uprising against Mubarak, Egyptian military, positioned in Israel's military HQ in Tel Aviv, were able to pass back information to their colleagues in Egypt, in real time, as they watched pictures of the crowds as seen by Israel's satellites. Not that this saved President Mubarak! Israel was happy to see the Muslim Brotherhood overthrown as its aim was to destroy the State of Israel. Israel was once again able to assist her friends in the Egyptian military with information about the movements of the Brotherhood. Movements of supporters from Libya, from Hamas and in Sinai were passed on by Israel, for Al-Sisi's troops to eliminate. With Israel's behind-the-scenes assistance, Sinai has largely been cleared of terrorists and Hamas' power greatly broken in the Gaza Strip. We shall look at this in more detail in the next chapter, when considering the Frog-spirits working in the Middle East.

Israel & Gulf States. 'The enemy of my enemy is my friend'

As well as a dramatic change in Israel's security due to changes in Egypt, there has been a substantial shift in Israel's relationship with her Gulf neighbours, due to President Obama's shift in policy in the Middle East. Again this is a matter which we will pick up in chapter 14; in this chapter we are looking at Israel's changing relationships with her neighbours.

The Gulf States recognise that under President Obama, there has been quite a shift in the US's concern for the Gulf States. We are not anticipating that these long established links will be broken, America still has a role to play, but Obama is intent on playing a role with Iran, in an endeavour to hold back the advance of Russia. Scripturally we know that, like Afghanistan and Iraq, this will end in failure, for this is not territory where we expect to find her. It presumably is the angels' means of bringing Britain back into the Gulf region, and also bringing Israel into a position of friendship with the Gulf States. We are expecting this from the fact that Ezekiel 38 clearly requires a fundamental shift from today's situation.

Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil? Ezek. 38:13

Why would Sheba and Dedan, representing the Gulf State countries, be protesting at Gog's invasion of Israel, unless, like Tarshish and her young lions, they had been friendly to Israel prior to this? The fact that they are listed first indicates that the present animosity with Israel has to be replaced by friendship.

There are several factors which are leading to this shift in attitude. Recent events have shown that Israel is not responsible for all the trouble in the region as has long been proclaimed. It is clear that the Arab leaders themselves are the cause of much of the unrest. Another factor is the fear that if America lessens her interest in

coming to their defence, who can they turn to? Russia is one option, but many have long memories of the previous time when, as the Soviet, Russia sought to dominate the region. Israel and Britain are the only viable alternatives. Furthermore the Arab nations have not progressed in technology and science. When one looks at the number of scientists that Israel has, compared with the Arab nations, the number of patents granted, the number of Nobel prize winners, books published etc. it is clear that Israel is in a class of its own. Many Israeli goods do get sold into the Arab world by round-about routes. Israel has the water know-how that these mainly arid countries desperately need. She has devised techniques of producing fish and milk in big quantities to satisfy her own needs and exports the systems around the world. Many Arab countries could benefit. In this computer age her skills at providing cyber-security are in world-wide demand and many an Israeli system is used in the Middle East, supplied by subsidiaries based outside Israel.

There have been many reports of behind the scenes meetings and intelligence sharing with several Gulf States. The Arab monarchies are pragmatic people. Their thrones are on the line if Iran has her way. It is better to work with a power, Israel, which also fears Iran's warmongering. Hence the proverb, *the enemy of my enemy is my friend!*

If Israel feels she has to physically launch an attack on Iran to halt her nuclear advance, when, as seems likely, the nuclear disarmament talks fail, then it would appear that Saudi Arabia would be willing to give tacit support, by allowing Israeli fighter and refuelling planes to fly over her territory unmolested and providing help to Israeli rescue missions if any of the planes ran into trouble.

The *Sunday Times* reported that Israeli Mossad agents have cooperated recently with senior level Saudi officials, in order to formulate a joint attack on Iran, in case an agreement signed with Iran won't be acceptable to the two countries.

According to the report, which relies on diplomatic sources, Saudi Arabia has agreed to permit Israel to use her airspace, as well as to provide assistance to Israel through the use of drones, rescue helicopters, and aircraft refuelling. ... In the report, Saudi Arabia is quoted to be very angry with the west and is willing to provide Israel all the assistance she needs to deal militarily with Iran.

This report joins previous reports that during secret talks between Israel and Saudi Arabia, the Saudis agreed to let Israeli planes pass over their territory in the event of an attack on Iran. But the new report indicates progress in Israeli-Saudi relations based on the fear of the common Iranian enemy. *Jerusalem Post* 17-Nov-13

We would expect this cooperation to continue and for there to be an increasing dialogue with Israel.

Israel—"Lighthouse Nation"

The *Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council* (AIJAC) 18-Dec-13 carried an interesting article under this headline, outlining the benefits that Israel was bringing to the world with her innovative ideas and her humanitarian programmes. Towards the end of the article was this remarkable story.

What is perhaps less well known is that Israeli President Shimon Peres recently made an unprecedented appearance at a gathering of Arab and Muslim nations—at their invitation. Peres appeared by video link from Jerusalem at a Gulf Security conference in Abu Dhabi in November, attended by foreign ministers from 29 Arab and Muslim states. Interviewed by UN Under-Secretary-General Terje Roed-Larsen, he was introduced as the President of Israel, and sat in front of an Israeli flag. Furthermore, he was actually chosen by host nation the UAE to open the conference, not one of the attendees walked out, and, at the end of his appearance, he was applauded.

Israel opens a virtual embassy

To avoid the problems she still faces with having embassy offices in the Gulf, Israel has come up with the idea of a ‘virtual embassy’! This is an on-line embassy which is aimed mainly at the Gulf States. It is estimated that Israeli goods to the tune of \$500m a year are exported to the Gulf States via third party countries. Computer software, security systems, agro-technology and health equipment are the most popular Israeli imports. Israel hopes this on-line embassy will boost trade.

Tamar gas field opens

This year marked an important step in Israel’s quest to be energy self-sufficient. On March 31st the first supplies from the big Tamar field started to flow ashore. The Israeli government had put great pressure on the developers to race ahead with its completion. It is estimated that Israel will save \$100 bn over the life of the Tamar field, by cutting out the need to import expensive oil to power her electricity generating stations and desalination plants. Already 40% of Israel’s electricity is fuelled from gas. By the year end, gas production from Tamar is expected to reach 10.1bn M³ a year. Israel consumption of gas in 2013 was expected to triple to 7.25bn M³ at the end of the year, rising to nearly 10bn M³ in 2015 and over 13bn M³ by 2020. This means Israel is already self-sufficient in gas.

In August, a new field was discovered called Tamar Southwest with estimated reserves of 19bn M³. The Tamar estimates have been upped to 283bn M³ and the Yam Hadera more than doubled to 96bn M³ with substantial estimates of oil there.

Israel is looking to wean transport off petrol and diesel as fuels, proposing to build a network of compressed natural gas (CNG) fuel stations to supply modified trucks. CNG is half the cost of diesel, but converting a truck costs around \$20,600. It is a much cleaner fuel. The Government is offering an annual \$1 million prize to innovators in the field to find solutions which will cut Israel’s oil imports.

Israel’s population growth driven by anti-Semitism

At the year’s end, Israel’s population stood at just over 8 million, (8,132,000) of which Jews were 6.1 million or 75% of the population. There has been a surge in immigrants from western Europe, the most dramatic being from France, where there is great pressure to get out while they can. The Israeli government is commencing a special scheme of assistance, as many of the French Jews are emigrating to America. Israel is keen that they come “home”.

We now turn to other important Middle East happenings.

Chapter 11

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FROG SPIRITS AT WORK IN THE MIDDLE EAST

*We have concentrated on Israel's relationships with Russia, the Vatican and others, in the previous three chapters. We now want to briefly look at other matters which have been happening in the Middle East during the past year. Our chapter heading refers to an aspect we have unfolded in the past two Milestones that of the **frog-like spirits** which issue out of mouths of the **Beast**, **Dragon** and **False Prophet**. These policies cause them to gather to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. It is clear that they are policies which are in conflict with Israel's policies, causing them to so hate what Israel is standing for that they seek to destroy the nation of Israel.*

We have long linked this frog-like spirit to the spirit of the French Revolution, which brought a mind-set which is intolerant of religious 'rights'. For some time now, Christians have felt persecuted in their own countries. No longer is freedom of conscience allowed to have any weight in many fields. Newspapers refuse to print certain of our lecture titles. This is all beside the Christian persecution in the Middle East at the hands of Muslims. Yet how does this affect the Arab nations' attitude to Israel?

Why is Israel so despised?

Every opportunity is taken by many western papers to put a gloss on stories which put Israel in an unfavourable light. The *New York Times* is one great example, and even the *Daily Telegraph* is often guilty. Why should this be? Why do the good things that Israel does hardly get mentioned? In December, terrible snowstorms covered much of the Middle East, disrupting life, bringing down power lines, blocking roads, flooding houses. Israel immediately helped the Palestinians in Gaza, supplying water pumps and heaters with gas bottles for drying out flooded homes.

Israel doctors regularly work incognito in the camps in Jordan for the Syrian refugees. Many aid packages are supplied, carrying no markings, but helping the refugees where they can. Many Syrian injured cross into Israel for free treatment.

In spite of evacuating the Gaza Strip in 2005, Israel is still accused of maintaining a siege on Gaza. It is true that several crossings are kept permanently closed because they didn't have much security, but the main crossing can cope with all the exports and imports that are needed.

Kerem Shalom—a hugely expansive and extraordinarily impressive feat of engineering and logistics—was sized to handle all of Gaza's needs if necessary. And it can do it without risking any Israeli lives.

Besides a small list of 'dual use' materials, Israel imposes no restrictions on Gaza imports. Even some of the 'dual use' materials can be imported under certain conditions—for example, international NGOs can import construction

materials. Israel allows potentially dual use items, such as CO₂, to be imported on a case-by-case basis as well.

Kerem Shalom is building new pipelines for fuel, and increasing capacity of existing pipelines, in anticipation of a potential dramatic increase of demand as a result of Egypt's closure of Gaza. Right now, because of Hamas and PA infighting, the demand is not there and Kerem Shalom is not using close to its full capacity for fuel. *The Algemeiner* 23-Dec-13

'The Palestinians the new persecuted'

This message that Israel is persecuting the Palestinians which is so frequently heard from the Palestinians also goes out from the *False Prophet*—the Vatican. Can we discern church teaching concerning Israel which is being mirrored by the *Beast* and the *Dragon*—Europe and Russia? Yes we can. The EU pours money into aid for the Palestinians, much of it ending up to pay terrorists in their fight to eliminate Israel. Russia too is basically anti-Semitic. All three powers would be happy to see Israel disappear from the face of the Middle East.

Anti-Semitism is rising sharply as this extract from the Roman Catholic newspaper, the *Tablet* explains. The heading to the article—a review of two new books dealing with the subject was, *Why Literally Everyone in the World Hates the Jews, and What to do About It*

In many parts of the world, Jews are increasingly unwelcome in the 21st century. The number of countries in which wearing visibly Jewish clothing such as a kippa means risking physical violence has hit an all-time high. On both the individual and the national level, Jews are targeted with extraordinary ferocity: We hear Israelis (but no one else) being compared to Nazis; we are told that Jewish nationalism is oppressive and archaic; that Israel is a uniquely racist country; that Israel's terrible misdeeds explain why people hate Jews. Instead of being seen as ordinary or all too human, Jews are seen as carriers of a uniquely transcendent evil. No other group of people on the planet is accused so much and of such fantastic wrongs. For a few decades after the Holocaust, it seemed that anti-Semitism might wane or even die out. That hope has now been defeated. *The Tablet* 04-Sep-13

The subtle message that is being disseminated, which is not confined to the Vatican but taken up by many other churches, is that Israel was given a refuge in the Holy Land, because of the terrible persecutions by Nazi Germany, but now she is persecuting the Palestinians. They are now the underdog and Israel has to be dealt with. The Israelis are now the new Nazis and the Palestinians the new persecuted!

It is very clever and is propagated by the Palestinians as the reason they are in the economic mess that they are in. The real reason for their woes is because corruption permeates their whole economic and political system and also their unwillingness to move forward, remaining stuck in the rut of the Nakba, the catastrophe of the setting up of the State of Israel, under UN resolutions. They could be as prosperous as Israel; indeed those Arabs living in Israel have prospered as well as those in the West Bank who have worked with, rather than against Israel.

One of the great problems is the continuing use of school textbooks that are full of anti-Israel material and glorify martyrdom as a weapon against Israel.

We have mentioned earlier, the opposition to the Jews returning by the Vatican. When the State of Israel was set up, the *L'Osservatore Romano*, the official Vatican daily, greeted this fact with this statement.

‘Modern Israel is not the true heir of Biblical Israel, but a secular state. ... The Holy Land and its sacred sites belong to Christianity, the True Israel.’

In July 1949, the official bulletin of the French Catholic Church declared: ‘We can only agree with the statement frequently heard that Zionism is Nazism in a new guise!’ The Vatican called the creation of Israel ‘another tragic milestone in the Via Crucis of Palestine.’

In 1973 a statement which the seven Catholic and Orthodox churches in Iraq transmitted to Rome said, ‘Zionism is a racist movement hostile to all accepted human values and linked to world Imperialism. It is far removed from Judaism as a religion.’ *The Vatican against Israel. J'Accuse*. Giulio Meotti.

Things have not improved, and the press continues, together with the UN, to seek to paint Israel as an evil occupier and the root of the Middle East's problems. Woven into this is the constant effort on the part of the Palestinian Authority leaders to turn Jesus into a Palestinian. Yasser Arafat made this point many times and Abbas has continued it.

Earlier on Monday, Abbas published a lengthy Christmas greeting, calling Jesus ‘a Palestinian messenger who would become a guiding light for millions around the world.’ Although he expressed his commitment to the peace negotiations with Israel, he expressed harsh criticism of Israeli policies, including an accusation that Jerusalem is responsible for the plight of Christians in the Holy Land.

‘We celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem under occupation,’ Abbas wrote. ‘This Christmas Eve, our hearts and prayers will be with the millions who are being denied their right to worship in their homeland.’ He called the security barrier an ‘annexation Wall, which is stealing [Palestinians’] land and dooming their future.’ *Israel Today* 24-Dec-13

Israel has facilitated the passage of pilgrims to Bethlehem; there was no restriction on their travel. This year saw a boom in Christian pilgrims to Israel. The persecution of the Christians has come from the Muslims. It is easy to re-write history, and the Palestinians are experts at it, supported as they are by the churches.

Alongside this are their assertions that the Jews have never had a place in the Land, there never was a Jewish Temple or Kingdom of Israel. The land was occupied by Palestinians, conveniently overlooking that on this reasoning the Arabs were responsible for the death of Jesus!

The ‘Arab Spring’ and Christian persecution

The phrase ‘Arab Spring’ is now rarely used, as it is clear that the results have not led to Spring, but to Winter! Whatever the original intentions, these uprisings have

been taken up by those seeking to establish an Islamic revival, with the desire to establish Islamic rule in these countries, with imposition of Sharia Law, matters I am sure that were far from the minds of those originally seeking for change. We saw the establishment of the Muslim Brotherhood as the ruling party and its rewriting of Egypt's constitution to reflect these new ideals. The Brotherhood's ultimate aim was to establish an Islamic Caliphate stretching from North Africa, through Egypt and Israel up into Syria and Turkey. Its headquarters would be in Jerusalem, hence their desire to see Israel destroyed. It also meant the elimination of Christians.

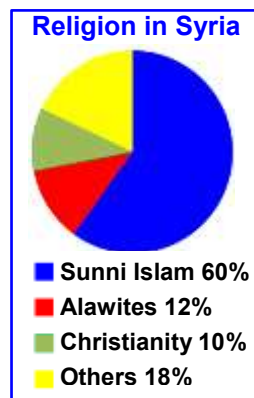
'Christians, like the Jews before them, are meant to be purged from each country,' said Ramelah, an Egyptian Christian activist and founder of Voice of the Copts, in a recent interview with Arab media, recalling that most notorious of Muslim chants, 'First the Saturday people, then the Sunday people.'

Indeed, attacks on Christians have increased exponentially in recent years, not only in Egypt, but even more so in Syria and Iraq. In Syria's ongoing civil war, Christians have essentially become 'target practice' for the Islamists trying to seize control of that country. *Israel Today* 18-Dec-13

During President Morsi's spell as Egyptian leader, and subsequently, the Muslim Brotherhood supporters have set Coptic Churches ablaze, and murdered the Coptic Christians. It is estimated that over 300,000 have left since the uprising in 2011. The new constitution being drawn up has had to insert special clauses to protect their traditional rights.

The Christian 10% of Egypt's population are certainly feeling safer under General Al-Sisi's protection.

The fate of the 'Sunday people' in Syria is much grimmer. Again Christians represent about 10% of Syria's population before the uprising 3 years ago. Although President Assad is a Muslim, the minority Alawite sect to whom he belongs is not extremist; Syria was not under a strict Moslem rule, and Christians had mainly been left to practise in comparative safety. Unfortunately many of the Christian areas have come under 'rebel' control, and as the nature of the opposition forces has changed over the 3 years of the uprising, with more extreme Muslim forces in control, the Christians have been greatly persecuted. The intention of the Al Qaeda forces is to make Syria Christian-free.



However, the opposition forces gathering in Syria are becoming more and more militant, and the many different factions are uniting under the al-Qaeda and other militant Islamist groups.

Nearly half the rebel fighters in Syria are now aligned to jihadist or hard-line Islamist groups according to a new analysis of factions in the country's civil war.

Opposition forces battling Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria now number around 100,000 fighters, but after more than two years of fighting they are fragmented into as many as 1,000 bands.

The new study by IHS Jane's, a defence consultancy, estimates there are around 10,000 jihadists—who would include foreign fighters—fighting for powerful factions linked to al-Qaeda.

Another 30,000 to 35,000 are hard-line Islamists who share much of the outlook of the jihadists, but are focused purely on the Syrian war rather than a wider international struggle.

There are also at least a further 30,000 moderates belonging to groups that have an Islamic character, meaning only a small minority of the rebels are linked to secular or purely nationalist groups. *Daily Telegraph* 17-Sep-13

This now poses a serious threat to the Christians and they are suffering extensive persecution. In Homs, a long-established Christian centre, whose population was around 160,000, has now shrunk to less than a 1,000.

More than 450,000 Christians have fled their homes, church leaders say, during more than two years of war. *New York Times* 10-Sep-13

According to *Israel Today* 12-Sep-13 the al-Qaeda linked terrorists are planning to 'subjugate if not slaughter Syria's Christians, secularists, and non-Muslims'. The majority of Syria's Christians are Orthodox, with a minority Roman Catholic.

As Prince Charles put it in a speech on 18th December:

'We cannot ignore the fact that Christians in the Middle East are, increasingly, being deliberately attacked by fundamentalist Islamist militants.'

The UK's Government's Minister for Faith, Baroness Warsi, had stated earlier:

'A mass exodus is taking place, on a biblical scale. In some places, there is a real danger that Christianity will become extinct.' *The Church Times* 22-Nov-13

It is clear that the coming of the nations against Israel will also be a crusade to avenge the elimination of Christians from the Middle East. Russia will take Constantinople, Istanbul, on her way to Egypt and Israel. Turkey is an increasingly Muslim country, and many old Churches have been converted to Mosques. The Orthodox Church has for centuries planned to avenge the loss of Constantinople. In World War I she was close to retaking the city, but British forces helped repel this advancement of Russia into the Middle East, and the city remained under Turkish control. Next time they will succeed.

It will be a crusade not just to restore Christian rule in many countries but to free Jerusalem from Jewish rule. This will be the opportunity that the Vatican has long desired, to wrest control of the city from Jewish hands. Until 1967 the city was under Jordanian control and the Vatican made no attempt to put it under international control. However in 1967, when it was recaptured, the pressure began again to prevent the Jews from controlling the city.

We will now look in more detail at events in Egypt, Syria and Iran.

Egypt's second revolution

Al-Sisi, the Defence Minister is the real powerhouse of the great changes that have swept Egypt this year. The elimination of the Muslim Brotherhood's power-base has continued apace. Most of its leaders are in prison, Morsi is due to stand trial on charges which carry the death penalty, their newspaper is closed and their organisation banned! A swift and virtually complete rout. As we saw earlier, Israel was pleased to assist in the crackdown. The Sinai—a huge, mainly barren area, three-times bigger than Israel, was home to many Bedouin tribes, happy to support extremist causes. Hamas in Gaza were affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood and were the main source of weapons and training to the many militant groups in Sinai. The crackdown since July has been powerful, though it would be difficult to eliminate completely, such is the rugged terrain. It gave added urgency for Israel to complete the final section of the security fence they have been building from the Gaza Strip to Eilat. This was achieved in December. The 245 km fence cost NIS 1,600,000,000 (\$456,608,000) and was one of Israel's largest projects in recent years. It effectively enables Israel to prevent terrorist incursions from Sinai.

One of the major fears is a terrorist attack from Sinai against shipping traversing the Suez Canal, a vital waterway which gives Egypt much needed currency from transit fees. Egypt is setting up a security fence studded with surveillance cameras and sensors and guarded by mixed ground, sea and air units, to secure the Canal.

Is this the end for Hamas?

Al-Sisi has been firm with his treatment of Hamas, who had given support to Morsi's attempts to regain power following the July revolution. Hamas earned most of their income from taxing trade through the sophisticated smuggling tunnels that burrowed under the Gaza-Egyptian border. It was highly lucrative, earning them some \$230 million per month, through the over 1,000 tunnels. Only a handful of tunnels survive. The Egyptian army cleared a security zone 0.5 km wide and running the length of the border. Trees and houses were cleared so that any activity could be spotted. The tunnels were then systematically destroyed and flooded. They were widely used for bringing arms and terrorists in and out of Gaza. Hamas were also the providers of arms, training and money to the many terrorist groups in Sinai. With the legitimate crossing at Rafah only open occasionally, trade with Egypt has slumped. One of the advantages of the smuggling tunnels was that cheap, subsidised fuel could be smuggled in from Egypt. The ending of this has led to a fuel shortage. The PA is responsible for supplying power via Israel. It purchases electricity, gas and oil from Israel, puts on a substantial mark-up and sells it to Hamas for distribution. Hamas objects to having to pay PA prices and restricts its purchases. As usual Israel is blamed for these power shortages! If Israel had blocked virtually all the smuggling tunnels think what a world-wide outcry there would be! As it was Egypt, this is not a news-worthy story.

Egypt has revoked the passports and Egyptian citizenship that Morsi had extended to the Hamas leaders. So great were their woes that the normal annual celebrations to commemorate the founding of Hamas 26 years ago were cancelled, citing deep financial woes! It was just as well because this is when the great snow storm hit the region, flooding many parts of Gaza, because the drainage system had not been

maintained. Again Israel was blamed for the floods, with reports that Israel had released water from (non-existent) dams and caused the floods!

Hamas has lost the majority of her friends: Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Hezbollah, Iran and many are wondering if it will survive for much longer. Hamas have been keeping a low profile since the ending of last year's Operation Pillar of Cloud. Any rocket attacks or border incidents have been met by strong Israeli reprisals. She has, however, managed to rebuild her arsenal of rockets, now mainly home built, with a greater range than before.

Assad still firmly in power in Syria

Last year it would appear that President Assad of Syria was on his way out. The 'rebels' were making strong gains and control seemed to be swinging in their favour. That proved not to be the case and Assad is using intensive bombing with barrel bombs packed with shrapnel, to drive back the rebels, secure in the knowledge that the West are not going to intervene, after the summer debacle. The carnage is terrible; those not killed are terribly lacerated by the shrapnel, many losing limbs. The refugees streaming out are facing a much colder winter than normal where-ever they can find shelter. It is a humanitarian crisis on a huge scale. According to a *BBC* report, 13-Dec-13

The UN estimates almost 2.3 million Syrians have fled to neighbouring countries since March 2011. Priority is providing help to Syria's internally displaced people, now thought to number 6.5 million. The UK has pledged £500 million, roughly what the rest of the EU states have pledged put together.

The death toll is put at 165,000 and rising and the number missing is put at 130,000

Following the reported use, on several occasions, of chemical weapons, thus crossing of one of Obama's red lines, the West prepared to intervene militarily to overthrow Assad. On Aug 21st, over 600 people died, (other reports put the deaths at twice this figure), with no physical injuries, making it clear that toxic nerve gasses had been used. Turkey, Britain and France were for military intervention, but without support from the rest of the EU. The British Parliament was recalled from their holidays to debate the matter, but the closing vote went against David Cameron's proposals to take military action. This was rather a humiliating defeat for him. Then President Obama decided to put the matter of military intervention to Congress to gain wider approval. This meant—as Congress too was still on holiday—that any decisions had to be postponed for at least 10 days. France was all prepared for starting that night the strikes on the military targets, when news came through of Obama's about turn, leaving France feeling very aggrieved.

Russia made it very clear that she would oppose any military intervention in Syria, as did the Pope who wrote to the Western leaders pleading with them not to intervene. Then, a seeming throwaway suggestion was made by the US Secretary of State that perhaps President Assad could destroy his stock pile of chemicals and so avoid the West's threatened intervention. This was seized upon by President Putin as the way forward. The idea rapidly snowballed—it provided a way out for Mr Obama as it increasingly looked as if Congress would follow the British Parliament and reject military measures against Syria. At the same time it gave

Russia the kudos that she was so anxiously seeking. A flurry of talks followed between Russia and the US resulting in an agreement.

The plan requires the Assad regime to disclose full details of its chemical weapons within seven days and demands unfettered access for inspectors to relevant locations by November with weapons scheduled to be removed for destruction by mid-2014. *BICOM* 16-Sep-13

Russia and America finally put together a draft UN resolution by omitting, at Russia insistence, any reference to military intervention if President Assad failed to carry out the disposal of his chemical weapons. This draft was unanimously accepted by the 15-member UN Security Council on Sept. 28th.

To everyone's surprise, President Assad dutifully produced a list of his chemical weapons, listing some 30 locations—a little short of American and Israeli estimates of 50 locations. At the beginning of October, 20 international inspectors were dispatched to check these locations ahead of the disposal teams. So far the timetable has been adhered to and the means of making the chemical weapons as well as the stocks, have been destroyed. What remains is the shipping out of chemicals which can't easily be disposed of in situ. The US is converting a ship to be a floating incinerator. Norway and Denmark are providing ships to ship these chemicals out of Syria to Italy where they will be transferred to the disposal ship. Russia will provide guards to safeguard the transferral to the Syrian port, and a naval escort to protect the transfer ships. The initial deadline that was set for the transfer to take place by the end of the year, was not met due to logistic difficulties, but it is expected to happen shortly.

The ultimate outcome of this war which has been running since March 2011 is uncertain. Many of the opposition 'rebels' have been taken over by more militant forces. Many fighters have come from Chechnya, causing Russia much concern that they will obtain weaponry which could be used to cause trouble at home.

Once the war ends, though, the fear inevitably is that they [the Chechen Islamists] may make their way back to the North Caucasus—and, as in the 1990s, they may bring with them allies and money to radicalize and reinvigorate the conflict there. TV footage of graffiti on Syrian walls reading, 'We started in Syria, we will finish in Russia' suggests that this is not just Muscovite paranoia. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* 24-Sep-13

The Winter Olympics which open in Feb 2014 at Sochi are only some 300 miles from Grozny the Chechen capital. Suicide bomber explosions at the year end at nearby Volgograd brought worries about safety at the games.

There are strong possibilities that Syria will split into ethnic regions, so weakening the whole area, making it ripe for eventual occupation by the forces of Gog.

There are two interesting outcomes to the aborted military intervention—the strengthening of Putin's hand in Middle East affairs at the expense of Obama and the alignment of the Pope and Putin in their desire to support Assad remaining in power, rather than Islamist forces whose aim was to make Syria Christian-free. We will see the significance of this when looking at Russia and the Papacy in ch. 12.

Iran pulls back—or does she?

The last area we need to look at is the situation in Iran. She had hoped for an ally in President Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, although they were Sunni, but any ideas of friendship here were firmly ended with the overthrow of Morsi. Iran's ambition has been to become a nuclear power, with the aim of being able to lead the Muslim world to victory over Israel. Beyond that she planned to impose Shia rule on the Sunni Arab nations of the Middle East. Iran has aggressively pursued an encirclement of the Gulf States with her sponsorship of Syria, Iraq, Hezbollah, and Hamas. She has built up her navy so she can support bases in the Red Sea region. However Iran's seeming unstoppable advancement in power has suddenly become vulnerable. The West's sanctions have been biting hard; everyday life is being badly affected as imports become scarcer. Money transfers are now very complicated and expensive, making even items which are not on the West's prohibited list more difficult and costly to import. Her main income is derived from oil exports; markets for this are shrinking due to the sanctions and the difficulties in paying Iran for her exports. The ordinary Iranians are frustrated that their leaders are prepared to bring considerable suffering on their citizens because of this fixation on nuclear weapons.

The Presidential elections to replace President Ahmadinejad, who, having served two terms could not stand again, brought Hassan Rouhani as his replacement, whom many regard as a much more moderate person than the firebrand Ahmadinejad. Under the new President, the annual gathering to condemn Israel was cancelled and a more accommodating tone was set at the nuclear weapons talks which have been ongoing since 2006 between America, Britain, China, France, Russia, plus Germany (the P5+1) and Iran. At the same time Obama showed an increasing desire to pull back from aggressive action in the region. America's long-term history of intervention in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan has not been popular at home and the American economy is still mired in debt. President Obama seems to be plotting a new course for America, which sees the new threat to be from the Far East and wishes to let Europe look after itself and to some extent the Middle East. This all coincides with America's increasing energy independence as she exploits her own resources with new technology that makes this economical and considerably lessens her dependence upon Middle East oil. So we see quite a changed situation—we could be at a cross roads. President Assad of Syria has agreed to give up chemical weapons and in spite of initial scepticism, this is proceeding apace. So the signing by Iran and the P5+1 on Nov 24th of an interim agreement on Iran's nuclear programme, marked an historic watershed in US-Iran relations. It was the culmination of many months of secret negotiations between the US and Iran and the document hammered out, represented the first meeting of minds between the two powers for 34 years!

True, there is much which is unclear in the agreement, or even that this is an agreement or is it only a step towards an agreement—the statements by the West differed substantially from those emanating from Iran. To them it was a triumph, with the West acknowledging their right to nuclear weapons and not demanding a serious commitment. To the West it was an agreement to stop her drive to possess

a nuclear bomb. It is beginning to emerge that the document signed is only the basis for further talks, aiming at a firm agreement within the next 6 months. Many perceive it as of having no more worth than the document that the British Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain, brought back from Berlin in 1938, when he declared, 'Peace for our time' as he waved the agreement he had signed with Hitler. Just a year later World War II was launched!

At this stage it is unclear how far Iran is prepared to pull back from her ambitious programme. The country desperately needs the sanctions to be lifted, and in the aftermath of the signing, many countries are busy scrambling for a share of the potential lucrative business, if it now becomes alright to deal with Iran. Britain has appointed a chargé d'affaires, a long way from having an ambassador, but the first step on a pathway for Iran to be brought back from its pariah status. The US has already lifted some of the frozen assets. The value of assets the US has unfrozen is worth around \$20bn. According to *The Israel Project* 11-Dec-13, this is twice the earlier estimates. It also indicated that Obama is offering to re-instate Iran as a member of 'the elite club of leading world powers' and promising to involve Iran in negotiations on discussions on the world trouble spots of Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon if she slows down her nuclear drive.

Israel and Saudi Arabia are naturally unhappy that the West has effectively undone years of accumulated sanctions that at last seemed to be working, in return for empty promises. According to the Iranian version of the interim agreement they seem to have agreed little in practical terms and certainly don't think that they have to give up their dream of becoming a nuclear power. Israel feels that Obama has turned his back on the fears of his friends, in order to curry favour with a power that continues to promote its links with Syria. This cartoon is one that appeared in 2010, but seems to be relevant still. Time will only tell if Iran is serious about long term changes.

From a Scriptural point of view, it makes sense that Iran is restrained in the short term. The time has not yet arrived for Iran—Persia—to be chief of Gog's companions as detailed in Ezek. 38:5. The Master has to be back some time before the Gogian invasion of Israel. What may well be unfolding is quite a shift in Middle East politics. Iran has a strong influence in



Forgive us if we seem a bit paranoid

Syria—Assad owes his continuance to Iranian money and arms. If, under American pressure, some solution to the Syrian situation can be found, then much of the current Middle East conflict could cease.

We now go to Europe and start by looking at the dramatic changes in the Vatican.

Chapter 12

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ALL CHANGE AT THE VATICAN, A JESUIT IN CHARGE!

It is not so many years ago that many doubted that the Papacy would ever be an influential power again. The world had moved on and humanism and evolution had replaced religion. There was no place for such an anachronism as the Roman Catholic Church. Time has shown that this is far from the case. Under its new headship, the prospects of increasing power and influence, especially in Europe look bright. After all, Nebuchadnezzar the great king saw that the Babylonian tree was banded with iron/brass bands to preserve it for its latter-day role when 7 times will have passed over it. We refer readers to Milestones 2011 and 2012 for further explanation of this time period and the visions of Daniel chapters 4 and 5. Suffice it to say that, depending on our starting date for the fall of Babylon, 2520 years brings us to the start of Pope John Paul II rule, who did more than most Popes to change the course of history and set the Vatican on a path of strength and renewal. This year we have a new and energetic Pope, whose impact is being widely felt.

The 1st Jesuit Pope

What a lot has happened since that dramatic day in February, a day when the dome of St Peter's was struck by lightning, when Pope Benedict announced he was standing down, the burden was too great to carry. Although not unprecedented, it is over 600 years since the last Pope resigned from office. One normally carried on until one died. Of course there are several Popes who seemed not to have died of natural causes! We need not dwell on the election conclave that produced, fairly rapidly, a new Pope. It was a world-wide media spectacle.

As a Jesuit, he will be under oath to use every means to bring heretics back to the Mother Church. The Jesuits are the biggest men's group within the Roman Church and number some 17,000. Jesuits have been involved in many plots going back to the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, which planned to use force to impose their wishes. They are known for their use of casuistry or equivocation, wherein one misleads with one's words, to hide the truth. In fact my Concise Oxford Dictionary, under Jesuit, has firstly a Member of the Society of Jesus, secondly 'dissembling person, equivocator'! This is just the kind of thing we would expect from reading the Scriptures concerning this false system. We read such phrases as *deceivableness of unrighteousness; strong delusion, that they should believe a lie; the false prophet ... with which he deceived them.* (2 Thess. 2:10, 11; Rev. 19:20)

Expect him therefore to use every skill at bring the lapsed back to the Church and reconciling Protestant daughters back to their mother. Let's look at the direction that Pope Francis is leading the Roman Catholic Church.

Breaking the traditional mould

It was clear right from the start that this was somebody different. Few knew much about who he was when the announcement was made. Instead of being arrayed in

splendid robes, here was a man in white. Not standing on a raised dais as his predecessors did and wearing his normal iron cross, not the solid gold one normally worn on these occasions. The striking thing was here was the first Jesuit Pope, who had taken the title Francis in commemoration of Francis of Assisi who appears a humble person who was concerned for the poor. He is also the first non-European Pope for 1,300 years, being born in Argentina. The other striking thing was the absence of the word 'Pope' in his speech; he constantly referred to himself as the Bishop of Rome.



In his first moments he was shaping his ministry. He knew that many were tired of the extravagance of the Church; he had been chosen by the Cardinals to provide a softer, humbler face. He was reaching out to the many in Italy who were suffering great hardships at this time of financial crisis in the southern European countries, many of which are classed as Roman Catholic. He has continued to shun the use of the Papal Apartments, continuing to live in the hostel where he stayed for the Conclave. He has shunned the papal limousine, using an old car. He often walks to places, much to the concern of his guards. He is happy to stop and talk, reach out to the poor and deformed. He is known to telephone cases of hardship and chat to them. He is also determined to bring changes to the grand living and corruption within the hierarchy of the Church.

Reaching out to the Orthodox Churches

He is also reaching out to the Orthodox Churches in an appealing way. Papal supremacy is a strong point of division, and to not use the title of Pope, but instead use that of Bishop of Rome, was a masterstroke. It put the papacy on a par with the Patriarch of Moscow and of Constantinople.

Pope Francis referred to himself repeatedly as the Bishop of Rome, and to Benedict XVI as the Bishop-emeritus of Rome. He never spoke of himself as the Pope, and alluded to his new pre-eminence only indirectly, when he observed that the Church in Rome 'is the one that leads all the churches in charity.' I think Pope Francis was laying the groundwork for a new understanding of the Petrine office: one that will drop the trappings of monarchical power and emphasize instead the role of the Bishop of Rome as the focus of unity for the universal Church. *P. Lawler Catholic Culture* 15-Mar-13

This certainly pleased the Orthodox leaders and for the first time since the great Schism of 1054, the Patriarch of Constantinople attended the inaugural ceremony.

Reaching out to the Jews

His appointment pleased the Jewish community in Rome. Unlike Benedict, Francis had many Jewish friends in Argentina and had given his help at the time of the bombing of the Argentine Jewish Embassy in 1988 when many Jews were killed. The Chief Rabbi of Rome was quick to send his congratulations. There is a real feeling among the Jews that this Pope will greatly improve relations between the two groups. However, one always has to bear in mind that as a Jesuit, he has sworn to promote the Church using whatever methods are appropriate.

Reaching out to the Muslims

His dedication of his ministry to *our Lady of Fátima* was another masterstroke, for this appeals not only to the faithful, especially in financially troubled Portugal, but reaches out to the Muslims! It is at Fátima in Portugal that Mary is allegedly supposed to have appeared in 1917 to three shepherd children and entrusted them with three secrets. We know that Mary would be appalled at what is done in her name as she sleeps in the dust awaiting the call from the dead from her son. However this has a very strong pull to many Roman Catholics, and Fátima is a place of great pilgrimage. The appeal to the Muslims lies in the fact that according to legend, the name was given to this Portuguese town by a Muslim princess of that name in the 12th century. At one time, long before Princess Fatima lived here, Muslim rule extended across northern Africa and into Spain and Portugal. After they were driven back, the Moors continued to live here. Princess Fatimah was herself named after the Prophet Muhammad's favourite daughter. In spite of having 13 wives, he only had 2 sons and 4 daughters, and only Fatimah had children who survived to adulthood. So descendants of Muhammad trace their ancestry through Fatimah. It is the most popular Muslim girl's name. There is yet another link. In the Koran, Muhammad only speaks of one woman, Mary the mother of Jesus whom he mentions 34 times. So there is a strong appeal to Muslims in Francis dedicating his ministry to Mary, '*our Lady of Fátima*'.

His worship of Mary

Like Pope John Paul II he is an avid worshipper of Mary—a false doctrine that appeals to so many, especially the Orthodox Churches. His first act, early in the morning following his election, was to walk to the St. Mary Major Basilica to spend time before her shrine of Our Lady *Salus Populi Romani*. This title translates *the Protectress of the Roman People*! The icon is claimed to have been painted by the gospel writer Luke! The Russian Orthodox Church is also very strongly into Mariolatry—have we another hint of

Shrine of *Salus Populi Romani*



reconciliation to come? The gold and riches are overwhelming, and contrasts sharply with the simplicity that the Pope is trying to project. It emphasised his position as Bishop of Rome, rather than Pope of a universal church.

Next he visited the chapel where St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuit order, celebrated his first Mass. Pope Francis, who has sometimes been disdained by his Jesuit confreres, shows that he holds fast to the best traditions of that religious order.

Finally he prayed at the tomb of St. Pius V. It is no coincidence that St. Pius V is renowned for regularizing the Roman liturgy, for firm opposition to a rising tide of Islamic power, and for attacking corruption in the Church: precisely the problems that Pope Francis now faces! St. Pius V strove to root out the sexual immorality that had become widespread among the clergy, and to implement the vision of the Council of Trent. Again our new Pope faces remarkably similar challenges. *Catholic Culture* 15-Mar-13

It was Pius V who arranged for the formation of the Holy League, an alliance of Catholic states that defeated the Ottoman Empire at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571.

In a museum in Rome one can see the statue of Juno, the original *Protectress of the Roman People*. In ancient Rome, people would come to her Temple to pray for her guidance and protection. Each year on August 5th they would commemorate the completion of her temple in 302 BC and lay their offerings at her feet and ask that she watch over the city. The Temple has long gone, but some 700 years later in AD 431, Pope Sixtus III built the St Mary Major Basilica to commemorate the Council of Ephesus' elevation of Mary as 'Mother of God'! Churches have their own feast days; it will not be a surprise that this one's is August 5th!

The Pope consecrates the world to Mary

As part of his worship of Mary, Francis proclaimed October 13th as a Marian Day'. The original statue of 'Our Lady of Fátima' was shipped to Rome for the occasion and paraded through the streets of Rome for the faithful to see, in the presence of a crowd estimated to be 150,000.

What his choice of Papal arms tells us

The papal arms are subtle indicators of the Pope's intentions for his ministry; it is his statement about himself. Interestingly the design was tweaked a few days after it was initially unveiled, indicating its importance. Starting from the top. The triple banded mitre with its two ribbons: the bands indicate universal episcopate, jurisdictional supremacy and temporal power. The vertical gold line shows they are incorporated in one person—the Pope. The crossed keys: the gold to indicate



power over heavenly things and the silver over earthly things. And the cord indicates the power to bind things in heaven and earth. This was one of the changes—the cord and tassels were made thicker—perhaps an ominous indication? The IHS on the shield is the Jesuit symbol. Iesus Hominum Salvator (Jesus Saviour of Men). The sunburst depicts the sun and is an ancient symbol which links back to Nimrod. The 8 pointed star (changed from the initial pentagon) is a symbol used for Mary, (it has links back to Babylon). The spikenard (changed from what looked like a bunch of grapes) is a symbol for Joseph. The legend (changed from a plain single line) with his motto, *'miserando atque eligendo'* 'looking upon him with compassion and choosing him' is taken from words of Bede in reference to Christ's calling of Matthew, not that this is mentioned in the gospels.

Francis is keen to bring the Church back to a position of recognition and power. He has certainly succeeded so far. Voted Person of the Year by *Time* magazine; voted in at No. 4 in Forbes most influential person of the year with the citation:

The March 2013 election of Pope Francis has breathed new energy into the world's largest religion with 1.2 billion followers. The first Jesuit and Latin American Bishop of Rome preaches compassion for the poor and a greater role for women while signalling the church to quiet its focus on 'only on issues related to abortion, gay marriage and the use of contraceptives.' He has embraced social media, regularly using Twitter to dispense religious advice to his 3-plus million followers and is responsible for the world's first papal 'selfie'.



In October he had amassed more than 10,000,000 followers on Twitter, reaching an estimated audience of 60 million with re-tweets and is considered one of the most influential users of the medium.

Pope Francis pulls the crowds

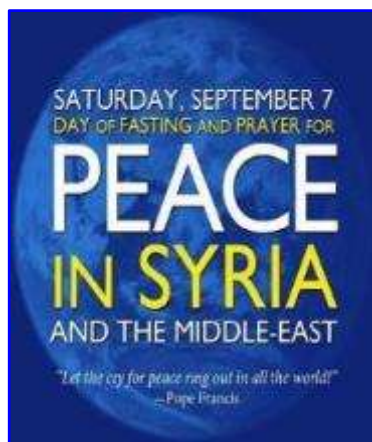
More than two million people have flocked to Pope Francis' general audiences in St. Peter's Square since his election in March, four times the number that Pope Benedict drew in all of 2012. *Reuters* 18-Dec-13

His visit to Brazil for the World Youth gathering brought record crowds to hear his message. His easy manner makes his message appealing and he is credited with boosting Church attendances in Italy and other EU countries.

He has been invited to speak to the United Nations and to the EU parliament—the only previous Pope to do this was John Paul II in 1988, when he famously used Christ's words *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's*, meaning, you politicians look after the things of Caesar and leave to me the Spiritual things.

Pope Francis and President Putin sing from the same song sheet

When it looked as if the West was going to intervene militarily in Syria to overthrow, or at least punish President Assad for his use of chemical weapons, the Pope intervened, writing to the western leaders asking them not to attack Syria. Moreover he organised a day of fasting and prayer for peace in Syria. Huge crowds assembled in Rome and in other centres in response to the Pope's call. He was supporting the call of Russia not to overthrow Assad. Why should we find these two powerful men singing with one voice? As we saw earlier, as far as Christians were concerned, Assad was better than having an unknown extremist to lead the country.



The Vatican has announced that Francis will host on Jan 13th 2014 eight top world leaders for a day to promote a cease-fire in Syria ahead of the Jan 22nd Geneva peace talks. Tony Blair is one of the participants.

A week before the Israeli Prime Minister visited the Pope; it was the turn of President Putin. He is notoriously late; he made the Queen wait 14 minutes, the Pope had to wait 50 minutes!

According to the formal communiqué issued afterwards:

During the cordial discussions, satisfaction was expressed for the good existing bilateral relations, and the Parties focused on various questions of common interest, especially in relation to the life of the Catholic community in Russia, revealing the fundamental contribution of Christianity in society. In this context, mention was made of the critical situation faced by Christians in some regions of the world, as well as the defence of and promotion of values regarding the dignity of the person, and the protection of human life and the family.

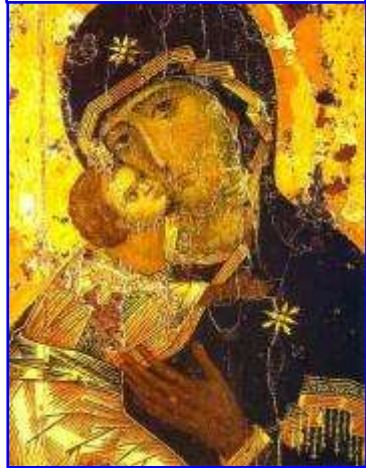
Furthermore, special attention was paid to the pursuit of peace in the Middle East and the grave situation in Syria, with reference to which President Putin expressed thanks for the letter addressed to him by the Holy Father on the occasion of the G20 meeting in St. Petersburg. Emphasis was placed on the urgency of the need to bring an end to the violence and to ensure necessary humanitarian assistance for the population, as well as to promote concrete initiatives for a peaceful solution to the conflict, favouring negotiation and involving the various ethnic and religious groups, recognising their essential role in society. *Vatican Radio* 25-Nov-13



Their head-to-head talk lasted for 35 minutes. In the traditional exchange of gifts Putin received a mosaic of the Vatican Gardens, no doubt this will be stored away

somewhere! His gift to the Pope was much more significant; he presented an icon of ‘*Our Lady of Vladimir*’ or *Theotokos* [‘Birth-Giver of God’] of *Vladimir*. Not only is Vladimir, Putin’s first name; the icon is held in great reverence as of *Mary the Protectress of Russia*. It is especially associated with Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine. There was added significance because at the time of Putin’s visit, was the very public event of Ukraine being courted by the EU and Russia! The original was thought to have been painted in Constantinople around 1130 AD and sent as a gift to the Grand Duke of Kiev, then taken by his son to Vladimir. It eventually arrived at Moscow—there are many conflicting stories as to when, but it formed an important role in the Russian Orthodox Church and Mary’s ‘intervention’ was credited with the saving of Moscow on several occasions! Pope Francis is of course a great worshipper of Mary and when Putin presented it, both men crossed themselves and both kissed the icon! Was Putin gently reminding the Pope, that Mary was the protector of Russia as well as Europe, and that he was the latter-day Tsar of Russia? How sad the folly of man to worship fictitious depictions of long dead people who are really asleep in the dust of the earth waiting the resurrection.

Icon of ‘Our Lady of Vladimir’



Canonization of Popes John Paul II and John XXIII

Expect Rome to be full to bursting in April. It will be one of the world’s biggest media events outside the world of sport. The eyes of all nations will be focusing on this travesty, when these two men are declared saints. What an opportunity for our community to bear witness to the true Bible message.

Popes John Paul II and John XXIII will be canonized on April 27, 2014.

In July, when the Pope signed a decree calling for the canonization of the two former Pontiffs, there was speculation that the joint ceremony might take place before the end of the calendar year. The later date allows Vatican organizers more time to plan for what will likely be an enormous influx of pilgrims for the ceremony. *Catholic World News* 30-Sep-13

Pruning the power of the curia

The immense task ahead of Francis is to tame the Roman curia.

The Roman Curia is the administrative apparatus of the Holy See and the central governing body of the entire Catholic Church, together with the Pope. It coordinates and provides the necessary central organization for the correct functioning of the Church and the achievement of its goals. *Wikipedia*

It was very corrupt and Benedict had attempted reforms, but this had proved to be beyond his capabilities. It was the centre of intrigue and power politics; its many

departments scheming their own power-politics. And running through it was the scandal of homosexuality. Benedict had set up a commission to investigate the Curia's affairs following the 'Vatileak' scandal, when many of the Pope's private papers were stolen and leaked to the press. Their conclusions for reforms were in a 300 page report that landed on Benedict's desk in December 2012.

It would appear that the Pope's resignation was in fact a master-stroke. Too old and frail to carry out the sweeping purges needed to put the Vatican back on course and to be the strong power Scripture indicates, his resignation carries with it the cessation of all the leaders of the many institutions in Rome. The new Pope Francis has the responsibility in making his own choice of who runs what. So in a stroke, Benedict achieved his goal of purging the Vatican institution.

Normally the heads of the different departments are reappointed within a few days of a new Pope being chosen, so life can proceed. In Francis' case he reconfirmed all the heads of the Vatican Curia offices. But he did so only '*donec aliter provideatur*' ('until otherwise it may be provided' or, perhaps most simply, 'just for now'). Since then he has slowly been making changes, appointing people whom he can trust. It is a huge task. At the same time he has been continuing the reforms that Benedict started with the Vatican Bank. There were many suspicious bank accounts which are being scrutinised and where necessary, closed down. Some of these were accounts which go back to the WWII deposits of looted items by the Croatian government from their destruction of the Jewish and Orthodox population there.

The Vatican and the Palestinians

The Vatican has strong links to the Palestinians; the Vatican recognised the PLO in 1994 and after 6 years of talks signed a *Basic Agreement between the Holy See and the Palestine Liberation Organization* in February 2000. Among its many points was this one concerning Jerusalem.

Declaring that an equitable solution for the issue of Jerusalem, based on international resolutions, is fundamental for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, and that unilateral decisions and actions altering the specific character and status of Jerusalem are morally and legally unacceptable;

Calling, therefore, for a special statute for Jerusalem, internationally guaranteed, which should safeguard the following:

It then listed a series of demands such as freedom of worship and freedom of access to the "Holy Places". Plus the Vatican's right to control its "Holy Places".

The PLO recognizes the freedom of the Catholic Church to exercise her rights to carry out, through the necessary means, her functions and traditions, such as those that are spiritual, religious, moral, charitable, educational and cultural.

The PLO recognizes the rights of the Catholic Church in economic, legal and fiscal matters: these rights being exercised in harmony with the rights of the Palestinian Authorities in these fields. *Vatican.va*

We now move across to look at Russia and Mr Putin in particular.

Chapter 13

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TSAR PUTIN BACK IN TOWN

It has been a good year for President Putin. He was voted by Forbes as the world's greatest personality and his standing in the Arab world has increased through his handling of the Syrian peace talks and the Iranian nuclear weapons talks. He has proved ruthless at home, the Russian press has had its wings clipped, Greenpeace activists have found themselves entombed in grim Russian prisons and they and the Pussy Riot band demonstrators have only just been released from prison. Vladimir Putin sees himself as a modern-day Russian Czar, upholding the Church and the traditions of the Fatherland. The Czars used their power to maintain their position, and generally the Russians are happy, provided they are left alone and have relative prosperity.

Putin, pillar of the Russian Orthodox Church

On November 4th, President Putin and the Russian Patriarch Kirill attended the annual commemoration of the liberation of Moscow from Polish soldiers. They placed a bouquet of red carnations at the monument to Minin and Pozharsky in front of St. Basil's Cathedral in Moscow's Red Square.

Kuzma Minin, a merchant, and Prince Dmitry Pozharsky were the leaders of an uprising against the Polish invasion of 1611. November 4, the day on which they liberated the center of Moscow more than 400 years ago, is now a national holiday, a symbol of how a united Russian people can defend itself against any foreign enemy.

Back at the Kremlin, the church leader had prepared a surprise for the president, a certificate honoring Putin 'for the preservation of greater Russia.'

'We know,' Kirill said, launching into a hymn of praise for Putin, 'that you, more than anyone else since the end of the 20th century, are helping Russia become more powerful and regain its old positions, as a country that respects itself and enjoys the respect of all others.' *Spiegel* 16-Dec-13

The Russian Orthodox Church—part of Russia's DNA

The Russian Orthodox Church today plays a very important role in Russia. Indeed, it has taken over from the defunct Communist Party of the Soviet Union in helping to maintain and strengthen Russian society, argues Dr Marcus Papadopoulos in this Talking Point.

Sunday marks the 1,025th anniversary of the Christianisation of the first Russian state in history, Kievan Rus.

Ceremonies across Russia have been held to mark the occasion, with His Holiness Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia having presided over a ceremony in Moscow's Christ the Saviour Cathedral.

While the Russian Federation is a secular, multi-cultural state, the Russian Orthodox Church today plays a very important role in Russia.

‘True values’

As President Vladimir Putin said: ‘The Church carries out a very important role even within Russia—the role of creating conditions for inter-confessional, inter-ethnic, international peace and accord.

Today, when the Russian Orthodox Church refers to the last twenty-five years as ‘the second baptism of Russia’, it is referring to how the Church became free again in 1988 after 70 years of Communist persecution. *Voice of Russia* 29-Jul-13

Putin has strongly supported the integration of Church and State. At a meeting with the Council of Bishops at the Kremlin he told them:

‘The Russian Orthodox Church has a significant voice in asserting ideals of humanism, virtue and mercy, and in bringing up younger generations on the basis of intransient moral values, patriotism and civil spirit.’

‘It is my deep conviction that we need to make every effort to boost collaboration between Church and State in key areas such as addressing urgent social problems, promoting antireligious and interethnic dialogue, and imbuing young people with respect for the extremely rich historical, cultural and spiritual legacy of the peoples of Russia,’ he said. *Interfax* 03-Feb-13

Russia: Baptised for the Second Time

As part of the celebrations marking the 1025th anniversary of the Orthodox religion in Russia, a film was produced with the above title. In it, President Putin spoke of the rise again of the Orthodox Church following the fall of Communism. He stated:

‘The meaning of the Church goes beyond the boundaries of the Russian Federation; it helps us to establish good relations with the peoples of other countries, and especially the post-Soviet space, and, of course, the Church is performing a very constructive, positive role here.’ *Voice of Russia* 29-Jul-13

In 1990 there were only 155 Orthodox Churches in use in Moscow, today there are about 320 and a further 200 are planned in the capital over the next 10-20 years. Before the Russian Revolution in 1917 there were over 1,000 churches here.

The Pope must be envious over the integration of the Church in Russian politics!

Warmer relations between the Churches

As we saw in the previous chapter, there is a growing reconciliation between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church; Francis has made several steps towards reconciliation. Talks are underway for the two leaders to meet in a neutral country.

Russian Orthodox Patriarch Kirill expressed high hopes for the future of relations between Moscow and Rome after a November 12 meeting with Milan’s Cardinal Angelo Scola.

The Russian primate expressed his admiration for Pope Francis, and said that ‘never before have our churches had so many things in common.’ He looked

forward to a time when ‘our historical disagreements cease to play a critical role.’

In Rome, meanwhile, after meeting with Pope Francis, Metropolitan Hilarion, the top ecumenical officer of the Moscow Patriarchate disclosed that negotiations have begun to arrange a meeting between the Pope and Patriarch Kirill ‘in a neutral country.’

Metropolitan Hilarion also spoke of the warmth in current relations between Moscow and Rome. Speaking in Rome, he observed that Pope Francis has voiced his appreciation for the Orthodox tradition, especially in the reverence of the Eastern liturgy and the understanding of episcopal collegiality. *Catholic World News* 13-Nov-13

There has been a steady exchange of visits between Rome and Moscow with positive expectations.

‘We pin great expectations on the election of Pope Francis because much of what the Pope formulates today and suggests for the church and the world and society coincides with our vision,’ Patriarch Kirill said at a meeting with the president of the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, Cardinal Kurt Koch, in Moscow.

‘In the positions of the bishop of Rome [pope] and the patriarch of Moscow there is a lot in common as regards issues that are sources of concern for many people,’ he said. As examples of such concurrence, he cited the two churches’ positions on persecutions of Christians in the Middle East and family affairs.

He said dialogue between the Orthodox and Catholic churches is essential today. Cardinal Koch passed Patriarch Kirill oral greetings from Pope Francis. *Interfax* 19-Dec-13

Note how Francis’ use of ‘the bishop of Rome’ had been picked up. This is a matter which we expect to grow considerably.

Putin’s plans for a Russian EU

In Mr Putin’s eyes the breakup of the Soviet Union was a tragedy; he is trying to put the clock back and re-bind the nations of the USSR into a copy of the EU. The first step has been to establish a customs union of the Commonwealth of Independent States, formed by Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. Stage two is to enlarge this into a full-blown Eurasian Economic Community in 2015. Kyrgyzstan,



Tajikistan and Armenia look set to become additional members. At the moment there is a tussle between the EU and Russia for the allegiance of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldavia. We saw the pressure for Ukraine to join the West, but Mr Putin's strong-arm tactics seem to have paid off and it would appear that Ukraine has submitted to Moscow, as Russia has already transferred €2bn of a €10bn bailout to keep her afloat. Doubtless Georgia and Moldavia will likewise go with Russia.

'The thug: how Putin savaged democracy and the West'

It is a critical time for Mr Putin. He has to be seen as a person who has the power and skill to stand up to America and the EU. He seems to be succeeding as this front cover to the German magazine *Der Spiegel* illustrates! The German translates along the lines of 'The thug: how Putin savaged democracy and the West'!

He enraged the West by giving shelter to the whistle blower Edward Snowden. Part of Snowden's revelations showed to what an extent America had spied on Europe, tapping the conversations of Europe's leaders, damaging for a time EU and American relations.

What is so interesting is to see the high moral ground that Putin is taking. He accuses the West (and we would not disagree!) of decadence and corruption.



Putin's moves were not isolated events. They fit into a pattern of behaviour over the past couple of years that deliberately distances Russia from the socially and culturally liberal West: laws giving official sanction to the terrorizing of gays and lesbians, the jailing of members of a punk protest group for offenses against the Russian Orthodox Church, the demonizing of Western-backed pro-democracy organizations as 'foreign agents,' expansive new laws on treason, limits on foreign adoptions.

What's going on is more complicated and more dangerous than just Putin flexing his political pecs. He is trying to draw the line against Europe, to deepen division on a continent that has twice in living memory been the birthplace of world wars. It seems clearer than ever that Putin is not just tweaking the West to rouse his base or nipping domestic opposition in the bud. He is also attempting to turn back 25 years of history.

'Putin wants to make Russia into the traditional values capital of the world,' said Masha Gessen, author of a stinging Putin biography. *New York Times* Opinion piece by Bill Keller. 15-Dec-13

Another article compares Mr Putin to the Russian autocrats.

Putin is a man who rules in the style of a 19th-century despot, one who does not feel committed to the European political model. He favors a feudalistic

approach instead, with a dominant state; courtiers who fulfill their ruler's every desire, no matter how arbitrary; an economy that purely serves the interests of politicians; and a motto that reads: 'What's mine cannot be yours.' And now the events in Ukraine and the role Putin has played in them raises the question, once again, of who the man in the Kremlin really is and what he wants. Is Ukraine, as it descends into turmoil, symbolic of a new turning point in the relationship between East and West? *Der Spiegel* 16-Dec-13

Putin seeks to take advantage of Obama's weakness

The Russian navy has frequently assembled for brief periods in the eastern Mediterranean, to remind the West that she does have a naval presence. They have been trying to find a Mediterranean port that they can use if the port at Tartus in Syria becomes untenable because of the fighting there. Talks have been ongoing with Cyprus about the use of facilities at Limassol; they have also explored the possibilities of Haifa in Israel and Alexandria in Egypt.

Putin has ordered his military to undertake 'an immediate and massive military upgrade by 2016' according to the *Washington Times* 27-Feb-13. They are planning to increase the size of the army to 1 million, having shrunk to about 800,000 people. This comes at a time when the West is cutting its military budgets.

The *Economist* magazine cover 27-Sep-13 neatly summarised the decline of the West's power over the Syrian debacle. The lion looks a bit sad for itself, its paw and tail are bandaged and in the glass is its set of false teeth! Into this weakness Putin has been able to insert himself. Not that the Gulf States are falling over themselves to fall into Russia's orbit, they remember the Soviet days and would rather not go back there. However for Iran and Assad in Syria, this weakening of the West and the growing power of Russia is welcomed.



Summary

Generally it has been a good year for Putin, although the economic outlook is not too good. He has reinforced his autocratic style and harks back to the imperial days while he continues to build the partnership of State and Church. He stressed the divide between Russia and the West. As the *Dragon* power of Revelation 16:13 she has an independent role to play, but will work with the *Beast* power of Europe and the *False Prophet* of the churches. Russia will play the lead-role in the Middle East, by heading the invasion of Israel, but will be opposed by the southern Arab nations, together with Britain and her young lions. Gog, the leader of the confederacy is described in other prophecies as the latter-day Assyrian. The Assyrian harshness of rule was legendary, and today Mr Putin shows a similar ruthless streak.

We now look at Britain and see how she has fared in the past year.

Chapter 14

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BRITAIN'S BETTER ECONOMIC YEAR

After years of Britain being in financial difficulties, it was a welcome change to have some positive news! Although not out of the woods yet by far, Britain has shown the flexibility to claw her way back to a major trading power, unshackled by the cold bands of the euro. Talk is of Britain being on course to overtake both France and Germany to become the strongest power in Europe. This is forecast many years hence, a result of increasing population, due to immigration, giving a better balance of age in her population, avoiding being overwhelmed by the demands of an aging population. Sadly Britain seems far away from upholding the Bible, yet there does seem a turning of the tide as increasingly louder voices are heard that the country needs to acknowledge its Christian roots and not allow the folly of humanism to overwhelm her. Under the phrase the Merchants of Tarshish, the Scriptural picture is of Britain being a power operating in the Middle East in preparation for being part of that group of nations who are opposed to the destruction of Israel at the hands of Gog and his companions. We see increasing evidence of Britain's rift with Europe, yet she is reluctant to take that step into the unknown and walk away from Europe. Circumstances will arise that will bring about this shift, but we may well have been called away by then. We start by looking at her gradual return to the Middle East.

Putting the Great into Britain again?

At the end of 2012 Britain's Defence Chief revealed that the government's policy was for Britain to consider returning to her traditional role of having her troops in the Gulf region, following their 2014 withdrawal from Afghanistan. This was thrilling news and perhaps marks a change in Britain's fortunes as she begins to play the role that our community has long seen for Britain. In 1922 at the height of the British Empire she ruled over almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of the world's land mass and 20% of its population. However her power had started to decline in the early days of the 20th century, even though her navy ruled supreme and just over 50% of the world's merchant shipping was British.

The 1st World War was a heavy burden that speeded up her downfall. The more she turned her back on the Jews and their homeland that she had secured, the more her power slipped away. The 2nd World War was the final straw and although she emerged from it triumphant, with the help of her allies, she was saddled with a great burden of debt. Some 75 years from the outbreak of that War, are her fortunes to turn? Scripture would indicate that this is to be so, in order to fulfil her role. After 40 fairly disastrous years attached to Europe, she is now viewing more distant markets. The clamour for her to join the euro is now a distant dream. Businesses who had let manufacturing leave these shores and had things made in far distant lands with lower wage rates, are bringing them back to be made here, due to quality problems and long supply lines. Wage rises here have been curbed to give greater competition. A growing problem is that recently, investors want to buy into the British pound as a safe currency and this is strengthening its value, which

makes exports more expensive. However, British exporters are giving the most optimistic forecasts for years.

Britain's East of Suez policy

Following the December 2012 indications of a policy change, the *Royal United Services Institute*, the think tank that advises the UK government in defence matters, produced a report in April entitled: **A return to East of Suez? UK Military Deployment to the Gulf**. Here are some extracts from the 16 page report.

At a time of economic retrenchment and growing uncertainty within Europe, it may seem strange that the UK sees its future military security increasingly 'east of Suez'. Such an emotive phrase suggests imperial ambitions at a time when UK armed forces are smaller than they have been for 200 years. But there are compelling reasons for the UK to take its Gulf relationships much more seriously.



The military intends to build up a strong shadow presence around the Gulf; not an evident imperial-style footprint, but a smart presence with facilities, defence agreements, rotation of training, transit and jumping-off points for forces that aim to be more adaptable and agile as they face the post Afghanistan years from 2014. The Minhad airbase at Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has emerged as the key to this smart presence and more will be heard about it, alongside the Typhoon deal with the UAE, in the near future.

But how accurate is it to say that the UK is returning 'east of Suez'? Indeed, did the UK ever really leave? The facts would say that the UK did not; rather, the UK presence in the Gulf endured in particular, with the military posture reacting to the needs of the day, and the political relationships oscillating between different governments. We may, in fact, be witnessing something more evolutionary than revolutionary and transformational. Instead of seeing the activities of Cameron, Hammond and Richards as something distinctly new, we should in fact see them as the codification of a series of ad-hoc initiatives, arrangements and developments that have occurred since 1971, and the forging of a more coherent strategy that packages together military deployments, defence sales, comprehensive bilateral engagements and wider issues concerning the UK's place in international affairs—with particular reference to the continued advancement of the 'special relationship' with the US.

... It remains the case that the scale of the military deployment being discussed is significant. The RAF is set to use the Al-Minhad air base in Dubai (currently used extensively in the logistics chain between the UK and Afghanistan) as a hub not only for the 2014 drawdown in Afghanistan, but as an overseas base of some standing in the future.

The Royal Navy is also taking a more active interest in Bahrain, which is already home to the United Kingdom Maritime Component Command (UKMCC). Reports also suggest that senior army personnel are keen to build on their strong links with Oman. And the Emir of Qatar has reportedly been assured by Cameron of the UK's commitment to the gas-rich emirate, with Doha a favoured location for UK military liaison and co-ordination activities in the Gulf.

There is significantly more at stake in this renewed relationship than mere military posturing. By enhancing the UK's relationships with the states of the southern Gulf, **the UK is committing to the security and longevity of the Arab Gulf states.**

Irrespective of whether the US remains in the Gulf or not, a clear strategic choice seems to have been made concerning where the country's strategic focus and attention will be in the future—and that is in the East. **The UK's more obvious and effective engagement in the southern Gulf, which will likely create opportunities for further engagement in the region incorporating the Indian Ocean and the sub-continent, could be seen as a new geopolitical expression of the US-UK special relationship**—perhaps designed to emphasise to Washington the value of an enduring, if changed, special relationship with the UK.

Yet, just as the UK's withdrawal in 1971 created a security vacuum that drew the US, somewhat unwillingly, further into the affairs of the Gulf, the US's cooling of its engagement seems to be drawing the UK back in.

However, it seems that the UK is taking on this burden of underpinning security in the Gulf **both out of necessity and of desire.** Certainly, it is of **considerable economic benefit** to the UK to be the **leading European—and, indeed, Western—**player in the Gulf. And it is undeniable that the UK defence and policy establishment still finds it **straightforward, enjoyable even, to engage with their equivalents in the Gulf in a way, perhaps, that has often eluded the Americans.** There is also a 'domestic' military rationale for the UK in developing closer defence ties with the Gulf, given that the army's imminent withdrawal from Germany will both curtail decades of experience of maintaining forces overseas and erode some of what has distinguished the UK military from its European counterparts.

The Gulf region is home to some 160,000 British citizens and is an important trade market.

We must look after our allies east of Suez

This was the headline to an article in the *Daily Telegraph* 11-Dec-13. Mr Obama seemed to be letting his Gulf allies down; he allowed his ally President Mubarak to fall in 2011 and now he is determined to make friends with Iran and so solve the situation there through the power of diplomacy. Many Gulf rulers are wondering whether Obama would stand up to support them if their kingdoms were attacked.

David Cameron and William Hague are in tune with the region and are anxious not to let Russia fill the vacuum as America looks to concentrate her defensive efforts in Asia. The article concluded:

Certainly, if the Obama administration is not up to the job of looking after its friends, then Britain should do the job for it. *Daily Telegraph* 11-Dec-13

The article was followed two days later by a letter of support to the *Telegraph* editor from a former Commander-in-chief Fleet. In it he explained how in his tenure of this position (2005-2007) he had foreseen the need to increase Britain's presence here, increasing British ships in the region from 1 to 14.

Deployment to the Gulf region brings clear advantage to one of our major strategic dependencies, is a quick dash from the eastern Mediterranean and halfway to the Far East. It also places us at the forefront of inter-operability with US forces, a vital characteristic in any crisis anywhere in the world.

The Royal Navy has moved on from 'train where we expect to fight' to 'deploy where we make the most difference'. *Daily Telegraph* letter 13-Dec-13

Britain's bases in the Gulf Region

The UK operates the United Kingdom Maritime Component Command (UKMCC), based in [Bahrain](#); this is the nerve centre for naval operations in the Gulf and Indian Ocean, working closely with the American 5th Fleet HQ alongside. Britain is contemplating putting in barracks for army troops. In [Qatar](#) the Emir is constructing the world's deepest port for use by US and UK ships. Britain is planning to build here a command control centre to coordinate all her activities in the Gulf. Plans are in hand to increase the airbase in the [UAE](#) for use as her hub in the draw-down from Afghanistan and thereafter to be an important future base. UK military personnel have long been involved with training in [Saudi Arabia](#). Britain and the US have troops in [Jordan](#) helping with the Syrian refugee crisis which is threatening to overwhelm Jordan's economy. Britain's main army and navy base is on [Cyprus](#). It is here, according to the whistle-blower Snowden that the UK intelligence agency operates her £1 billion Middle East listening post, picking up the emails and phone calls from the region.

As well as military interest in the area, Britain has deep economic interests in this whole region. [Saudi Arabia](#) is the UK's biggest ME market with bilateral trade of almost £10bn. She has investments there of some £11bn and around 200 joint venture companies operate there. Her second largest market is with the [UAE](#), with bilateral trade of over £7bn and on target to double by 2015. Some 4,000 UK companies operate there, being the centre for trade to other Gulf States. [Oman](#) is small as far as trade is concerned, but has British links that go back 350 years. Joint navy exercises are frequently carried out. The UK is the biggest investor in [Egypt](#) with over 900 UK firms operating there. Obviously trade has been affected by the Arab Spring, but



most companies are anticipating things returning to more normal levels under the Egyptian military leaders.

We looked in chapter 10 at Britain's growing trade with [Israel](#) and Britain's efforts to greatly increase that trade. The UK is Israel's 2nd biggest export market behind the US.

London Gateway now open

The ruler of Dubai has invested heavily in Britain's maritime future with the construction of the London Gateway on the north bank of the River Thames. By dredging the Thames right out to sea, deep water ships can now dock some 20 miles (32km) from the heart of London. This is the biggest port in Europe and capable of handling the 40 ft. containers that form the backbone of world trade.

The port is run by DP World which absorbed the UK's P&O in 2006. The money, an estimated £1.5bn, comes from Dubai World, which is the Dubai government's investment company to use its oil wealth to promote Dubai as a maritime centre. The first of six docking berths was opened in November. It will be some time before it is completely up and running and the distribution hub associated with it finished. It has



the potential to reduce shipping costs dramatically to and from the UK and is expected eventually to provide 27,000 jobs and contribute £2.4bn a year, according to the *BBC* 07-Nov-13.

Britain still the centre for business

Whether looking at inward investments, property investments or ease of doing business, Britain retains her No 1 position. Others are snapping at her heels, but if the economic growth promised materialises, then this will increase Britain's advantages. Britain is still ranked top hub for financial services and came top for the 11th year running for inward investments. Investment in Britain's North Sea Oil is running at a 30 year high, creating a shortage of skilled engineers. Britain is the top European destination for Chinese investments; with Mr Cameron taking his biggest ever business delegation to China in December and coming back with deals estimated to be close to £6bn. He has cut taxes to make Britain more attractive than her fellow EU members, and intends to continue to do so to attract more and more firms to make the UK their base.

'I know of more than 40 multinational companies that have been looking to undertake global and regional headquarter relocations into Britain,' Mr Varley, the UK chairman of Ernst & Young, said.

'They have the potential to bring £1bn of additional annual tax revenues and more than 2,000 high-value senior management jobs to the country.'

‘There are numerous reasons for this, including real progress on the British ambition to become one of the most competitive corporate tax regimes in the G20.’

Mr Varley also revealed new figures which suggest that many foreign businesses from North America and Asia believe Prime Minister David Cameron’s push to renegotiate Britain’s legal agreements with the European Union would be attractive to many businesses.

‘What I’m hearing in the market is that renegotiating our relationship with the EU would actually have little negative impact on foreign investment decisions into the UK,’ he said. *Daily Telegraph* 05-May-13

Fastest growing economy in the developed world

That was the startling headline in the *Daily Telegraph* 04-Oct-13. Even the IMF has been forced to acknowledge that the economy in the UK should grow 1.4% this year. That does not sound very much, but even Germany has ground to a halt and France’s economy is shrinking and it may be greater than India’s and Brazil’s growth. Britain’s exports to the rapidly growing BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) countries have more than doubled since the financial crisis began.

Locked into the euro and with a shrinking workforce, the prospects for Germany are much poorer than for Britain. Germany’s population is expected to fall from its present 86 million to 64 million by 2060, with an aging population. Britain’s population is projected to grow from its present 62 million to 80 million in 2050.

Britain is determined to press ahead and develop her shale gas deposits which are thought to be enormous, with the potential to cut the UK’s gas imports drastically and provide cheaper energy which would be warmly welcomed by industry and homeowners alike. Big financial incentives are being offered to communities to allow exploration on their patch.

Britain on course to become strong man of Europe

Britain will overtake France as the world’s fifth largest economy within five years and is on course to leapfrog Germany to become the largest economy in Europe by 2030, according to a leading think-tank.

Its younger workforce and position outside the eurozone mean it is less exposed than its European neighbours to the problems of the 17-nation bloc, says *The Centre for Economics and Business Research* (CEBR), which believes that leaving the EU could be in the UK’s long-term interest.

‘Positive demographics with continuing immigration, rather less exposure to the problems of the eurozone ... combine with relatively low taxes to encourage faster growth than in most western economies,’ the CEBR said in its annual Economic League Table report.

The CEBR also highlighted the need for Britain to ‘further reorient its exports to faster growing markets’. *Daily Telegraph* 26-Dec-13

Of course we expect the coming of the Master to bring to a halt the schemes and plans of men, but it is interesting to see how the trends are favouring Britain, to enable her to play the role long ordained. For the prophets have spoken of the *isles afar off*.

*Hear the word of the LORD, O ye nations, and **declare it in the isles afar off**, and say, He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock.*

For the LORD hath redeemed Jacob, and ransomed him from the hand of him that was stronger than he.

Therefore they shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow together to the goodness of the LORD, for wheat, and for wine, and for oil, and for the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. Jer. 31:10-12

Britain and her young lions

In October, the EU and Canada signed a free trade deal, from which Britain is likely to benefit the most and indications point to the potential of trade increasing nearly 30% between the UK and Canada, potentially creating thousands of new jobs. Earlier in the year Britain signed a Defence treaty with Australia ‘designed to further boost cooperation on military and security issues.’ The report continued:

Australia’s Defence Minister Stephen Smith said the idea for the accord had arisen during Australia-UK ministerial talks two years ago, to ensure all ‘practical cooperation measures, arrangements, protocols, and memorandums of understanding that we have ... be put under a broad strategic framework’.

He described the Defence and Security Cooperation Treaty as ‘deeply significant’, adding that the relationship between the two countries ‘has always been first class’.

‘It reflects not just our history, but also our closeness and our desire to work even more closely in a practical cooperation sense, whether that’s on strategic matters or procurement and acquisition matters, into the future,’ Smith said.

British Defence Secretary Philip Hammond said the treaty gave the allies a framework on which to build on their existing high level of co-operation.

‘As we draw down from Afghanistan ... we need to think about how we maintain levels of interoperability with each other,’ he said. *AFP* 18-Jan-13

The Commonwealth has never been stronger

Trade in the Commonwealth is booming, with member states collectively exporting more than £1.5 trillion of goods and services each year. Research conducted by the Royal Commonwealth Society found that when two trading partners were members, their trade was likely to be a third to a half more than when one or both trade partners was non-Commonwealth. There is clearly the potential to build on this in 2013 and beyond. *Daily Telegraph* 02-Jan-13

As an evidence for this, trade with India has increased by 20% this year, boosted by the efforts of Mr Cameron who takes a party of business leaders on his overseas

visits as does Vince Cable the Business Secretary. Mr Cable was on his 4th visit to India since he was tasked with doubling trade with India by 2015. Britain is the biggest European investor in India and India's investment in the UK is greater than all her investments in the rest of the EU combined.

BREXIT

This stands for Britain's exit (from the EU). The pressure is growing for Britain to sail away from the EU. We can only speculate what causes the final break. Will it be a case of being pushed out, or mutual separation or an acrimonious divorce? Scripture does not guide us, only it indicates that the UK is not part of the *Beast* system; she has other work to do. At the moment, David Cameron would prefer to remain in the EU, but a reformed EU with looser bonds. His ideal is based on the ancient Hanseatic League. The *Economist* 30-Nov-13 ran an article incorporating the cartoon we have on the front cover. The Hanseatic League was a loose coalition of traders spread out along the coastal regions of today's Holland to the Baltic. The traders from each country promoted inter-trading and low taxes. It ran from the 13th to the 17th century and was in a way a forerunner to the EU. London joined the League in 1320 and became a significant contributor.



It grew significantly over time into a walled community with its own warehouses, weighhouse, church, offices and houses, reflecting the importance and scale of the activity carried on. *Wikipedia*

It had agents and warehouses in many East Coast ports of Britain; Kings Lynn has the sole remaining Hanseatic warehouse in England. As the cover cartoon shows, Mr Cameron would love to get rid of the impoverished southern EU members and form the trading alliance with Germany and the prosperous northern countries that Britain had thought she was going to be doing when she joined the EU in 1973.

However, the financial downturn in the EU is pushing the UK to other markets. The stronger the £ is against the €, the more expensive Britain's exports are to the eurozone. It does help to reduce the cost of what she has to pay into the EU coffers, as they are paid in euros. However, the promised EU budget cuts that seemed to be a certainty at the start of the year seem to have evaporated, increasing again the contributions for those countries that pay in more than they get back from the EU.

Summary

It is thrilling to see Britain being prepared by the angelic hands, with a strengthening economy that will make it possible for her to fulfil her role.

Our final look takes us to Germany where Ms Merkel was re-elected Chancellor.

Chapter 15

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MERKEL BACK AGAIN WITH MORE POWER

Ms Merkel has been returned to power for the third time, this time she has formed what is termed a grand coalition which puts her firmly in power, having control of 80% of the seats in the Bundestag. This was the result of the previous coalition partner, the Free Democrats (FDP) failing, for the first time, to obtain any seats; such was their low position in the polls. Ms Merkel had to find a new partner and eventually a new alliance was made with the Social Democrats (SPD) to form a grand coalition. The elections were on 22nd September, the new government was sworn in on the 17th December. This meant that there was little political movement in the EU while this was going on.

The GroKo government

This is short for ‘Große Koalition’, German for Grand Coalition and is a word which became the ‘word of the year’! Mrs Merkel’s first term was a GroKo, with the same partners, but at her second election she had won sufficient seats to choose allied parties. In order to woo the Social Democrats she has had to make some concessions, the main one being to agree to a minimum wage. However its inauguration has been put off until 2015. Chancellor Merkel has managed to reduce wage rates when everyone else in the EU has been putting them up, making her exports more competitive.

Another not so grand consequence is that the new cabinet list had to allow for many considerations to create a politically-correct balance between the top representatives of the three parties, in addition to the usual male-female, protestant-catholic, East-West balance.

As a result, we now have a labour minister who never worked in a profession (outside of her party organization) and a minister for defense who has never been near the army. *The Local* 19-Dec-13

With such a huge parliamentary majority, Chancellor Merkel should be able to push through her ideas during this new term.

No other significant nation in the current EU has both a strong economy and a strong government—certainly not France, clinging to the past and teetering on the brink of a new recession. Not Britain either, we should note. *The Guardian* 19-Dec-13

However the Social Democrats who are close to France’s Socialist party of Francois Holland will not be favourable to David Cameron’s desire for reforms. Ms Merkel has in the past supported Mr Cameron, but she is less likely to want to rock the boat with her coalition partners.

But Ms Merkel’s focus will be squarely on international policy. Her insistence on austerity in the euro crisis won her the election because voters credited her with keeping a lid on Germany’s exposure to the debt of ailing member states.

Despite the SPD's control of the foreign ministry, she will retain a firm grip on European policy, not least because her ally Wolfgang Schäuble, the wheelchair-bound, gruff veteran of countless Brussels crisis meetings, remains finance minister.

As a result, Germany's stance on Europe won't change, even though Ms Merkel has become a figure of hate in countries like Greece, where she is blamed for soaring unemployment and radical cutbacks. German officials have cited Ireland's successful exit from the international bailout last week as proof that Ms Merkel's approach was right. *Daily Telegraph* 17-Dec-13

At the beginning of her third term, Merkel has more power in Germany and Europe than any chancellor before her. There hasn't been such a strong majority behind a government in Germany's parliament, the Bundestag, since the first grand coalition half a century ago. In the midst of the European crisis, Germany has become the undisputed dominant power in Europe.

The grand coalition will hand Merkel a majority she could use to shape Germany and Europe and address major issues, including constitutional reforms in Germany and the reform of European Union institutions.

In contrast, officials at the Chancellery are forging plans for Europe that are practically visionary for someone like Merkel. If she prevails, they will fundamentally change the European Union. The goal is to achieve extensive, communal control of national budgets, of public borrowing in the 28 EU capitals and of national plans to boost competitiveness and implement social reforms. The hope is that these measures will ensure the long-term stability of the euro and steer member states onto a common economic and fiscal path. This would be the oft-invoked and ambitious political completion of Europe's monetary union—a huge achievement.

It isn't a new goal, but what is new is the thumbscrews Brussels will be allowed to apply if Merkel has her way, including sooner and sharper controls and veto rights, as well as contractually binding agreements and requirements. In short, this would amount to a true reconstruction of the euro zone and a major step in the direction of an 'economic government' of the sort the SPD too would like to see put in place. *Spiegel* 21-Oct-13

We watch and wait to see what this powerful leader of Europe pushes for Europe. It will also be interesting to see how much she is influenced by Pope Francis.

Forbes: Merkel the world's most powerful woman

Angela Merkel came No. 5 in *Forbes* list of the most powerful persons in 2013 and the top slot for the most powerful woman. Their citation:

The world's most powerful woman is the backbone of the 27-member European Union and carries the fate of the euro on her shoulders. Fresh off a commanding re-election in September 2013, she has served as Chancellor of Germany since 2005; the first woman in the position. Merkel has earned the top spot on the FORBES list of Most Powerful Women in the World for eight of the past 10 years. *Forbes* 30-Oct-13

Germany profits again from the euro crisis

Although the Germans have had to contribute generously to bailing out their poorer cousins in the south, the EU has been highly beneficial to them. The strength of the German economy has led to remarkably low borrowing rates, it is estimated that the German economy is better off to the tune of billions of euros.

Germany has profited from the euro crisis to the tune of 41 billion euros in reduced interest payments. Strong demand for its debt has cut yields and made it cheaper for Germany to borrow. Meanwhile, the crisis has only cost Germany a mere 599 million euros thus far.

On average, the interest rate on all new federal government bond issues fell by almost a full percentage point in the 2010 to 2014 period. Financial investors regard Germany as a particularly safe creditor because of its solid state finances.

The interest rate savings combined with unexpectedly high tax revenues generated by the strong economy have also led to a decline in new borrowing. Between 2010 and 2012, the German government issued €73 billion less in new debt than planned. *Spiegel* 19-Aug-13

Their export success has not led to a surge of imports; in fact the gap between the two is remarkably big.

New records in German foreign trade are provoking massive international criticism of Berlin's concentration on exports. According to reports, the German economy has achieved a foreign trade surplus of 20.4 billion Euros in September—a new record. It is estimated that for 2013, German companies' exports will exceed by around 200 billion Euros the amount imported. That is the world's highest national import-export gap. Protests are growing because many of the customer countries for German products thereby are driven into debt, as was the case in the crisis countries of the southern Euro zone. Other than the EU Commission threatening Berlin with an official reprimand, the US Secretary of Finances is accusing the German government of threatening the stability of the global economy. The IMF is also emphatically insisting that Germany reign in its export offensive. *German Foreign Policy* 11-Nov-13

As most of her exports are within the EU, this is a double blow to her fellow members, especially those in the eurozone. Not only do they lose their own manufacturing businesses because it is cheaper to import from Germany, but their own exports are down, because Germany isn't buying them. Ms Merkel's years of austerity are now reaping their rewards—for Germany!

The Franco-German control of Europe is no more

Since the founding of the original Coal and Steel union, France has been the force behind such a scheme, in order to keep Germany in check. Never again did France want to be at war with her neighbour. Germany was happy to take the back seat and keep her head down as she tried to make amends for the horrors of two World Wars within a short time span. It suited both sides, but what France did not realise was that it was not Germany's intention to remain in this position. The Word of

prophecy pointed to Germany, not France who would be the dominant leader of the *Beast* of Revelation 16 and 17.

Today we see France struggling, saddled with a shrinking economy, saddled with expensive trade practices, kept afloat by the expensive CAP agricultural subsidy scheme which sustains France's numerous, but inefficient, small farms. Meanwhile Germany has forged ahead, whereas France is facing a triple-dip recession.

France is, in fact, 'falling further behind.' While the German economy is growing, the French is stagnating; while unemployment in Germany has dropped to 5.4 percent since 2009, it has risen to eleven percent in France. Germany's exports are booming and providing the country an enormous growth in foreign trade, whereas France has sunk deep into the minus. *German Foreign Policy* 13-Nov-13

It is clear that there is little love lost between Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande, they have never warmed to one another and there seems little trust between them.

France dissolves symbolic regiment based in Germany

One of the great signs of Franco-German cooperation was the forming, in 1987, of the German-French Brigade, a united military brigade. France had 1,500 troops stationed in Germany and Germany around 500 stationed in France. It was a highly symbolic sign of friendship, set up by President Mitterrand of France and Chancellor Kohl of Germany.

The brigade is highly symbolic in nature as it is difficult for both countries to jointly deploy soldiers to hotspots, given the different rules of engagement that govern both armies. *Agence France-Presse* 21-Oct-13.

It formed an important element of Eurocorp, the fledgling EU army. In October, France announced that it was withdrawing one of its brigades from Germany, leaving only around 500 troops there. It cited budgetary cuts. Although this does not end the German-French Brigade, it is greatly weakened by this move.

Germany and Russia

A member of the SDP, Frank-Walter Steinmeier was Foreign Minister in Merkel's first government and before that had been close aide to Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, who, following his party's defeat, took up chairmanship of the Nord Stream project, spending much time in Russia. Ms Merkel has appointed him Foreign Minister in her new government. We should expect that Germany's policy will continue to reach out to Russia.

Germany accommodates Russia's concerns. Historically and from the long-term strategic perspective, Germany wants to be Russia's main European partner to ensure that no alliance emerges between Russia and Germany's western neighbors, France and Britain that could threaten Berlin. Moreover, Germany has a high demand for Russian energy supplies. The country has a strong industrial base but lacks the domestic energy supplies to fuel it. More than a third of the natural gas Germany consumes comes from Russia. Importing

energy through the existing infrastructure is more economically viable than the alternatives Germany is pursuing.

Several events in the past decade have demonstrated the significance of the Russian-German bilateral relationship. One such event was the construction of the Nord Stream natural gas pipeline, which provides a direct link between Germany and Russia. Another was Berlin's opposition to closer NATO ties with Ukraine and Georgia in 2008. These are examples that show Germany understands it must accommodate Russia even if it means going against the wishes of Central and Eastern European partners and Washington.

Next year Russia is likely to make greater efforts to strengthen its industrial base and decrease its dependence on the energy sector. Given Germany's industrial competitiveness, German companies will be seen as important partners from which to acquire technical expertise. Russia will likely try to buy German companies and will work to attract them to set up production sites in Russia.

While both countries have an interest in building economic relations, there will also be tensions. Germany has an export-oriented economy and is interested in greater access to the Russian market in light of the European economic crisis. Germany will probably argue for closer business ties (for example, through visa liberalization) while also demanding that Russia grant greater access to German exports, which could challenge Russian producers.

One of the key challenges for German policymakers will be the balance between European cohesiveness and relations with Russia. *Stratfor* 27-Nov-13

The tug-of-war over Middle Europe

We saw Russia's desire to prevent the EU from absorbing more of her former Soviet members. It will be an interesting battle, as Germany desires to lead the EU eastward, whilst Russia resists this encroachment on her former territory. It is an item that will surely run until the countries of Middle Europe become attached to either the EU or Russia as the Image of Daniel 2 prepares to stand on its feet.

Croatia admitted to the EU

2013 marked the enlargement of the EU to 28 countries as Croatia joined on 1st July; the 2nd country from the former Yugoslavia to join, (Slovenia joined in 2004). Yugoslavia was formed at the end of WWI as a republic by the merging of Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. It was then carved up by Hitler and Mussolini when it was invaded in 1941; parts were shared between Germany and Italy, other parts with Hungary and Bulgaria. The rest was formed into the Independent State of Croatia. At the end of WWII it was regrouped back as Yugoslavia and continued until the break-up of the Soviet in the 1990's, reverting back to similar divisions as before WWI. Germany and the Vatican have supported the two mainly Roman Catholic countries of Slovenia and Croatia to join the EU.

We have to go back to the time of WWII to see why Germany and the Vatican were keen to have them as members. It is a dark and terrible period when the Vatican supported the deportation, conversion and murder of many thousands of

Yugoslavia's inhabitants. Croatia was placed under the control of Ante Pavelić, chief of the Croatian Fascists, known as the 'Ustashis'. With the help of the Roman Catholic clergy, led by Mgr. Stepinac, there was mass destruction of Jews, gypsies and Orthodox Serbs. Some 600,000 Jews and Orthodox believers were murdered and 240,000 Orthodox Christians forced to adopt Roman Catholicism. It is extensively documented in the books *Vatican against Europe* and *Convert or Die!* by Edmund Paris. This year, the first English translation of a 1965 book written in German was published, entitled *God and the Fascists: The Vatican Alliance with Mussolini, Franco, Hitler, and Pavelić* by Karlheinz Dechner. It has a chapter on *The Vatican and the Croatian Atrocities*. It is well documented. Much of the subsequent history of the Balkans is coloured by these dreadful happenings.

After the war, Mgr. Stepinac was tried for war crimes and was given a 16 year sentence. He was subsequently released by President Tito after serving 6 years in prison and placed under house arrest in Yugoslavia, where he subsequently died in 1960. In 1952 Pope Pius XII elevated him to the rank of a cardinal and in 1997 the Vatican declared that he had died as a martyr! This enabled Pope John Paul II to beatify him as no miracle is required for those who were 'martyred'. Again, what a travesty of the facts. In 1998 the Pope visited Croatia and led the beatification service.

Ante Pavelitch fled to Italy disguised as a priest and was sheltered by the Vatican until helped to obtain a false passport from the Red Cross, he then fled to Argentina where he eventually set up a Croatian government in exile. He was wounded in an assassination attempt, eventually fleeing to Spain, where he died in 1959.

Through the steady rewriting of history, little of this is spoken about and the EU rejoiced as this piece of the former Yugoslavia became its 28th member.

Summary

We have witnessed in the past few years the rise in power of Germany as the undisputed leader of the EU, able to cast on one side the help given by France, who has fallen by the wayside, in large measure because Germany ensured that the EU was crafted to suit her. We are witnessing the last stages in the forming of the Western leg of Nebuchadnezzar's image.

We have now reached the end of our Milestones for 2013. I am conscious that there are many more things one could have written about, as there is certainly no shortage of material! As is our custom, we close with a short chapter of exhortation. After all, it is one thing to get excited about seeing God's Hand at work among the nations and witnessing the Word of God being fulfilled before our eyes, but it has to also change us. We are so close to the Master's call, it can come at any time and where will he find us? A sobering thought.

Chapter 16

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“Yahweh, who stretches out the heavens”

Creation and Bible prophecy are like the two sides of a coin. On the “Creation” side we see the incredible mind of God who can not only design and create such an intricate and interdependent world, but builds in the means of its perpetuation, and ability to cope with changes. The “Prophecy” side shows us an equally all-knowing God, who knew everything that would happen and has left us a detailed picture of coming events. With the passage of time many are now in the past and we can see just how amazingly accurate they were, and how powerful God is to cause world events to happen exactly as He foretold. What an awesome Mind our God has.

It puts man in his place for he doesn’t know what tomorrow will bring. Outside the fixture of the seasons—ordained by God and outside what God has revealed, man can only speculate and the wisest man’s knowledge is puny compared to God’s. Man’s understanding is ever-changing—his only certainty is eventual death!

How sad to see the ideas of evolution, which would accept neither side of our imaginary coin, creeping into the Brotherhood. The Creation account is the very foundation stone of the rest of Scripture. Reject its teaching that God brought the world into being and completed His work in just a few days and try to impose billions of years until we have an Adam and an Eve, makes a mockery of sin and death being introduced and the need for a Saviour. If death had already been in existence for millions of years, it makes meaningless the need of a “2nd Adam” to provide the way back to God to escape the consequences due to the 1st Adam’s sin.

The picture of a powerful God who spoke and it happened can find no place in a gradually evolving world over aeons of time. The 6,000 years of Bible time is far less than a mere blink in terms of the evolutionist’s alleged age of the earth of 4.6 billion years, let alone the 13 billion years from an alleged “Big Bang”. Picture the 12 hours on a clock face as representing 4.6 billion years. Then, on this scale, the 6,000 years of Bible time is **less than 1/200th of one second!** Welcome to the space of human recorded civilisation. Yes a blink is much too long!

Where do these long ages come from? They are ALL based on unprovable assumptions! Evolutionists howl at such a statement against their god “science”; never-the-less it is true. Nobody was there a million years ago to confirm that their suppositions were right. In *faith* they have to believe their hypotheses are true—that there was no world-wide flood and no act of mature creation. There is no evidence-based proof that confirms an old earth, without needing an assumption.

In faith, finding the Bible to be trustworthy (through prophecy, archaeology, etc.), we have a sound foundation, from Yahweh who being there, told us what He did.

Our heading is taken from Zechariah 12:1. [WEB] It is easy to overlook this verse as we seek to understand what follows. Every word is relevant. God is making this challenge to the nations, that the God of Israel (which they don’t believe is true) is also the Creator of the heavens and the earth (which they also don’t believe is true). Let us not join their folly, but look for coming of the One who accepted that, in the words of the Psalmist: *God’s Word is true from the beginning!* (Psa. 119:160)

Keep up-to-date!

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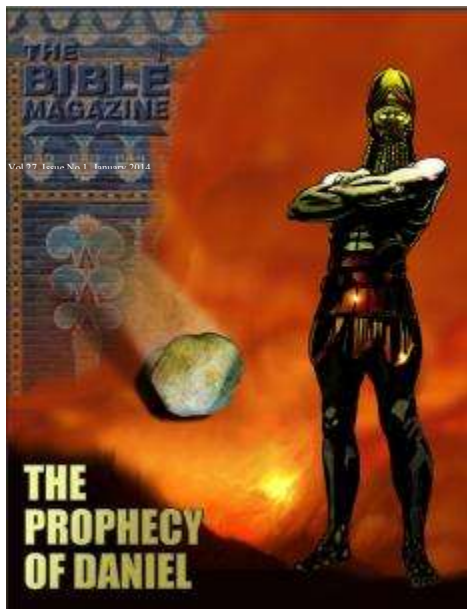
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Both the *Bible Magazine* and the *Milestones* websites carry details of known Prophecy Days around the world that uphold our traditional understanding of the fulfilment of prophecy. For latest details of the Rugby Prophecy Day go to:

www.bibletalksrugby.org and click on links. Also you will find a link to the Rugby Christadelphians YouTube channels where you can watch many Prophecy Day talks from the UK and around the world.

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Milestones 2013

Our main themes for 2013:

- A new Pope, already making great changes
- Changing allegiances in the Middle East
- The two legs and feet of Nebuchadnezzar's image shaping up!
- Britain, as Tarshish, returning to the Gulf region
- Putin building a new Empire
- Ms Merkel back in power
- Israel prospering and making new friends



We see so many signs that our Master is at the door.

Wake up and watch lest we fall asleep!

The chapters have their usual mix of exposition, prophecy and connections to the events of the year, in support of our established understanding of Bible prophecy.

Milestones 2013 is an antidote to apathy in these difficult times for Christ's brothers and sisters.

