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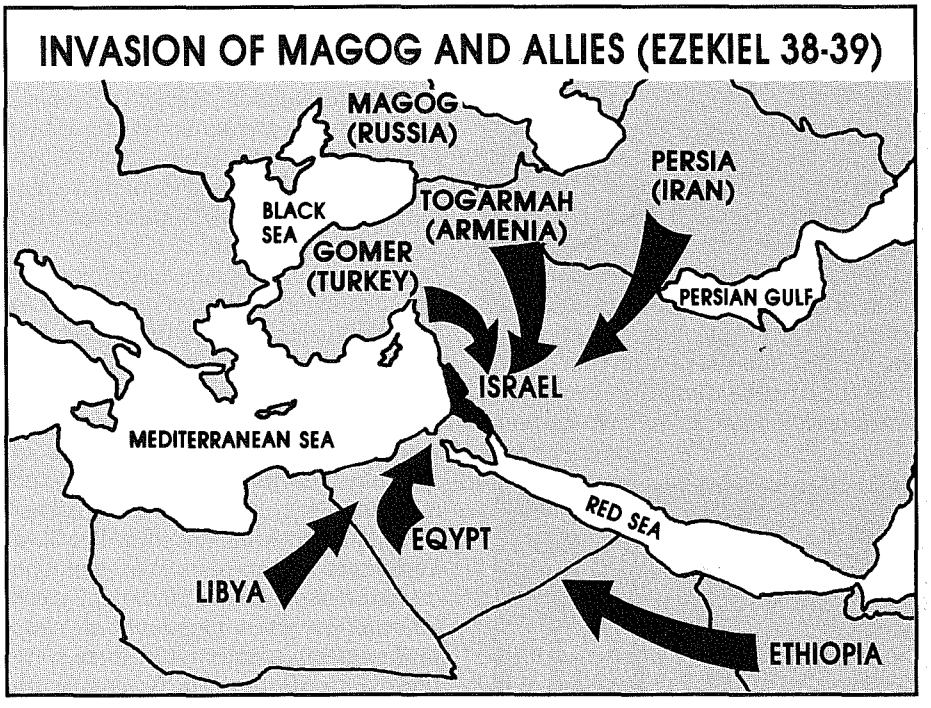
Libya: A Part of Ezekiel's Prophecy?

by Ed Hindson

One of the most amazing prophecies in the Bible is Ezekiel's prediction that Israel will be invaded by Russia and several Arab allies, including Libya, in the last days. This prophecy is found in Ezekiel 37-39. Its setting is given as the time when Israel will be regathered from among the nations of the earth and brought back into her own land. This regathering is described in chapter 37 of Ezekiel's prophecy as occurring in two stages: a physical return to the land and a spiritual rebirth in the land. This is followed by the prediction of an overwhelming invasion of the land vividly described in chapters 38-39.



The Magog prophecy, as it is often called, is one of the most unusual in all the Bible and has never yet been fulfilled. Medieval scholars tended to view Magog as the Turks, a view that prevailed even until Puritan times. The Turks were a natural choice since they were the major enemies of Judaism and Christendom at that time, and their location approximated that of Magog in Ezekiel's description. The identification of Magog as Russia can be traced back to the time of Martin Luther and was well established among dispensationalists by the end of the nineteenth century.

In 1909, prior to the Bolshevik Revolution, the Scofield Bible clearly identified Magog as Russia. Dispensational scholars have generally followed that identity ever since. This view is certainly not new, nor is it limited to the current crisis with Libya. It has had a long line of proponents: C.I. Scofield, J. Frank Norris, William Pettingill, Alva McClain, Harry Rimmer, John Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, Richard DeHaan, Theodore Epp, W. A. Criswell, and more recently, Hal Lindsay.

Probably the most influential of all was Harry Rimmer. His books, *The Shadow of Coming Events* and *The Coming War with Russia,* were written in the early forties during World War II. In 1942, following Ezekiel's prophecy as his guide, Rimmer predicted that the allies would win the war, that Italy would lose all her colonial holdings in North Africa, including Libya and Ethiopia, and that Russia would emerge from the war as the major enemy of Israel and the West. His prognostication was so accurate that his view received even greater acceptance in Conservative circles.

The Coming War with Russia. Ezekiel's prophecy hinges on the identity of Magog (38:2) and her Arab allies. The nations listed in the prophecy include: Magog, Persia (Iran), Ethiopia, Libya, Gomer (Turkey), and Togarmah (Armenia). Until recent times this has appeared to be a rather unlikely confederacy. However, the political developments of the past decade make the fulfillment of this prophecy more likely than ever. As tensions mount in the Near East, it is increasingly obvious that we are headed toward the confrontation of major proportions Ezekiel describes.

The term *Magog* comes from the name of Noah's grandson through Japheth, the forefather of the Europeans (Gen. 10:2). His descendants settled north of the Ararat Mountains in what is southern Russia today. Over the centuries of human history they were called Scythians or Russ. Eventually they intermarried with the Slavs and Tartars to form the modern people of Russia. The leader of Magog is described as Gog, the chief prince or, better, the "prince of Rosh" (an ancient name for Russia). Beyond this, the identity of Meshech and Tubal as Moscow and Tobolsk seems stretched. What is clear in the prophecy is that

a great Russian nation from the "north parts" (38:15), will invade Israel in the "latter days" (38:8, 16).

Israel is described by the prophet as "dwelling safely" in a land of "unwalled villages" (38:11). At no time since Ezekiel gave this prophecy has such a description of Israel been true, not even after the return from the Babylonian captivity. Nor has the invasion described by the prophet ever occurred in Israel's history until the present hour.

The Arab Connection. Why Russia would ally with the Arab states listed in this prophecy certainly puzzled Bible scholars prior to the latter half of the twentieth century. But the rise of modern technology, with its dependence on oil, has made it all too clear now. Russia's dependence on the Arab oil fields is obvious and her subversive activities in Turkey, Iran, Ethiopia, and Libya are well documented. However, until lately the nations listed in this prophecy were relatively friendly to the West and to Israel. But recent political revolution has driven each one further into the Communist orbit.

If the dispensationalists are right, future prospects would seem to indicate the worsening of relations between these states and the West, further antagonism toward Israel, an Iranian victory (probably with Russian assistance) over Iraq (which is unnamed in the prophecy), and some form of continued hostilities between the U.S. and Libya.

What must be taken seriously is the alignment of the nations in Ezekiel's prophecy.

The designation "Libya" (Hebrew, *Phut*) appears five times in the Bible. In Ezekiel 30:5 and Jeremiah 46:9 Libya is listed with Egypt and Ethiopia as one of the nations that will soon be defeated by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. In Daniel 11:43 the Libyans and Ethiopians are mentioned in connection with the willful king (11:36-45), who is generally taken to be the Antichrist. Finally in Acts 2:10, the "parts of Libya about Cyrene" is listed as one of the places from which Jews and proselytes had come to Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost and miraculously heard their own language being spoken by the apostles. The New Testament also refers to the man who carried Jesus' cross as Simon of Cyrene (Matt. 27:32). Prior to the rise of Islam in the seventh century A.D. there were flourishing churches in Roman North Africa, in what today is Libya.

Will They Succeed? The ultimate questions in the current crisis are where is it headed and will the Russian-Arab invasion be successful? Ezekiel's prophecy indicates that the current crisis will eventually escalate into a wider confrontation. Exactly when that will happen is not clearly stated. Prognosticators would do well to exercise caution. It is not yet clear that the current situation is directly related to Ezekiel's prophecy. This may be only a preliminary step in order to set the stage for the actual fulfillment at a later time.

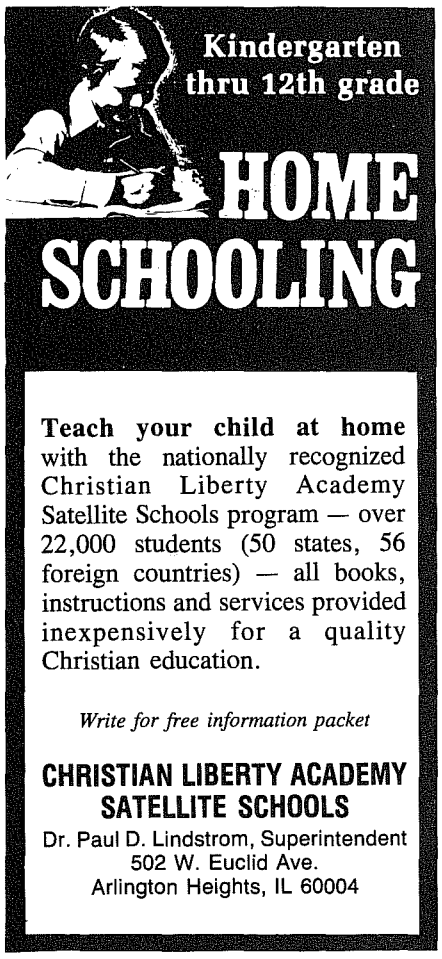
As to whether the Russian-Arab invasion will be successful, the Bible emphatically says no. God's promise is clearly recorded: "I am against thee" (38:3); "I will turn thee back" (38:4); "My fury shall come up in my face" (38:18); "I will rain upon him . . . fire and brimstone" (38:22); "I will turn thee back, and leave but the sixth part of thee" (39:2); "Thou shalt fall" (39:4), "I will send fire upon Magog" (39:6). That the prophecy is certain is emphasized by the words: "Behold, it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord" (39:8).

The aftermath of the battle is such that it will take seven years to burn all the rubble of battle (39:9) and seven months to bury the dead (39:14). In the end Israel will turn to God and He will pour out His Spirit upon them (39:29).

Is Armageddon Soon? The final conflict between Christ and the forces of Antichrist culminate at the end of the Tribulation period in the Valley of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16-21; 19:11-21; 20:1-15). By contrast, Ezekiel's eschatological battle is located in the "valley of the passengers" (39:11), also called the Valley of Jehoshaphat. In other words, these appear to be totally different conflicts fought at different times in different locations and by different participants.

What must be taken seriously by every student of biblical prophecy is the alignment of the nations in Ezekiel's prophecy which is now a reality. If we are not seeing the first stages of prophetic fulfillment we are certainly closer than we were. Secondly, we must all face the fact that universal nuclear destruction is an imminent possibility. To put it more bluntly, how much closer to the end can we get before we get to the end!

All that has happened in such rapid succession regarding the crisis with Libya should remind us that God is still in control of the destiny of this world. Certainly this is a time for concern, but not panic. It is also a time for serious prayer. We cannot glibly sit back and assume everything will be fine, because prophecy never allows us that option. Many of the elements of eschatology are deliberately vague and are often clarified only *after* the prophecy has been fulfilled.

Christians especially should remember that there was once a flourishing gospel witness in what is now Libya. God's love for the Libyan people has never changed. More than ever they need our love and prayers. Perhaps we need to be willing to bear the Cross of Christ to them even as Simon did for Jesus nearly two thousand years ago.

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