

SIGNS OF THE TIMES

February 2023

We are living in astonishingly evil and troubled times. The world is stumbling from one crisis to another. It seems the angels are very active in bringing the world to the time of Christ's promised return to the earth when he will awake the responsible dead and secrete them away at the appointed place of judgement while humanity is plunged into the "time of trouble such as never was" (Dan. 12:1-2). Armageddon will follow some years later when the nations of the world will boast that they have 'steadied the ship' claiming "peace and safety" when sudden destruction looms over them (1 Thess. 5:3).

RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

24 February 2023 sees the anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine which Vladimir Putin continues to call a 'special operation'. It is estimated that around 200,000 Russian soldiers have been killed in the war so far. Ukraine's losses are said to be about half that number. There seems to be no end in sight of the conflict.

In my email the attached document of the Eurasia Group's annual forecast of the geopolitical risks confronting the world in 2023, the very first item is Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Under the heading "Rogue Russia" the opening statement is: **A humiliated Russia will turn from global player into the world's most dangerous rogue state, posing a serious security threat to Europe, the United States, and beyond.**

In the lengthy article they also say "Russia won't back down." However, they say Russia cannot win this war. They are wrong on that score. In our previous Prophetic Updates we have made the Biblical case for the ultimate assumption of the territory of Ukraine to fulfill Ezek. 38:2. We do not intend to repeat that here in detail. Suffice it to include a snippet from the update for May 2022:

[It is unnecessary to repeat the content of pages 1 to 3 of the February 2022 update here.](#) However, it may help to summarize the points made there:

- [Ezek. 38:2 requires "Gog" to be "of the land of Magog" and the eastern portion of what historians describe as "Magog" includes Ukraine and Belarus. These two countries, along with a portion of neighboring southern Russia constitute the original territory of the kingdom of the Rus. Putin has declared his ambition to restore that kingdom given its greatest ruler is his hero Vladimir I.](#)
- [Vladimir Putin's lengthy article of 12 July 2021 titled "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" provides one important reason why he invaded Ukraine on 24 February. There were others which were canvassed in the February 2022 update, including the part played by religion.](#)

Mention is made of the updates for February and May 2022 and should these be required they can be sent on request. The looming great Depression the world knows is coming (among other things) will kill off support for Ukraine and it will eventually fall into Russia's hands.

THE INCREASING FREQUENCY AND INTENSITY OF DISASTERS

In the years leading to the holocaust of AD 70, the Lord's warning in Luke 21:10-11 of rapidly increasing wars and rumors of wars, earthquakes and various forms of pestilence, came to pass. The arrival of the Roman armies was a "coming" of Christ – Matt. 10:23; 22:7 and was a fulfillment of Dan. 9:26 (Matt. 24:15). A similar pattern is evident in preparation for the Second Advent of Christ. For over a century now, wars have blighted the globe and rumors of wars are endemic. Pandemics and 'natural' disasters have changed the character of human society and produced untold hardship to many nations, including famines and fearful sights just at it was prior to AD 70. History is repeating itself as it so often does and we need to take heed to the warning. It is as relevant today as it was to our brethren of old.

Luke 21:10-11 – "Then said he unto them, Nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be **from** heaven."

The word "from" in the citation above (in bold) is the Greek preposition *apo* which indicates origin or source. The signs given to believers in the prelude to AD 70 had their origin in heaven. That is, they were the result of Divine intervention, not simply accidental or by chance. It is clear that the plethora of 'signs' we are seeing and their rapid escalation is not a matter of chance. It is evidence of the nearness of a 'birth' – the birth pangs of the Kingdom of God as the Apostle reveals in **1 Thess. 5:1-3** – "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, **as travail upon a woman with child**; and they shall not escape." Birth pangs increase in frequency and intensity as the day of birth draws near.

One of the signs is the increasing frequency and intensity of earthquakes around the world. Since readings and records were taken of earthquakes since the early 20th century scientists have noted this fact. A glance at the Wikipedia article and the incredibly long list of earthquakes since 1900 will offer support for this claim:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_deadly_earthquakes_since_1900

Zech. 14:2-4 – "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. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which *is* before Jerusalem on the east, and **the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south.**"

In the wake of the series of powerful earthquakes in Turkey and Syria recently with the loss of close to 50,000 lives and untold destruction, the following article from i24NEWS is very relevant to the above citation from Zech. 14:2-4.

Earthquakes: A familiar, looming threat to Middle East. Expert says Great Rift Valley, which runs the entirety of Israel's border with Jordan, poses a grave concern; adds small shocks are a near constant in country's north – a possible warning of things to come / i24NEWS, 02.07.23. The earthquake that devastated Turkey and Syria registered a 7.8 on the Richter scale, leaving thousands dead in its wake. This destructive quake was no isolated event, no freak occurrence, but rather a testament to a Middle East cut through with fault lines under tensions and ready to unleash catastrophic fury, including in Israel. “In Israel, this active rift, which is called the Great Rift Valley, is a major concern,” said Ittai Kurzon, a seismologist and project manager at the Geological Survey of Israel. “It’s a tear in the earth’s crust that runs the entirety of the border with Jordan, starting in Eilat and continuing all the way through the Sea of Galilee into Lebanon,” he told i24NEWS. The danger is region-wide, though. The Middle East is where three continents meet, and as such, these geological collision zones have historically produced earthquakes that have leveled cities as far back as antiquity. [...] – Reprinted with permission from i24NEWS. <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/r1wf0rjts>

COULD 2023 BE THE YEAR OF CHRIST’S RETURN?

Some think so based on their understanding and interpretation of the time periods of Dan. 12. Nominating any date/year for Christ’s return is always fraught with danger but we should remember the Apostle Paul did write to the Thessalonians thus – **1 Thess. 5:1** – “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.” We cannot know “the day” or “the hour” (Matt. 24:36), but we should know the times and the seasons. The word “times” in the Greek is *chronos* – Strong says of this word – “Of uncertain derivation; a space of *time* (in genitive case, and thus properly distinguished from G2540, which designates a *fixed* or special occasion; and from G165, which denotes a particular *period*) or *interval*.” That is, the word applies to a period of time which obviously has a termination. The word “seasons” is *kairos* – Thayer in his Lexicon says this word means; “1) due measure; 2) a measure of time, a larger or smaller portion of time, hence: 2a) a fixed and definite time, **the time when things are brought to crisis**, the decisive epoch waited for; 2b) opportune or seasonable time; 2c) the right time; 2d) a limited period of time; 2e) to what time brings, the state of the times, the things and events of time.” While this provides a fairly wide scope for interpretation, it is context that ultimately determines meaning in any passage, and it is clear Paul’s context is the return of Christ to judge the world. That is a time fixed by Divine appointment (Acts 17:31). It will not change.

Then we have the testimony of **Amos 3:7** – “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.” If we should know “the times and the seasons” then it is likely to be revealed somewhere in the prophetic Scriptures.

Brother Ken Whitehead of the Southport Ecclesia in Queensland, Australia (a long-time friend) has agreed to allow me to reproduce in this document an email he sent to a few on 30 December 2022 after viewing an interview with Israel’s newly elected Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. It makes for an interesting read and sets out the case for the real possibility that 2023 could be the year we are waiting for. Time will tell. See what you think. This is what he wrote:

Loving greetings Brethren

Sending the link (below) to this brilliant interview with Benjamin Netanyahu (BN).

It’s quite a comprehensive overview of Israel’s history and claim to the Holy Land, and their current prosperity, as Bro Thomas anticipated from passages such as Ezekiel 38:12-13. (Of course BN claims personal responsibility for the nation’s prosperity! – as politicians do!)

More importantly to the subject of this email: in the interview, BN suggests that the Jews were not finally dispersed and scattered among the nations until the seventh century (well beyond AD70), when the Muslims took control. Only then were the remaining Jews in the land totally driven out.

You may be aware of my understanding of Daniel 12:7 which speaks of the period of 1260 years ending in the year when the “scattering” of the Jews would finally come to an end. In 1948 Israel became a nation, and the people could no longer be scattered. Moving backwards from 1948, the 1260 years began in the seventh century, in fact in 688 when the Muslims took total control of the holy place by commencing construction of the Dome of the Rock.

BN references 1948 and a number of times he mentions the fact that 75 years have passed since then (yes, it’s almost 75 years!). Daniel 12:12 speaks of 1335 years, which is exactly 75 years longer than 1260. If the start date for Daniel 12:7,11 and 12 is the same, the 1335 days must end next year, in 2023.

The only start date specifically mentioned is in verse 11 - when the abomination that maketh desolate is ‘set up’. I contend in my video on the subject that this is a clear reference to the setting up of the Dome of the Rock. The time period mentioned here is 1290 days, which ended in 1978 with the Camp David Accords, when President Sadat of Egypt agreed that **all the holy places in Jerusalem should be accessible to everyone for worship** – including the temple mount. This was the first time since the Dome of the Rock was built that any Muslim leader had made any such concession! (See below links to the two Daniel videos).

But the situation on the ground has not really allowed free worship for non-Muslims to happen just yet – Daniel was told that situation would have to wait another 45 years, V.12 – Blessed is he that waiteth,

and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days - 2023. This would be the 'end of the days', when Daniel will stand in his lot – verse 13!

It's no wonder we can look forward excitedly to 2023. BN's new government includes some strong elements with the desire to take the Temple Mount under total Jewish control. The abomination that maketh desolate will come to its end. Will this be the time of our Lord's return and our deliverance? We certainly hope and expect so.

536 BC and 1917 AD – similarities

One other interesting comparison comes to mind. There is no actual scriptural basis for this as far as I am aware, just something to ponder.

If we parallel the decree of Cyrus to rebuild Jerusalem in 536 BC (the generally accepted date) with the Balfour Declaration of 1917, we have a possible indication of the length of the Time of the End period.

We could say that the Return of the Exiles began with Cyrus' decree and climaxed when Nehemiah came again to Jerusalem after his journey back to the "far country" of Persia, as prophesied in Malachi 3:1-4: "The lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple" – he shall refine and purify his people, and "then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years".

Many put the date of Nehemiah's return from Persia to 'purify' the people at 430 BC. This means that 106 years elapsed from God first moving Cyrus to encourage the Return until the people were judged, refined and purified by Nehemiah.

From 1917, when again the Jews were encouraged to return, this time by the British, the same period of 106 years will bring us to 2023! As in Nehemiah's day, the people returning have struggled for many years with the nations around them, have suffered dreadfully, and yet have failed to fully develop the true Faith in the One who has rescued them from among the nations. Will 2023 be the year when the Lord comes to his temple, when the Sun of Righteousness will arise, with healing in his beams, when their hearts will at last be turned, as in Malachi Chapter 4?

We know not, but we wait more and more expectantly for that wonderful day!

With love to you all in the sure Hope of Israel

Ken Whitehead

Here are the links:

Netanyahu Interview: [\(245\) Does Israel have the right to exist? | PM-Elect Benjamin Netanyahu | #311 - YouTube](#)

Daniel: Part 1 – The 2520 and 2300 periods of Daniel 4 and 8 as an introduction to the Time of the End

<https://youtu.be/V5VjpgKlu2M>

Part 2 – Centres specifically on the three periods given in Daniel 12 – hopefully ending in 2023!

<https://youtu.be/afs7fY9YbQU>

ANNEXATION OF THE WEST BANK BY ISRAEL

Benjamin Netanyahu once opposed the annexation of the West Bank because he knew it would endanger American support for Israel which continues to pursue a two state solution. However, his Likud Party at a special meeting on 31 December 2017 voted in his absence to pursue the policy of gradual annexation of the West Bank with the ultimate aim of full annexation. Netanyahu changed his view prior to the election in 2020 because the opposition had also adopted this policy. The only way Netanyahu could return to power was in coalition with hard right wing parties who seek annexation of the West Bank. Now it is clearly the aim of the present government of Israel and has resulted in feverish activity by the US and European powers to save the defunct two state solution.

Isa. 10:28-32 and Ezek. 38:10,12 require the territory of the West Bank to be part of Israel proper at the time of Armageddon. Here is a snippet from the 2021 mid year update that makes the case.

West Bank is part of Israel proper – Ezek. 38:8

Up until the series of indecisive elections in Israel during 2020, Benjamin Netanyahu was not keen on the annexation of the West Bank promoted by sections of his party. However, the crucial decision made by the Likud party in his absence at 11.45 pm on 31 December 2017 to annex the West Bank finally became politically viable for the former prime minister in order to shore up his fading support among right wing voters. In fact, both major parties contending for power in Israel went to the voters with the same policy, namely, annexation of those parts of section A of the West Bank where Jewish settlements had been established. Since a change of government in Israel in June 2021 that policy remains but with the problem that there is an Israeli Arab party in the strange coalition that now governs Israel. However, the growing presence of Jewish settlements has made achievement of a Palestinian State almost impossible. See the article “Trump-era growth of settlement growth has only begun” in the Appendix.

Ezek. 38:8 requires the West Bank to be part of Israel proper at the time of Armageddon. Gog comes “against the mountains of Israel”, not the mountains of Palestine. Gog’s intention to “go up to the land of unwallled villages” is another proof. The Hebrew word for “unwallled villages” is *perazah* which means “open country” (Strong H6519). Today, the West Bank is not open country. However, when Israel finally annexes it, the way will be open for travel from Jerusalem along the central massif of the Land unavailable today. The walls around the Green Line will have been taken down, the nation “dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates.”

Additionally, Ezek. 38:12 finds Israel dwelling "in the midst of the land" when Gog invades. The word "midst" in the Hebrew is *tabbur* and is defined by Brown Driver Briggs as meaning "centre, midst, navel, highest part." Rotherham translates it "navel". The West Bank is the midst of the Land of Israel.

If there is to a Palestinian state it will be in an extended Gaza Strip as agreed by Egypt in 2019. Joel 3:4 and Zeph. 2:4-7 both in the context of Armageddon suggest that any Palestinian state of the future will have a coastline. The West Bank does not have a coastline. The nearest it gets to the Mediterranean is 9 miles (13.4 kms).

The following article reveals the thinking of Israel's current government and the reason for consternation in parts of the international community. It is a pity they do not understand Bible prophecy.

Netanyahu's hard-line new government takes office in Israel / By Yolande Knell & David Gritten, BBC News, Jerusalem & London. Published, 29 December 2022. The most religious and hard-line government in Israel's history has been sworn in. Benjamin Netanyahu returns as prime minister, after his Likud party formed a coalition with ultranationalist and ultra-Orthodox Jewish allies. [...] This is a record sixth term as prime minister for Mr Netanyahu, who was ousted by his opponents 18 months ago, but his coalition partners are pledging to lead the country in a new direction. The first guiding principle of the new government, published on Wednesday, declares that "the Jewish people have an exclusive and unquestionable right to all areas of the land of Israel". It says that includes the occupied West Bank and promises to "advance and develop" settlements there. About 600,000 Jews live in about 140 settlements built since Israel's occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 1967. Most of the international community considers the settlements illegal under international law, though Israel disputes this. There are also some 100 outposts - small settlements built without the Israeli government's authorisation - across the West Bank. In a coalition deal with the ultranationalist Religious Zionism party he signed last week, Mr Netanyahu agreed to retroactively legalise the outposts. He also promised to annex the West Bank while "choosing the timing and weighing all of the State of Israel's national and international interests". Such a step would be opposed by Israel's Western and Arab allies. [...] - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-64115141>

IRAN LOCKED IN TO RUSSIAN ALLIANCE

Prophecy also requires “Persia” to be an integral part of the Gogian confederacy of Ezek. 38:5. The Persia of Ezekiel’s time was a much larger area that included Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and half of Pakistan. This subject is dealt with in some detail in the 2021 mid year update.

Russia has been meddling in all these countries since 2015 and has firmed up Iran as a strong ally supporting its war in Ukraine. The following article demonstrates how close that relationship has become.

Iran’s “pivot to the East” built around its super drones for Russia and China / DEBKAfile, Feb 12, 2023. Iran has begun using its advanced armed UAV technology to open the doors of China and Russia as allies, US intelligence experts report. This new “pivot to the East” policy was developed inside the close circle of the supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khomeini’s advisers. Tehran has already signed a deal with Moscow for the co-production of 6,000 high-tech UAVs – and not just for the use of Russian forces in the Ukraine war. Iran is gearing up to meet a potentially approaching US-Israeli military offensive against its nuclear program. This is Tehran’s take on the frequent visits exchanged of late between top American and Israel officials that also embrace regional powers. [...] - <https://www.debka.com/irans-pivot-to-the-east-built-around-its-super-drones-for-russia-and-china/>

There can be little doubt we are on the threshold of wonderful events.

Author of this document for distribution among Christadelphians – Jim Cowie – 22 February 2023