

2021 MID YEAR REVIEW OF SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Much of the world remains under the dark shadow of the Covid-19 pandemic. With 185 million cases worldwide, nearly 4 million deaths and only 1.75 billion of the world's 8 billion population fully vaccinated, it seems likely that the pandemic will continue to disrupt human life for some time to come, but with nations around the world tiring of lockdowns and restrictions, watch for an extraordinary outbreak of "eating, drinking, marrying, building, buying and planting" as our Lord warned on the eve of his return. The major impact of the pandemic is on the world's faltering economy and the growing bankruptcy of many nations. The faithful need to be ready.

There are many aspects of prophecy that could be included but we will focus on some of the most important with a particular focus on the Middle East and the place of China in Scripture and in future events.

RECENT SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

What does Ezekiel 38 require prior to Armageddon, and how close are we to its fulfilment? The answer is that in the last five years huge developments have occurred in relation to all the requirements of Ezek. 38:1-13. This of itself indicates how close we are to the return of Christ. The package is unmistakable.

Below we have listed what Ezek. 38 requires (in black) and then in blue added comments on some of the significant things that have occurred since 2016.

So, what does Ezek. 38 require prior to Armageddon?

A dictator called Gog dominates the Eurasian continent – V.2.

Gog a dictator (Hebrew - 'The one at the top' - The English and Hebrew Bible Students Concordance) is "prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal" (clearly Russia – see Elpis Israel 9th Edition pages 423-425) from the uttermost parts of the north of Israel (V.15) which also confirms the standard Christadelphian interpretation.

2020 saw a significant development in regard to dictatorship in Russia. Vladimir Putin President from 2000 to 2008 and then again from 2012 to the present, secured a change to the constitution allowing him to remain in power until 2036 (see article "Putin Signs Constitutional Changes that Allow Him to Rule Until 2036 in Appendix). At 67 years of age and with no effective challenge to his power, there is every reason to expect that he may well be in power at the time of Armageddon. We do not know whether Putin is the 'Gog' of Ezekiel 38, only time will tell, but it is certain he has created the Tsarist style dictatorship ('the vertical of power') required prior to Armageddon.

Russia's pressure on Ukraine for many years both economically and politically is no coincidence as Ukraine was the territory of the first kingdom of the Rus and Kiev was its first capital. Tsar Vladimir I who ruled from Kiev is Putin's hero and he has made it clear he intends to revive the Russian Empire of old. Hence, the pressure on Ukraine in the disputed east, in Moldova and the annexation of Crimea in 2014, not to mention the recent threatening military exercises on Ukraine's border.

See the article on "Zelenskiy invites Putin to meet in Donbas for peace talks" in the Appendix.

The territory east and north of Israel under Gogian control – V.5-6.

Russia extends from St Petersburg in the west to Vladivostok in the east, a huge territory that includes Muscovy (Moscow) and Siberia with its capital Tobolski (Tubal).

Russia's entry into the Syrian civil war in September 2015 resulted in a consolidation of Russian control of parts of Syria and the securing of 25 year leases on two ports and the airport at Latakia. It is clear Russia is in Syria to stay. As Benjamin Netanyahu correctly said in October 2015, "Israel is aware of the fact that it has a Russian border now."

Since the Law of the Caspian Sea was agreed in August 2018 in which Russia robbed Iran of \$2.3 trillion worth of Caspian Sea oil, Russia has also taken effective control of much of Iran's offshore and onshore oil reserves. Donald Trump withdrew from the 6 nation Iran Nuclear deal in 2018. As Iran's sole major-power ally, Russia in 2019 offered Iran financial support to offset America's sanctions which exacerbated Iran's already deeply troubled economy. For the oil and gas sector, specifically, it involved Russia giving US\$50 billion per year every year for at least five years so it could complete its top priority oil and gas projects to Western standards, which was estimated to cost around US\$250 billion. Another US\$250 billion would then be available for the following five years for Iran to build-out the remainder of its economy. In exchange for this, Iran would give Russian companies preference in all future oil and gas field exploration and development deals, to add to the seven already agreed at that time.

In addition to gaining effective control of much of Iran's oil reserves, in 2019 Russia acquired access to the Persian Gulf ports at Bandar-e-Bushehr and Chabahar as forward military bases for warships and nuclear submarines. The agreement included use of an airbase at Bandar-e-Bushehr as a hub for 35 Sukhoi Su-57 fighter planes. Accordingly, the fulfillment of Ezek. 38:5 and Dan. 7:7 (see the Appendix on "Stamping the Residue – Dan. 7:7) is well under way.

The 'Persia' of Ezek. 38:5 refers to more than just Iran. It is a reference to the Persian Empire of Ezekiel's day which became the Seleucid kingdom of Alexander's successors and includes Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan and portion of Pakistan up to the Indus River. In April 2020, Putin threatened that if the Taliban gained control of more than 40% of Afghanistan, Russia would invade again as it did in 1979. With the departure of American troops and those of all other nations from Afghanistan by September 2021, the Taliban who are already taking over parts of the country will have control of 40%. Putin may soon make good on his threat. When Trump stopped financial support for Pakistan because of their alleged surreptitious support for the Taliban, Putin immediately offered military support to that country. (See the article titled "In Pakistan, Russia's Lavrov Pledges Bilateral Boost to Combat Terrorism"). The ground is being prepared for Russia to become the Biblical "king of the north" (a title that is only available to inheritors of the territory of the Seleucid kingdom).

A dependent Europe falls under Gog's political control – V.6.

While the European Union currently has sanctions imposed on Russia due to its annexation of Crimea, there are many indications that the EU, and particularly its two

major powers, is seeking to find ways to ensure the threat from the east is eliminated. The instability of NATO arising from Trump's threats to reduce American involvement because European nations were not contributing their share of funding, forced Germany and France to look at alternatives to NATO protection.

During the French presidential elections in 2017, the leader of France's right wing political party, Marine Le Pen, declared a major policy platform of her campaign to be the forging of what she called "a privileged partnership with Russia". President Emmanuel Macron adopted a similar approach after Trump threatened NATO's future. He argued that Europe needed to build its own military force. In 2019, Macron put forward the idea of engaging a strategic dialogue with Russia as a necessary step to create an "architecture of trust and security" on the European continent. This built on a steadily strengthening bilateral relationship with Moscow. Macron has met regularly with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin many times since the 2017 election. This is very important because the "Gomer" of Ezek. 38:6 is France (Elpis Israel 9th Edition pages 426-428).

The Nord Stream project which began in 2011 is a system of offshore natural gas pipelines in Europe, running under the Baltic Sea from Russia to Germany. It is nearing completion and will make Germany even more dependent on Russian gas than it is now. It was this pipeline project that infuriated Donald Trump who made the point that NATO was set up to protect Germany from Russia and this project was counterintuitive. When NATO along with the European Union in its present form do finally collapse (as prophecy requires), the strong trend in Germany towards right wing policies will see Germany make peace with Russia along the lines suggested by France. Significant progress towards that outcome has been made in recent years. It will only need a Depression to dissolve the EU and undermine NATO.

West Bank is part of Israel proper – V.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 unwalled villages" is another proof. The Hebrew word for "unwalled 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.”

One notable achievement of the Trump regime was securing the support of the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia for the replacement of the 2003 Saudi proposal (supported by the UN) called the “Two State Solution” which foreshadowed a Palestinian State in the West Bank with East Jerusalem as its capital. That has been dropped by Saudi Arabia in favour of a Palestinian State in the Gaza Strip with additional land in northern Sinai being granted by Egypt (Debka report 16 December 2017). This accords with the requirements of prophecy. Joel 3:4 and Zeph. 2:4-7 in the context of Armageddon both suggest that any Palestinian state 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).

Israel at peace internally and with near neighbours – V.8-11.

This looked an unlikely prospect just a few years ago. Another achievement of Donald Trump (under the hand of God) was to lay the ground work for peace between Israel and some of its near neighbours who were former deadly enemies of Israel. See comments on verse 13.

The situation within Israel is different however. Trump’s transfer of the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in 2018 (70th anniversary of Israel’s statehood), his declaration of the Golan Heights as legitimate Israeli territory and his support for Jewish settlements in the West Bank changed the political landscape firming up the influence of Hamas in Gaza and weakening the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

After indecisive conflicts between Israel and Hamas in 2008, 2014 and 2021 it is becoming clearer to Israel that the quelling of Hamas in Gaza and Hezbollah in southern Lebanon is unlikely to be resolved by war or invasion of territory. This makes the repeated appeals from Russia to step in and pacify Israel’s enemies by the intervention of a political partner that they will shrink from challenging.

Vladimir Putin has been cultivating a friendship with Israel and its leaders for many years. In 2011 he said, “Israel is, in fact, a special state to us. It is practically a Russian-speaking country. Israel is one of the few foreign countries that can be called Russian-speaking. It’s apparent that more than half of the population speaks Russian.” That is an exaggeration, but a close relationship exists between Putin and Netanyahu which accounts for the almost complete absence of friction over the Syrian conflict in which both nations have been involved. Israel has expressed its appreciation for Russia’s role in defeating Nazi Germany in the Second World War and freeing Jews from extermination camps, and sought to tighten the relationship between the two countries. (See article titled “Ashkenazi: Israel will never forget Russia's role in fighting Nazis” in the Appendix).

However, after having his 2016 offer to put Russian oil and gas workers on Israel’s Mediterranean platforms to warn off Israel’s enemies and make it unviable to attack Israel, Russia has now stepped up the pressure.

Speaking to reporters in Moscow on 19 January 2021, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Russia had previously told Israel that they are willing to intervene on Israel's behalf rather than have Israel strike at Iranian military targets in Syria. "If Israel is really forced to respond to threats to Israeli security coming from the Syrian territory, we have told our Israeli colleagues many times: If you see such threats, please give us the information. So, our dear Israeli colleagues, if you have facts that your state is facing threats from the Syrian territory, report the facts urgently and we will take every measure to neutralize the threat." As inconclusive wars with its local enemies fail to advance the cause of peace there is a growing inclination in Israel to seriously look at taking up Russia's offer. Is this development what we would expect?

Yes, it is. The patterns for the present and the future leading to Armageddon are set forth in the prophecy inherent in the events of the reigns of Ahaz and Hezekiah. Threatened by enemies to the north and north east (precisely where Israel's local enemies are today), Ahaz refused an offer of help by Yahweh through Isaiah (Isa. 7) and sent messengers to the Assyrians seeking help (2 Kings 16:5-9). The Assyrians attacked Damascus and killed Rezin and destroyed the city. The Assyrian threat to the north of Israel distracted Pekah from his purpose and so Ahaz achieved a temporary peace.

Ahaz is a type of faithless Israel in the latter days who will make a similar covenant with the latter day Assyrian – Russia. The Assyrian invasion of Judah in the days of Hezekiah became the vehicle of prophecy concerning the Gogian invasion of the Land. "The Assyrian" is the title of Gog (Ezek. 38:2) in Isaiah and Micah – Isa. 10:5,24; 14:25; 30:31; 31:8; Mic. 5:5,6. Prophecies of the future in Isaiah are based on the invasion of Judah in the days of Hezekiah – 2 Kings 18:13-16; 2 Chron. 32:1; Isa. 36:1 - a type of Armageddon. The Assyrian army was destroyed outside the walls of Jerusalem, as will Gog's forces.

Further to what has been stated above about the strengthening relationship between Russia and Israel, it is of great significance that Israel signed a five year military agreement with Russia on 6 September 2010 which was renewed in 2016. The time will come when Israel will acquiesce to Russia's offer of help and this will secure internal peace for the nation and relief from the nuclear threat of Iran.

Ezek. 38:10 suggests that some kind of agreement or accord is broken by Gog in conceiving the invasion of Israel. Ezek. 38:11 indicates that the nation of Israel is completely unsuspecting that an attack is imminent and therefore is totally unprepared.

Recent reports suggest that Russia is becoming impatient with President Assad of Syria. If the patterns set in the prophetic history of the time of Ahaz are fully played out, the future of the brutal dictator of Syria and his capital does not look good (Isa. 17:1; Amos 1:4; Jer. 49:24).

Israel very prosperous and envied – V.12.

Up until the late 20th century Israel had been an economic basket case since its statehood in 1948. Successive wars, socialist governments and populist leaders with no economic expertise saw the nation stumbling through decades where

dependence on financial support from America and support by wealthy Jews in the Diaspora was essential for survival. This all changed when Benjamin Netanyahu became prime minister in 1996. Though his leadership only lasted until 1999, the seeds of Israel's prosperity were planted. An American educated MBA and a strong supporter of entrepreneurs and inventors he grasped the opportunity provided by Ariel Sharon who passed to him the 'poison chalice' of the finance ministry in 2003. Netanyahu pushed legislation through the Knesset to completely change the way Israel did business and managed its economy. Adoption of Australian and Canadian banking regulations brought Israel through the Global Financial Crisis of 2007 and 2008 better than most countries. When he became prime minister again in 2009 these initiatives culminated in Israel becoming a world leader on many fronts.

Israel prospers in many and varied fields – computer technology, agriculture, arts, science, weapons development, oil and gas, diamonds, etc. Israel has more NASDAQ listed companies than any other country, besides the US. More than all of Europe, India, China and Japan combined. In proportion to its population Israel has the largest number of start-up companies in the world. In absolute numbers more than any other country besides the US. Israel has attracted the most venture capital investment per capita in the world, 30 times more than Europe. Relative to its size, Israel is the largest immigrant absorbing nation on earth, it has absorbed 350% of its population in 60 years. Israel has more Nobel Prizes per capita than the United States, France and Germany. It has more laureates, in real numbers, than India, Spain and China. Israel is the only country in the world that entered the 21st century with a net gain of trees, made more remarkable by the fact that it is 60% desert. 93% of Israeli homes use solar energy for water heating, the highest percentage in the world. Israeli scientific research institutions are ranked 3rd in the world. Israel is ranked 2nd in space sciences. Israel is one of the ten countries in the world capable of launching its own satellites. Israel leads the world in patents for medical equipment. Israel produces more scientific papers per capita than any other nation by a large margin – 109 per 10,000 people – as well as one of the highest per capita rates of patents filed. Israel has the 3rd highest rate of entrepreneurship amongst women in the world. Israel's \$300 billion economy is larger than all of its immediate neighbours combined.

In the last few years Netanyahu has regularly boasted about Israel's advances and prosperity. In the UN in September 2017 he said, "we're in the midst of a great revolution. A revolution in Israel's standing among the nations. This is happening because so many countries around the world have finally woken up to what Israel can do for them. Those countries now recognize what brilliant investors, like Warren Buffet, and great companies, like Google and Intel, what they've recognized and known for years: that Israel is THE innovation nation. THE place for cutting-edge technology and agriculture, in water, in cyber-security, in medicine, in autonomous vehicles. You name it, we've got it."

Israel is prosperous now, but after the ravages of the coming Great Depression Israel will recover faster than most other nations and will again occupy the position required by Ezek. 38:12 – envied by other nations, especially Russia who will invade seeking "to take a spoil, and to take a prey."

Yemen, Saudi Arabia and Gulf States are first to oppose Gogian invasion – V.13.

Sheba refers to Yemen as noted by Wikipedia - "Modern archaeological studies support the view that the biblical kingdom of Sheba was the ancient Semitic civilization of Saba (Sheba) in Southern Arabia, in Yemen." Yemen was the home of the Sabaeans (biblical Sheba), a trading state that flourished for over a thousand years and also included parts of modern-day Ethiopia and Eritrea. (Wikipedia)

The country was divided between the Ottoman and British empires in the early twentieth century. South Yemen remained a British protectorate known as the Aden Protectorate until 1967 when it became an independent state and later, a Marxist state. The two Yemeni states united to form the modern republic of Yemen in 1990.

Corrupt President Saleh was replaced by Vice President Hadi in 2012 backed by the UN and the Gulf Council. In September 2014, the Iranian backed Houthis took over the capital Sanaa helped by ousted president Saleh. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States intervened in the civil war to restore the internationally recognized government.

Yemen is experiencing the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Armed conflict has killed over 18,400 civilians, with most caused by Saudi-led coalition air strikes. It is also experiencing the world's worst food security crisis with nearly two-thirds of the population requiring food assistance.

Yemen's economy has been ravaged by years of conflict. Destruction of critical infrastructure has ruined commerce. A Saudi blockade of ports has led to widespread starvation, an outbreak of cholera with 1 million affected, and now unchecked Covid-19 (population 20m).

All of the misery and heartbreak that has afflicted Yemen since 2014 is part of the process of turning Yemen into a pro-Israel country and part of a coalition of nations that will be the first to object to the Gogian invasion of the Land.

Dedan refers to the Saudi Arabian peninsular and incorporates Saudi Arabia and its Gulf partners Oman, United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain and Qatar.

As noted above, one of the enduring achievements of President Donald Trump was the signing of the Abraham Accord in September 2020. Israeli media reported that this agreement was brokered by Jared Kushner (Trump's Jewish son-in-law), Mossad Chief Yossi Cohen, and others. But foremost, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed, ruler of the UAE, had boldly led the Middle East into what will not just re-align the region's geopolitics, but those of the world. As per the agreements, the UAE and Bahrain will establish embassies, exchange ambassadors, cooperate and work together with Israel across a range of sectors, including tourism, trade, healthcare and security.

On 16 September 2020, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described the accord as a "pivot of history", heralding a new dawn. He said, "You have heard from the president (meaning Trump) that he has already lined up more and more countries. This was unimaginable a few years ago. But with resolve, determination, a fresh look at the way peace is done, this is being achieved." What he did not say of

course was that prophecy required this dramatic development, once termed “a fantasy,” to become reality because God “rules in the kingdom of men”.

Saudi Arabia is undertaking a campaign to educate its people to take a totally different approach to Israel than that of the past under Arab leaders like Gamal Abdul-Nasser of Egypt who fomented the 1967 Six Day War. Documentaries on Saudi TV about how Israel became a nation and their tragic history; academics teaching in universities and imams giving sermons on the need for Muslims to be kind to all people are reshaping the Arab psyche. It is likely that Saudi Arabia along with Oman will join the UAE and Bahrain in signing a peace deal with Israel in the near future, particularly if Iran under its new right wing president continues to threaten the Gulf States and interfere in Yemen.

Saudi columnist Musaid Al-Asimi on 6 June 2017 wrote in an article, “While there’s no need for demonstrations of friendship toward Israel – a country that occupies Arab land, at the same time there’s no need for unjustified demonization of Israel, especially at a time when the Palestinians themselves and Arab countries have already signed peace treaties with Israel. A careful examination of the question of “Who is the enemy?” will, he says, lead to the clear conclusion that it is Iran, and not Israel, that poses a threat and endangers Saudi Arabia, and that everything possible must be done to defeat it.

When an Iranian missile was fired into the Saudi capital in 2017, the Saudi Crown Prince realized a direct confrontation with Iran is inevitable. He also assessed his ability to defeat Iran in a land battle and concluded his forces do not measure up (he had previously been Defense Minister). However, with Israeli assistance a joint force might prevail. Hence the Crown Prince is developing joint military maneuvers with Israel as his key ally. Bible prophecy will always come to pass however fantastic it may seem to political commentators.

Britain and her ‘young lions’ (former colonies with British form of government) follow suit – V.13.

23 June 2016 was one of the finest moments in the fulfilment of Bible prophecy in recent decades. The British people, against all predictions, voted to leave the European Union (EU). The unlikely outcome was due to Divine intervention on the day of the vote. At midnight on 23 June a series of storms developed over the EU capital Brussels in Belgium and pushed westward over the channel to the area around London (UK storms normally come from the Atlantic). By 8 am streets of London were flooded stopping traffic and preventing many from attending polling booths on the way to work. Again at 11 am and 5 pm bursts of heavy rain flooded streets closing down many polling booths and making access to voting very difficult. Public transport and traffic were at a standstill in the London area and many could not get home in time to vote in their local polling booths which closed at 10 pm. It was estimated that around 2 million did not get to vote because of the storms. The ‘No’ vote won by around 1.7 million votes. It was Yahweh’s will. It did not matter what pollsters and politicians thought might happen.

After four painful years of division, uncertainty and equivocation the British people elected Boris Johnson on a platform of getting Britain out of the European Union and

that goal was finally accomplished on 31 January 2020. In June 2021, the leaders of Britain and Australia signed an in-principle free trade agreement, the first Britain had made since Brexit. Other former colonies of the British Empire are lining up to do the same as Britain looks outside of Europe for trading partners. Working behind the scenes is an organization called CANZUK an acronym for Canada, Australia, New Zealand and United Kingdom. The former colonies of Britain in this group all have a British form of parliamentary government and Queen Elizabeth II as their titular head of state. They are the “young lions” of the old lion Tarshish which both Scripture and history reveal to be Britain. A strong trading relationship between Britain and its former colonies before Armageddon is suggested by the phrase “the merchants of Tarshish” (Ezek. 38:13). That is now fast becoming a reality.

The pro-Israel policies of Britain and its “young lions” will see them stand with Israel at the time of Armageddon.

FOCUS ON CHINA

In recent decades China has become a serious player on the world stage. Everyone is interested in China. This raises important questions such as; (1) is China referred to in the Bible; (2) will China play an important part in the events of Armageddon; and, (3) what might the future be for this massive country of 1.4 billion people?

On 1 July 2021, China celebrated 100 years of Communism. The centrepiece of celebrations was held in Tiananmen Square the notorious site of the massacre of thousands of rioting pro-democracy students in June 1989, an event subject to strict censorship in China but often referred to by international media.

President Xi Jinping congratulated the 92 million party members of the ruling communist party at the lavish ceremony. He was defiant and confident. “The era of China being slaughtered and bullied is gone forever,” said Xi Jinping, amid thunderous applause. “Anyone who dares try to do that will have their heads bashed bloody against the Great Wall of steel forged by over 1.4 billion Chinese people.” Given the way China has been flexing its military muscles in the South China Sea and laying claim to islands and fishing waters claimed by other nations; threatening Taiwan with takeover and suppressing dissent in Hong Kong, it is legitimate to ask where might this all lead.

China forces Australia to look towards Britain

One very important element of China’s aggression is its reaction to nations that have been critical of its human rights abuses and its aggressive entry into the Pacific region using its abundant wealth to buy the loyalty of struggling island nations. One of those nations questioning China’s ‘human rights’ actions is Australia and it has suffered by having its export trade massively impacted by bans on some of its iconic products like wine, beef, coal, grains and lobster. All attempts to overturn these bans have failed although China continues to snap up huge quantities of Australian iron ore so it can continue to produce steel for domestic and military purposes. Australian politicians and producers are at a loss on how to proceed. Initially, traders diverted shipments intended for China to other countries like India. However, a long-term solution had to be found. Accordingly, Australia has been seeking free trade

agreements (FTA) with other nations realizing it was a mistake to put all their 'trading eggs in one basket'. As noted above, Australia negotiated an in-principle FTA with Britain in June 2021. It is likely to be the first of many and this will see Tarshish (Britain) and its 'young lions' Australia, Canada, India and New Zealand locked together in a trading partnership no-one contemplated just a few years ago. Prophecy demanded it and it is not far away from becoming a reality. China has played an important part in achieving that goal.

The looming danger to China from its Belt and Road Initiative

China's Belt and Road Initiative is a global infrastructure development strategy adopted by the Chinese government in 2013 to invest in nearly 70 countries and international organizations. It calls for the integration of the Eurasian land mass into a cohesive economic area. For the maritime 'Road', China's development of ports and hubs across the Indo-Pacific is a key aspect of the initiative.

Initially, BRI sought to connect countries in Central, South, and Southeast Asia with China. In the two years following BRI's launch, only ten countries formally joined the initiative by signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) or cooperation agreement. In 2015, however, BRI began to outgrow its initial corridors, as an additional seventeen countries joined. In 2017, for instance, China extended BRI to Latin America, describing it as a "natural extension of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road." 139 countries are now formally affiliated with BRI.

However, the BRI looks likely to get China into serious trouble with its once friendly neighbour, Russia. The catalyst to spark confrontation is Turkey's involvement in the BRI.

Turkey's unpredictable populist president Recep Tayyip Erdogan has big ambitions. He is building a 45 km canal from the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea planned in 2011 in order to create another access separate from the Bosphorus and give him greater control of the Black Sea. The Istanbul Canal is designed to give Erdogan a weapon against Russia and Putin has warned him that Russia will not allow a reduction of its influence in the Black Sea or the overriding of the 1936 international agreement on access via the Bosphorus Strait. But China sees an opportunity to promote its Belt and Road Initiative and has indicated an interest in assisting to finance the \$15 billion project. China has recently poured billions into buying critical infrastructure in Turkey, including port terminals and the Bosphorus bridge.

Ankara and Beijing have also signed a memorandum of understanding to align Turkey's "Middle Corridor Initiative" linking Turkey and Europe with China through a trans-Caspian east-west route. President Xi Jinping has seized the opportunity to increase China's influence in Eurasia but in so doing he is on a collision course with Vladimir Putin. The Sino-Russian relationship is already fractured due to Chinese involvement in the Russian Far East, the Arctic, Central Asia and the theft of Russian defense designs. (See this video on YouTube - <https://youtu.be/O9u8MtwrvHE>)

Perhaps a confrontation with Russia and the devastating effects of the coming Great Depression will sideline China from the events of Armageddon as the latter will the United States of America. One thing is clear, neither China or America are named in

prophecy as having a specific and significant role in Armageddon. The only way they can be included is through the phrase “all nations” in Joel 3 and Zech. 14.

But what about China’s future beyond Armageddon?

China in the Kingdom

China is named in the Bible. In Isa. 49:12 “the land of Sinim” is identified by commentators and historians as a reference to China. The article in the Appendix by Bro. Ken Whitehead outlines the evidence and explores the origins of the Chinese from the descendants of Canaan the son of Ham.

Isa. 49:12 presents an interesting picture. “Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.” Worshipers will come from the north and the west to Jerusalem in the early days of the Kingdom, but there is no mention of the east or the south. The latter perhaps because those nations are close to Jerusalem. However, the numerous nations to the east are represented only by China. This may suggest a greater readiness and interest by the Chinese people in that day superior to their neighbours.

It can be postulated that if Yahweh intends to purge two thirds of His own people in the events of Armageddon (Zech. 13:8), He will purge no less from other nations who deserve His judgements on the basis of the Biblical rule – to the Jew first and then the Gentile. The massive loss of life around the world from Divine judgements is clearly foreshadowed in passages like Jer. 25:29-33.

If that rule of thumb is applied to China’s current population of 1.4 billion the survivors of Divine judgements would number around 450 million. That is a lot of people to educate in the fundamentals of the Truth and guide towards a totally new way of life. This will be a huge task for the Saints appointed for this work. However, Isa. 49:12 reveals a willingness by the surviving Chinese to learn and to journey to Zion as Isa. 2:3 and Mic. 4:2 clearly indicate.

THE COMING GREAT DEPRESSION

Prophecy is clear about “a time of trouble such as never was” (Dan. 12:1-2) being closely associated with the resurrection of the dead (i.e. prior to Armageddon). What accompanies that time of trouble is strongly suggested by the pattern of the removal of Noah and his family, and Lot and his family from the impending judgements that fell upon those generations. Both eras were times of prosperity (Luke 17:26-30) and foreshadowed the era of Christ’s return. That prosperity collapsed almost immediately after Noah and Lot and their families were removed to a safe place. The living will follow the resurrected responsible dead to the Judgement Seat of Christ and we can expect to be removed just before the world’s economy collapses after that pattern.

It is significant that most financial collapses in modern history have occurred in the September/October period (the Day of Atonement time of the year) commencing with the 29 October 1929 collapse of the stock market leading to the Great Depression of the 1930’s. Financial commentators have been saying for years that another collapse in the cycle is overdue. It will happen when God is ready and the Covid pandemic has made it certain. Debt around the world is out of control and many

countries and businesses teeter on the brink of bankruptcy. The watchful and faithful need to be ready for the call to the presence of Christ.

Any doubts about how close the collapse may be can be erased by the raft of articles and videos appearing on the parlous state of the world's economy as Covid tightens its grip on the throat of economic activity. The impending disaster has caused many nations to abandon a Covid elimination strategy and adopt an approach that learns to live with the pandemic.

By end of July, countries like Great Britain will end Covid restrictions even though the fast-spreading Delta variant of the virus is increasing the number of cases every day. The prime minister has said the country will have to live with Covid and accept the deaths that will inevitably come. The same approach is being adopted by other countries in Europe and the Americas. It is summer in the northern hemisphere and people are tired of being locked away from normal human activities.

Christ was very clear about the conditions that would exist in the earth when he came again. Luke 17:26-29 – “And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did **eat**, they **drank**, they married wives, they were given in **marriage**, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did **eat**, they **drank**, they **bought**, they **sold**, they **planted**, they **buildded**; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all.” The pandemic put a damper on many of the activities highlighted in bold above. When restrictions are lifted, men will not only return to these pre-Covid activities, they will do so with alacrity and gusto. It will be in times of that character that Christ will return stealthily to gather his people, unknown to the world, whose attention and interest in the removal of the saints from among them will be distracted by the collapse of the world's prosperity as the Great Depression hits.

Any doubt about the responsible being removed from a time of general prosperity is dispelled by the Lord's warning in the letter to the Laodiceans (Rev. 3:14-21). As brethren of the past have pointed out, the letters to the seven ecclesias are actually prophetic of the history that would unfold from John's day (AD 96) to the return of Christ. That is why the letter to the Laodiceans is the only one containing the words, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock” (Rev. 3:20). This letter pertains prophetically to the post-war period of general prosperity around the globe, a prosperity that in many countries challenges the vitality of the Gospel message in people's lives. The Laodiceans were lukewarm because they were “rich, and increased with goods, and had need of nothing.” This is a warning to the final generation as the world hankers to return to its materialistic and entertainment pursuits after a long period of lockdown and restrictions on their normal way of life.

Mark 13:33-37 – “Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.”

APPENDIX

Putin Signs Constitutional Changes that Allow Him to Rule Until 2036 / By RFE/RL's Russian Service, April 05, 2021. MOSCOW -- Russian President Vladimir Putin has signed into law a controversial bill that opens the door for him to potentially remain in power until 2036. The bill, which was recently approved by the lower and upper chambers of parliament, aligns the election laws with constitutional changes approved by voters last year. One of the constitutional changes resets Putin's term-limit clock to zero, allowing him to seek re-election when his current term expires in 2024, and again in 2030 if he wishes. [...] -- <https://www.rferl.org/a/putin-signs-law-to-rule-until-2036/31187934.html>

Zelenskiy invites Putin to meet in Donbas for peace talks/ By RFE/RL, April 20, 2021. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy has invited his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, to meet him in eastern Ukraine for talks on calming tensions between the two countries. "I go there every month. Mr. Putin: I am ready to go even further and invite you to meet anywhere in the Ukrainian Donbas, where the war is going on," Zelenskiy said in a video released on the presidential website on April 20, amid a Russian military buildup along the border with Ukraine and in occupied Crimea. There was no immediate comment from Russian officials. The United States and NATO say the Russian military buildup is the largest since 2014, when Moscow illegally annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and backed separatists holding parts of the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in a conflict that has killed more than 13,000 people. [...] The Ukrainian foreign minister said Russian troops continue to arrive near Ukraine's borders and are expected to reach a combined force of more than 120,000 troops in about a week. He said the military buildup includes paratroopers, electronic warfare systems, ballistic missiles, and other potentially offensive capabilities. [...] -- With reporting by Reuters and AFP. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-russia-military-buildup-painful-anctions/31213544.html>

Stamping the residue – Dan. 7:7

“Let us emphasize, here is an important statement that has not as yet been fulfilled. Rome has never trampled the residue of Persia under foot, it has never occupied all this territory. A power must yet arise which will occupy the territories of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, to be afterwards subjected to a higher power, namely Jesus Christ. Russia will do this. Thus, like the image of Daniel chapter 2, whose metals will have to be confederated together, before they can be broken to pieces TOGETHER (2:35), so also this terrible fourth beast vision has a latter-day application.”

Bro. Morrie Stewart, The Prophecy of Daniel (US Edition)
August 1973

In Pakistan, Russia's Lavrov Pledges Bilateral Boost to Combat Terrorism.

April 07, 2021. Visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said in Islamabad on April 7 that Russia will provide unspecified military equipment to Pakistan as the two countries increase cooperation to fight terrorism. Russia and Pakistan will also

conduct joint naval and land exercises, he said. Lavrov's two-day visit marks the first to Islamabad by a Russian foreign minister in nearly a decade and is widely regarded as part of an effort to foster deeper bilateral relations that have warmed only recently. [...] "We stand ready to strengthen the anti-terrorist potential of Pakistan, including by supplying Pakistan with special military equipment," Lavrov said. Moscow has recently sought to assert greater influence in conflict-torn Afghanistan as the United States and other Western powers try to extricate themselves from a two-decade war. [...] -- With reporting by AP and dpa.
<https://www.rferl.org/a/pakistan-russia-lavrov-pledges-bilateral-boost-combat-terrorism/31191483.html>

Trump-era growth of settlement growth has only begun. With settlement construction, which saw 28% increase under the Trump administration, sees no signs of slowing, Biden would need to stage an intervention with Israel to keep faint hopes for a two-state solution alive / Associated Press, Published: 04.14.21. An aggressive Israeli settlement spree of over 9,000 homes during the Trump era pushed deeper into the West Bank than ever before, according to an investigation. The trend puts the Biden administration in a tough bind if it follows through on pledges to revive peace efforts between Israel and the Palestinians. Satellite images and recent data show for the first time the full impact of the policies of then-President Donald Trump, who abandoned decades-long U.S. opposition to the settlements and proposed a Mideast plan that would have allowed Israel to keep them all - even those deep inside the West Bank. Although the Trump plan has been scrapped, the lasting legacy of construction will make it even harder to create a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel. President Joe Biden's administration has embraced the two-state solution - which is still widely seen as the only solution to the decades-old conflict - but given no indication on how it plans to promote it. [...]
<https://www.ynetnews.com/article/HkR9dZNUu>

Ashkenazi: Israel will never forget Russia's role in fighting Nazis. In press conference with Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, foreign minister stresses Russia's importance in maintaining stability in Mideast, calls for tightening cooperation between the two countries / i24NEWS, Published: 03.17.21. Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi reaffirmed Israel's appreciation of Russia for the country's part in fighting Nazi Germany during World War II, and for freeing countless Jews from Nazi extermination camps in Europe. "The Jewish people will never forget Russia's role in its war against the Nazis, and in liberating Europe and the extermination camps," Ashkenazi said at a joint press conference with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov. The two have met on an official visit of Ashkenazi to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Moscow and participate in an unveiling ceremony for a Holocaust Memorial at the Israeli Embassy in Moscow. Ashkenazi further addressed the changing tides in the Middle East, referring to Israel's recent normalization agreements with four Arab states, stressing Russia's importance in maintaining stability in the region. He stipulated that the Abraham Accords do not pose an obstacle to peace with Israel's neighboring Palestinians and

urged them to return to the negotiation table with no preconditions. Moreover, the former military chief thanked President Vladimir Putin's support for Israel's security concerns and called to tighten the cooperation between the two countries. --

<https://www.ynetnews.com/article/ryWslCyEu>

CHINA IDENTIFIED IN THE BIBLE by Bro. Ken Whitehead

2020.10.12 – China identified in the Bible

Yes, this is groundbreaking. China has not occupied our attention in the past, but now it is imposing itself on the world. We have long identified Sinim in Isaiah 49:12 with China, and rightly so. But its connection with the Canaanites has not been so obvious.

We must always first “search the scriptures” John 5:39, and then consider profane writings where support might be needed.

Here are the four related names from Strong's:

Sin – Strong 5512 – Wilderness in the region of Sinai

Sinites - Strong 5513 – descendants of Sin, one of the sons of Canaan

Sinai – Strong 5514 – Mountain in the Sinai peninsula

Sinim – Strong 5515 – A distant Oriental region at the extremity of the known world, identified with southern China

Here are some authorities who identify the land of Sinim with China:

✓ Ptolemy 90 -168 AD

✓ Manasseh Ben Israel 1604-1657

✓ Gesenius 1821

✓ Keil & Delitzsch 1857

✓ Strong's 1890

✓ Brown Driver Briggs 1906

✓ Henry Morris 1976

Strabo mentions a number of robbers' fortresses in Syria in his day, including one called Sinna. But this single mention doesn't help us in our quest. On the other hand, Strabo and Josephus speak of the Seres, the “silk people”, believing that the silk traders brought the product with them from origins in India. It was not until Ptolemy later showed that the Seres were merely intermediaries on a much longer route, originating in the farthest east, that he identified the mysterious Sinae people. Refer to: https://www.academia.edu/29668214/The_Images_of_China_in_the_Western_Literature_Greco_Roman_Antiquity

Knowing that all nations of the earth came from Shem, Ham and Japheth Gen. 10:32, we must ask where did the Sinae, the people of the land of Sinim, originate. And here we must let the scriptures speak.

The Tower of Babel began to be constructed with this motivation:

Gen. 11:4 – "...let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."

We know God intervened, resulting in Verse 8: "So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city."

This is reinforced in Verse 9: "from thence did the LORD scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth."

It is most interesting that the only people specifically named as being 'scattered' are the Canaanites:

Gen. 10:15-18 – "And Canaan begat (11 sons) Sidon his firstborn, and Heth, And the Jebusite, and the Amorite, and the Girgashite, And the Hivite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite, And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite: and afterward were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad."

As you know the bulk of Ham's tribes went into the African continent – Mizraim = Egypt, Cush = Ethiopia and southern Africa, and Phut = Libya and northern Africa. And "afterward", some of them spread abroad from there.

What of the youngest son of Ham, Canaan, who was cursed by God through Noah?

We are told in Gen. 10:19 – "And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza; as thou goest, unto Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lasha."

That is, the Canaanites occupied the region with its border from Sidon in Lebanon, down the Mediterranean Sea coast, then across to the southern ends of what we now know as the Dead Sea and then upwards to the east of that Sea.

But by the time Abraham comes down to that area, and later when Joshua leads the people into the promised land, instead of finding the descendants of all eleven sons of Canaan, there were only "seven nations greater and mightier than thou" Deut. 7:1.

Where were the others? In scripture, the Arvadite is identified in the Lebanon region Ezek. 28:8; Hamath is mentioned several times e.g. Num. 34:8, a significant area in the Orontes valley of Syria; the Zemarites are not significant enough to be called a nation by the time they are incorporated into Benjamin's inheritance Josh. 18:22.

That leaves the Sinites.

From the Scripture references to this name we can conclude that because the Sinites are not elsewhere mentioned among the bulk of the Canaanite nations, they originally settled between the general southern border of the other Canaanites, i.e. the Dead Sea area, and the Red Sea, beyond which was the area occupied by

Mizraim, in Egypt. So the descendants of Sin, the Sinites, originally lived in an area which was largely a harsh desert wilderness.

The children of Israel came into the Wilderness of Sin after crossing the Red Sea – Ex. 16:1; 17:1; Num. 33:11-12; and from thence they came to the wilderness/desert of “Sinai” verses 15-16, the Hebrew name so closely related to “Sin”.

But the Sinites were no longer there when Israel arrived under Moses. Nor is there any record of them being there when Abraham entered the land about 2000 BC.

Gen. 10:18 had said: “afterward” were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad.

How long afterward? The first historical record of significant occupation of the land of China is around 2070BC. See: https://www.ancient.eu/Xia_Dynasty/

The flood having occurred about 2344 BC, and the Tower of Babel event occurring two generations later, we can conclude that the descendants of Sin lived in the wilderness regions called in Scripture ‘Sin’ and ‘Sinai’ for up to 200 years. So they gave their name to that area. But as we know the Chinese people are strong breeders, now the most populous nation on earth, and soon the wilderness limited their growth such that they began to search for greener pastures. God could certainly have scattered them abroad instantaneously, but more often He arranges circumstances behind the scenes for His will to be accomplished without men being aware.

The Sinites were given little choice – regions to the north and south were already occupied by other tribes and nations. The sea to the west was an unknown, and the isles were possessed by the sons of Japheth Gen. 10:1-5. The Sinites had become accustomed by now to desert conditions, so the journey east, even through some of the most formidable territory on the planet, was a challenge they could deal with. So they set off East into the unknown.

And just imagine their surprise and unmitigated pleasure when they finally arrived at the far eastern end of the Eurasian land mass, to find the most beautiful, fertile land imaginable. A place where they could forget all about God, be largely uninterrupted by anyone else, develop their own unique culture and philosophy, and live self-reliant and self-sustaining for almost 4000 years until now. And importantly, the pathways of their journey East were later to become the routes of the Silk Road for their amazing and coveted products such as the finest silk, translucent porcelain and delicious tea to travel back to the West!

But rest assured, God has not forgotten His curse through Noah, and their judgment is coming!

Ken Whitehead (Southport, Queensland)