



Prophetic Observer

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Keeping Time On God's Prophetic Clock

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Was the Russian Invasion of Ukraine Foretold in Bible Prophecy?

by James Collins



Ukrainian Soldier Vytalyi (left) with Chaplain James Collins (right)

Brotherhood is a term that is often used in the military. For me, friendship and faith helped me find a brother in the country of Ukraine. In 2013, I served as the chaplain for a coalition of international forces in Ukraine. Our mission was to train the Ukrainian Army in warfare strategies and tactics. On my first day in the country, I met Vytalyi. He stared at me as I walked through the dining facility and continued to stare when I sat down with my meal. I motioned for him to come to my table and join me, which he did. He didn't speak English, but we communicated through an interpreter. He introduced himself and asked about the cross on my uniform which identified me as a Christian chaplain. I explained the meaning to him, and he seemed very surprised. He had never seen a chaplain. At the time, there were none in the Ukrainian Armed Forces. We spoke for a few minutes. Then Vytalyi stood up, saluted me, and left.

The next day, Vytalyi found me again. He had many questions about my ministry. I asked him if he was a believer. He said he was, and that he loved Jesus. Then he smiled and said, "I'm going to be a chaplain someday like you."

Over the next several days, Vytalyi and I spoke often. He shared about getting into trouble when he was a young man, but that all changed when he found Christ. Because of his faith, he believed his choice to serve in the military was God's plan for his life. He had a calling to serve God and country — a calling which I also had — and we quickly became friends. Really, we were more than friends. We were brothers — brothers in arms and brothers in Christ.

During my years in the army, I learned people would come and go in the blink of an eye. So, I always tried to make the most out of any friendship regardless of the brevity of time together. That is what I tried to do with Vytalyi. When

my tour ended, I gave Vytalyi a Ukrainian Bible and reached out to shake his hand. He snapped to attention and saluted me. Then he took my hand and hugged me. I haven't seen him since, but I have thought about him often...

A Battle

Today, there is a battle taking place in Ukraine. These past few weeks I have been answering many phone calls and emails about the Russian invasion. Most people have the same question: Was the Russian invasion of Ukraine foretold in Bible prophecy?

To answer that question, I want to look at what the Bible says about Russia in the last days of history. In Ezekiel 38, written over 2,600 years ago, the prophet Ezekiel predicted an alliance of nations led by Russia would form at the end of this age, just before Christ returns. Ezekiel identifies the nations in this alliance as “Magog, Rosh, Meshech, Tubal, Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, and Beth-togarmah.”

Today, Bible scholars call these nations the “Gog-Magog Alliance” and the end-times battle the “Battle of Gog-Magog.” To help you understand this alliance, let me give you the name of the country in the time of Ezekiel and the country's name today. First, Rosh is Russia. Magog consists of the modern nations of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan. Persia is Iran. Cush is Sudan and Ethiopia. Put is made up of the modern countries of Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria. Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, and Beth-togarmah are in present-day Turkey.

The Bible says in Ezekiel 38:8 that the Gog-Magog alliance will form and attack Israel from the north “in the latter days.” The ruler of Russia, who is known as Gog, will attack the land when it's filled with the exiles who return from among the nations. No one will come to Israel's defense, not even the United States. When all looks lost for Israel, God will miraculously intervene, destroying Russia's alliance of forces.

Where is Ukraine in all of this? Ukraine is part of the ancient Russian Empire. Russian president Vladimir Putin wants to rebuild that empire. If Russia takes Ukraine, Putin will control almost all the areas of the ancient Russian Empire, which potentially would set the stage for the future Gog-Magog invasion.

A Bully

Some people believe Vladimir Putin is Gog from Ezekiel 38 and 39. Let me urge you to be cautious about such speculation. The Bible does not specify if Putin is Gog. However, I will say he is extremely Gog-like. Like Gog, he is a man of military aggression, pride, and greed. Putin is a bully.

Vladimir Putin was born in 1952 in Leningrad. Russia was in a post-World War II economic depression. He grew

up in poverty in communal quarters. From a young age, he was mesmerized by the power of the Soviet Union. He joined the KGB in 1975 and rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel. He began his political career in 1991 and became president in 1999. He never got over the fall of the Soviet Union and is obsessed with bringing it back. He will stop at nothing to see Russia become the most powerful nation in the world.

While it is possible Vladimir Putin could be Gog, it is too soon to draw such a conclusion. What I will say is Putin cannot be definitively identified as Gog; neither can he be conclusively ruled out. He may be responsible for the Ezekiel 38 and 39 invasion of Israel, or he may be setting the stage for a future leader.

A Belief

I believe we are living in the last days. The Lord could come back at any moment. Jesus said in the last days there would be “wars and rumours of wars” (Matthew 24:6). He also said, “... when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.” So, if you are a follower of Jesus Christ, then you should be looking up in these last days. Also, remember that **God is still on the throne and prayer changes things**. So, join me in praying for the people of Ukraine.

A Brother

In addition to praying for the people of Ukraine, would you also join me in praying for my friend, Vytalyi? In 2014, Ukraine began integrating chaplains into their military, but mostly on a volunteer basis. Late last year, the Ukrainian military officially formed a chaplain corps and allowed paid clergy to serve alongside their fighting forces. I don't know if Vytalyi ever became a chaplain, or if he continued his military career as an enlisted soldier. Somehow, I have a strong feeling he is in the trenches right now, fighting for freedom.

Since I retired from the army, I have often wondered what exactly makes a military friendship different? Why do I feel such a sense of brotherhood with Vytalyi and many, many others who served with me? I think it is because a soldier, sailor, airman, or marine is always in a situation that could potentially turn dangerous. Whether it is from combat zones, terrorist groups, naval vessels catching fire, or aircraft crashing, the lives of military members are in constant danger. Understanding that you could die at any moment is the key to forming strong friendships in a short amount of time. Knowing that your “battle buddy” has got your back deepens the bonds of brotherhood at an accelerated rate.

So, even though I was only with Vytalyi for a short time, I still think of him as a brother ... and I stand and salute him and all those who have answered the call of God and country.

Preterism On Trial – Part II

by Pastor Larry Spargimino, Ph.D

In Part I of this series I shared some of the basic ideas about preterism, and why the view that prophecy has already been fulfilled doesn't stand up under close scrutiny. In Part II, I want to look closely at some of the scriptures to which preterists appeal. Do they support preterism? I don't believe so. Let the reader be the judge.

Revelation 1:7 – God's Judgment on Israel in AD 70?

"Behold, he cometh with clouds," Revelation 1:7 says, "and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him." "Every eye" and "all kindreds" sound like a big group of people worldwide. The word "kindreds" is a translation of *phule*, meaning "tribes." Preterists would say it is a reference to the twelve tribes, but in this text there is no reference to the "twelve tribes." Rather it is "all tribes." The same term is used in Rev. 5:9; 7:9; 11:9 and 13:7. It's a very broad word that defies limitation to Israel, and even the ancient Roman Empire.

Preterists see the reference to "clouds" as a clincher for their case. They say it is a reference to the Divine "Cloud Rider," a designation for God who has come in judgment upon nations in the historical past. Isaiah 19:1 reads, "Behold, the Lord rideth upon a swift cloud, and shall come into Egypt: and the idols of Egypt shall be moved at his presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of it." Preterists argue that this happened when the Assyrian king Esarhaddon conquered Egypt in 671 BC and was God's instrument of judgment upon Egyptian idolatry, as Rome was God's instrument of judgment on Israel in AD 70.

Preterists have a certain creative flair for novel ideas that are not immediately apparent, but I think they have missed some essentials from the text of the Bible. In Isaiah 19, the Lord is pictured as riding ON the clouds, whereas in Revelation 1:7, the Lord comes WITH clouds. In this Scripture we see a textual parallel with Daniel 7:13: "... and, behold, one like the Son of man came WITH the clouds of heaven." Verse 14 bristles with kingdom glory and says "his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed." Dare we even limit God's dominion to the Roman world?

Matthew 24:14: Witness to Everyone in Jerusalem, and Then the end?

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world (*oikumene*) for a witness unto all nations (ethnos); and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14). Supposedly, "the end" in this verse is the end of the Jewish sacrificial system that occurred with the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70. The Gospel witness "in all the world" means "all the Roman world."

Oikumene does have a range of meanings. Luke 2:1 tells us that "there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world (*oikumene*) should be taxed." Obviously, this decree did not affect all the people on planet Earth. But *oikumene* is used in Acts 17:31 in the phrase God "will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained." This does not mean God will only judge the Roman world of antiquity. The same words can have different meanings, as in the phrase "let the dead bury their dead" (Luke 9:60). Context and meaning helps the reader decide.

Peterists, however, like to give a word the meaning that best suits their system rather than considering context and meaning. This is a real problem with preterism. It's a case of the tail wagging the dog. For example, Romans 1:8 states: "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world" (*kosmos*). "World," of course, means the Roman world. However, in a different context the same word "*kosmos*" cannot be limited to the Roman world. "For God so loved the world (*kosmos*), that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). If there is any doubt what "world" means, verse 17 is emphatic in the use of *kosmos* in close succession: "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." *Kosmos* is powerfully used in another scripture that also shows that it cannot be limited to the Roman world of the first century: "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world" (*kosmos*) (1 John 2:2).

Big Words in Bible Prophecy

Matthew 24:21 speaks about the horrors of the Great Tribulation. Verse 22 says, “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh (*sarx*) be saved.” Does this mean “no flesh in Jerusalem”? I doubt it. *Sarx* is a big word: “Therefore by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight”(Rom. 3:20). Does this mean that “no flesh in Jerusalem will be justified by keeping the law, but everyone else will”? First Corinthians 1:29 is similar: “That no flesh should glory in his presence.” Does this mean that no one living in Jerusalem in AD 70 should glory in God’s presence but everyone else should?

“This generation” – Which One?

In Matthew 24:15-21, the Lord Jesus speaks about great trouble for Israel. Jesus speaks about great tribulation and suffering exceeding anything that has been or will ever be (vs. 21). The Lord is revealing how bad things will really get. But He doesn’t stop with that. “And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (vs. 22).

Preterists believe that in AD 70 God was acting in judgment against Israel. But there is much more taught in the Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24. Satan’s future attempt to completely destroy God’s ancient covenant people will fail. Luke 21:24 reads: “...and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, UNTIL the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.” The Lord is revealing three things of great importance: (1) Jerusalem’s fall is of a limited duration. It is not final, nor is it complete. (2) There is a period of time when Gentiles will overrun the city and rule over the city and its population. (3) There will be a later time when this situation will be reversed.

In Luke 21:25-26, Jesus talks about celestial and cosmic disruptions that are completely unsettling. Verses 27-28 states: “And THEN shall they SEE [it is visible, not invisible] the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And WHEN these things BEGIN to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your REDEMPTION draweth nigh.” Notice it’s “redemption” not destruction and doom.

Verses 27 and 28 remind us of the rapidity with which all of these signs occur. This explains Matthew 24:34: “This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled.” The generation that sees the signs signaling the return of the Lord will endure through it all to see the Lord. When

the signs appear, prophetic events will proceed very quickly. There is a stated nearness of the signs to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 and the Olivet Discourse

In 1 Thessalonians 4:15 the Apostle states: “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord.” “Lord” is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. There are several Scriptures in which Paul uses the phrase found above to indicate words and thoughts spoken by Jesus (1 Cor. 7:10-11, 25; 9:14; 11:23-25). We have good reason to believe this is what happened in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11. In other words, the words and thoughts of Jesus in Matthew 24 and other parallel passages appear in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5.

Matt. 24:30: “...and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds...” 1 Thess. 4:16-17: “For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven...in the clouds...”

Matt. 24:31: “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” 1 Thess. 4:16-17: “...with the voice of the archangel, and the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.”

Matt. 24:36: “But [*peri de*] of that day and hour knoweth no man...” 1 Thess. 5:1-2: “But [*peri de*] of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you...”

Matt. 24:39: “And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.” 1 Thess. 5:3: “For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them...and they shall not escape.”

There is still much unfulfilled prophecy revealed in the Bible. The Bible is indeed “profitable” in all things, including its prophetic teachings. It is God’s Divinely revealed truth about the end times. I pray that the material in this presentation may encourage the saints and be used in alarming and winning the lost, “for the time is at hand” (Rev. 1:3).

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