

Article of the Month
April, 2022

"After the 70 Years"

The horrors of the war in Ukraine may well be connected to an intriguing prophecy in Isaiah 23.

A SUMMARY Of SYMBOLS

This prophecy in Isaiah is one of a series of prophecies (beginning in Chapter 13 and concluding with Chapter 23) devoted to specific groups of people who will be affected by the deterioration of the world as it crumbles to make way for the Lord's promised Kingdom.

These prophecies are each called "The burden of..." (in the King James Bible), or called "The oracle concerning..." (in the New American Standard Bible). The names of each of these groups are always SYMBOLIC. Determining who they represent is helped by investigating the name meanings and/or by comparing the names to their uses in other prophecies.

In Chapter 23 we have "The oracle concerning **Tyre**." Tyre is a symbolic name for the Church of Rome -- both its eastern and western branches. Today we know these two branches as "The Orthodox Church" (in the east), and the "Catholic Church" (in the west.) Both were originally united and were the official church of the Roman empire (and the later "Holy Roman Empire"). They were one unseparated institution until the 11th Century when they divided. Usually it is the Papal branch that is the focus of prophecy; but here it seems to be the Orthodox branch -- specifically the Russian Orthodox.

For this article we will not go into the complexities of the entire chapter, but we will focus only on verses 13-18. As is always the case with prophetic passages, it is not wise to be dogmatic. We will interpret as seems best from the information available. The Lord will straighten out our possibly-faulty comprehension as needed.

In Isaiah 23:13 & 14, we seem to have an announcement that the church in Russia would at some time come to an end. The "Assyrian" in this verse is usually a symbol of a non-Christian power. "Chaldeans" in prophecy is another name for "Babylon" -- a name the Lord ascribes to the apostate religion which grew out of Rome's making Christianity its official religion.

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Thus as we read these two verses, we are placed in time at the close of the First World War. And we are placed in location in Russia. The communist revolution (1917-19) did away with the Tzar and the aristocracy. It also abolished religion in Russia -- a stunning objective and accomplishment!

The final symbol we need to consider is "The Ships of Tarshish" which in prophecy symbolize trade -- the trade of the western world.

A SIMPLIFIED INTERPRETATION

With the above symbolisms identified, these two verses (paraphrased) are saying:

- v. 13 BEHOLD [a dramatic change!] the land [Russia] which has been nominally Christian for centuries. This [in terms of religion] is now a "was-not" people. The atheistic communists have appointed Russia as a [religious] desert -- a place for atheists only. Christianity is to be forgotten as if it "was not." The communists have erected protective bulwarks in their society so as to strip religion of its powers and to ruin it as entirely as possible.
- v. 14 And, as for you, the trade and commerce interests of the west, WAIL! You have lost this entire end of Europe as a trading ground -- both for goods and for ideas!

Verses 15-17 now focus on the length of time this religious desert will continue and what will happen once the communist power is broken in Russia.

A little reference to recent history is helpful here. In 1989, when the Soviet Union and its communist philosophy was about to become dismantled, and the Berlin Wall was about to be torn down, there was on national television a news-clip of the Soviet Duma (their "legislature"). In great-sized letters on the wall behind and above the speaker's rostrum was emblazoned *the handwriting on the wall*. There it was for all to see -- not written in Russian, but simply with two numerical figures:

70

The Soviet communist dynasty was celebrating 70 years of existence as it was closing down and dismantling its failed system. It is this 70-year period which is the focus of this Isaiah 23 prophecy.

Seeing this history, we can paraphrase verses 15-17 as follows:

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- v. 15 It will come to pass once the Russian Revolution has formalized its power (c. 1919), that the Russian Orthodox church will be only a memory for seventy years -- during the days of the communist dynasty. But once those seventy years have expired (1989), there will be a resurgence of religion in Russia, and the work toward re-establishing a state-church system [spiritual harlotry] will have begun.

Two things should be noted here. (1) As the Soviet Union was closing, Gorbachev went to have an audience with the Pope -- a very unusual action by a Russian leader. (2) Putin is, himself, a devoted member of the Russian Orthodox church. The rumors of his desire to re-establish it as a state religion have been widely reported. In this reporting, it has been mentioned that, since Russia's "Christianity" was begun in the Ukrainian capital city of Kyiv, Putin wants that city in particular as the re-instated traditional center of Russian orthodoxy. This may well explain his otherwise irrational desire to conquer Ukraine. With this information, verses 16 and 17 fall into place nicely. Our paraphrase continues:

- v. 16 Orthodoxy, start trying to make harmonious your previous harlotry (church-state relationship). Carefully collude with this new [post-communist] Russia so that, even though you were forgotten, you will again be viable.
- v. 17 Thus it will come to pass after 1989 that God will arrange matters [to accomplish His ends] with Tyre [Orthodoxy] so that she will again seek the unusual powers of a state church. In this position, she will encourage the mixture of the sacred with the profane [harlotry] all over "Christendom."

The final verse of the chapter allows us to see WHY the Lord allows this to happen. He wants forever to abolish apostate religion. Other prophecies indicate that all of "Babylon" will come to a final eradicating collapse. But first, it must be "taken up" in order that it will be "thrown into the sea [the raging masses of mankind] with violence and will not be found any longer." (Revelation 18:21)

- v. 18 And all of the power, doctrinal control, influence, and wealth that she had wielded over the centuries will be SET ASIDE [re-dedicated] to the Lord [and His incoming Kingdom]. No longer will "Christendom" selfishly hoard these things for its own gratification. Instead, the true wealth of these formerly-misdirected things will be redirected to lavishly feed [spiritually] and elegantly clothe [cover all the needs of] mankind as it begins to dwell under the protection of God in His newly-empowered Kingdom.

"Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done ON EARTH!" (Matthew 6:10) Then will come to pass another Isaiah prediction (14:7): "The whole earth is at rest and is quiet. They break forth into singing!"

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ANOTHER FACTOR

If we correctly understand the meaning of this Isaiah 23 prophecy, it is a living and powerful testimony to the fact that we are at the doorway of the long-promised Kingdom. In large measure (after it), only the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 intervene -- although a few other small prophetic events must transpire. The focus on our day of all prophecies is, indeed, most encouraging -- as hard as it is to watch the accompanying troubles and sufferings.

It is altogether likely that the Russians will be at the head of the "Gog and Magog" invaders of Israel in Ezekiel 38. This may also be a factor in the current Ukrainian invasion. If we draw a straight line from Moscow to Jerusalem, it passes through the eastern territories of Ukraine which Putin has recently declared to be "independent." The only remaining obstacle to him on the straight line is eastern Turkey -- an area which has for some time been seeking independence from Turkey. This will be an area to be watched as time passes. It is not that Russia has to have a clear line to Jerusalem. Today's warfare doesn't need such a welcome doormat! But some prophecy indicates that Armenia (eastern Turkey) will enter into the final details.

We know generically what must happen. But we can only speculate on details. Prophecy is nearly never clear while in process or in the future. But the end is certain: "Peace on earth; good will toward man."

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