

Energy crisis?

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Israel are witnesses to the God of heaven, Who rules in the kingdom of men. Consequently, events that can influence the balance of power in the Middle East are of great interest. We are encouraged to look for the fulfilment of still outstanding prophecies.

WE ARE bombarded by the media with stories of one crisis after another, be it the credit crunch, global warming, or failing energy supplies. A very general overview of prophecy and the Divine perspective in history that Scripture records would lead us to expect such a situation at the end time of an era. That we are nearing the end time which all the faithful have looked for, as bringing the return of Messiah and the establishment of the Kingdom, is witnessed by the renewed presence in the world of Israel as a sovereign nation. Their return from exile after nearly 2,000 years is an amazing event; but we may be in danger of failing to keep this miracle—which is a testimony of God at work in our days—in the front of our consciousness to stimulate our personal watching.

The “Window on Israel today” article this month draws attention to the very significant finds of gas and the high expectation of also finding oil in Israel, or close by under the Mediterranean Sea (p. 386). The need for a country to buy energy places a significant burden on the economy, and Israel is currently in this position.

A new source of gas and possibly oil under their own control not only removes the cost of buying it, but also gives income from exporting it. It is rightly noted that this would change the balance of power in the area, and could provide the motivation for the Gogian invasion, as stated in Ezekiel 38:11,12: “. . . to take a spoil, and to take a prey . . .”.

Conflicting news

Two other items of news bear on this subject. A report in the *Daily Telegraph* on 8 October¹ said that a new study had shown that “the world may start to run out of oil in the next ten years”.

The International Energy Agency is predicting 2030 as the likely date, but the UK Energy Research Council, which is government funded, thought 2030 “was at best optimistic and at worst implausible”.

Apparently, though, oil companies say that there are still major discoveries to be made. Those who might think that “They would say this, wouldn’t they?” should remember the ‘Limits to Growth’ predictions made in the 1970s. According to that scenario, most major raw materials should by now have been in dire shortage. This state of affairs has not materialised because new sources have become available and developing technology has expanded what can be extracted. There is clearly uncertainty; real cause for concern does remain because large amounts of energy are needed to maintain the life style of the current age, especially in the developed countries, as well as in the expanding societies of China and India. Severe curtailment of supply would be



Major areas of ‘tight gas’ in the United States.

Source: US Energy Information Administration, 8 April 2009.

very disruptive, possibly to the point of social unrest.

The second item appeared four days later² as a comment on the World Gas Conference in Buenos Aires. It was reported there that significant technical advances have been made in extracting gas from shale by hydro-fracturing the rock to release 'tight gas'—a process called 'fracking'. Use of this technology has already allowed the United States to reduce its import of liquefied natural gas from Qatar and Trinidad almost to nil, with knock-on effects for the global gas market and crude oil. It is now claimed that "natural gas reserves . . . have risen to 1.2 trillion barrels per day of oil equivalent, enough for sixty years' supply, and rising fast!" On this basis it is claimed that "The world is not going to run short of energy as soon as feared. America is not going to bleed its wealth importing fuel. Russia's grip on Europe's gas will weaken. Improvident Britain may avoid paralysing blackouts by mid-decade after all".

This latter item, if realised to any extent, has significant import for the world, and the Middle East in particular. Until the financial crisis Russia had been exercising a grip on gas supplies to Europe and benefitting financially. Notably, much of this increased income has been directed to re-equipping its military and allowing it to have more influence on the world stage. Developments that remove the possibility of a Russian stranglehold on energy supplies would both reduce its power to achieve its ambitions and severely reduce its income, with consequential problems within its own country.

If the potential gas and oil sources in Israel prove viable and are developed, and the alternative gas supplies via 'fracking' of shale come up to expectations, then it is easier to see how a situation might arise where Israel has "cattle and goods . . ." etc. to such an extent that a somewhat impoverished Russia would come down as Gog, in fulfilment of Ezekiel 38, to take a spoil.

Prosperity for Israel?

There have been expositors among us who have felt that it would be impossible for Israel to dwell safely (or carelessly, Heb. *betach*)³ before the return of the Lord Jesus and the preliminary establishment of the Kingdom. They have therefore seen the Gogian invasion as taking place after our Lord's return. Others have concluded that the Gogian invasion is the trigger for Divine intervention through Jesus to bring the colossus of the kingdom of men to an end. Until now, on this

view, it has been a little difficult to see exactly how Israel could be dwelling safely without bars and gates and be prosperous enough to be a source of spoil to a major power like Russia. A development of the scenario set out above would make this situation possible—at least if the antagonism of the surrounding Arab nations could be removed.

The Arab nations immediately round about Israel do not feature as identifiable peoples among those named in the Gogian invasion. There are no Semitic peoples listed as Gog's allies. There are at least two reasons why that might be so:

- they no longer exist as identifiable nations
- they are simply regarded as part of the prosperous land that Gog overruns.

Whichever situation may apply (and readers may be able to suggest others), there seems to be the need for some resolution, albeit temporary, of the Israel-Arab differences, especially the activities of Hamas and the PLO. Are we to expect another Israel-Arab clash that will give Israel the upper hand and provide the basis for the peaceful and prosperous situation required before the Gogian invasion? Is it soon that the surrounding aggression against Israel depicted in Psalm 83 will boil over into a conflict from which God will rescue His people to make them dwell safely? Such a situation seems to be foreseen by Ezekiel: "And there shall be no more a pricking brier unto the house of Israel, nor any grieving thorn of all that are round about them, that despised them; and they shall know that I am the Lord GOD. Thus saith the Lord GOD; When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the people among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the heathen, then shall they dwell in their land that I have given to My servant Jacob. And they shall dwell safely therein, and shall build houses, and plant vineyards; yea, they shall dwell with confidence, when I have executed judgments upon all those that despise them round about them; and they shall know that I am the LORD their God" (28:24-26); and: "Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say unto Gog, Thus saith the Lord GOD; In that day when My people of Israel dwelleth safely, shalt thou not know it?" (38:14).

1. "Oil may be running dry by 2020", *Daily Telegraph*, 8 Oct. 2009.
2. "Energy Crisis is postponed as new gas rescues the world", *Daily Telegraph*, 12 Oct. 2009.
3. It has also been suggested that Ezekiel is here describing a false sense of security in Israel (see, for instance, G. Henstock, *Christadelphian*, Feb. 2003, p. 49).