



## A storm of desolation

Nigel Bernard

**W**HAT WILL it be like for Israel when Gog invades? God says: "Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land" (Ezek. 38:9). The word translated "storm" has the sense of desolation, and is translated in this way in Isaiah 10: "And what will ye do in the day of visitation, and in the *desolation* which shall come from far? to whom will ye flee for help? and where will ye leave your glory?" (v. 3). Isaiah is speaking about the Assyrians who were soon to invade the land of Israel. But we see a parallel between the Assyrians and the forces of Gog. They both bring desolation.

That the forces of Gog will "cover the land" shows that the invasion will not be a token one. The whole land, in particular the mountains, will experience a storm of desolation. This will bring great suffering on the Jews in the land. The prophet Isaiah was commanded to call one of his sons Maher-shalal-hash-baz (8:3). This name is made up of four words, which mean 'speed', 'spoil', 'haste' and 'prey'. It spoke of the way in which the Assyrians were going to capture the prey of Israel: "For before the child shall have knowledge to cry, My father, and my mother, the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria shall be taken away before the king of Assyria" (v. 4). Two of the words in the name, the words for 'spoil' and 'prey', are taken up in Ezekiel 38: "to take a spoil, and to take a prey" (v. 12). The invasion of Gog will be like that of the Assyrian in its brutality and ruthlessness.

When Gog invades, the people of Israel "shall dwell safely all of them" (v. 8). However, this is not a safety brought about through their faithfulness and their consequent blessing by God through Christ. When Christ is King it is inconceivable that he would allow such a desolation to take place in the land. Ezekiel 38 reveals that an earthquake will help defeat the forces of Gog (vv. 19,20). Zechariah 14 shows that Christ will not enter Jerusalem until after the great earth-

quake (vv. 4-9). At the time of the invasion of Gog Israel will not be the only people dwelling safely. The same word for 'safely' is also used in Ezekiel 39: "them that dwell *carelessly* in the isles" (v. 6). But these isles will have a "fire" sent upon them. Like Israel, their confidence in their own safety has been misplaced.

If Gog is to bring a storm of desolation upon the land, like the Assyrians of old, then we should be looking for similar characteristics in the leadership of Russia today. In a recent article in the *Daily Express*<sup>1</sup> the writer Will Stewart wrote an article that spoke of growing concerns that Russia is indeed heading in this direction. The article is ominously entitled, "Will Russia return to its Cold War terror?". It tells of how the current leader Vladimir Putin is seeking to rebuild the KGB, the feared secret police of the Soviet era. In an echo of the days of Stalin, he has also restored the Soviet national anthem.

But these signs of ruthlessness are not seen as being limited to the internal working of Russia. Stewart writes: "There are also worrying signs that Russia is reviving its old hostility to the West. Last week the Pentagon accused Russia of shifting nuclear missiles back to Kaliningrad—the area of Russia closest to Western Europe. With concern rising in countries bordering this Baltic enclave—Poland and Lithuania—Putin at the weekend dismissed the US claims as 'rubbish'. Yet America remains worried". Whatever the truth behind these particular claims, they arise amidst a growing concern at the behaviour of Russia.

The depiction in Ezekiel 38 is of an economically prosperous Israel being stormed by a desolating force intent on prey and spoil. Of course, another way for Gog to gain wealth would not be by invasion but by trade. However, this is clearly not Gog's style. Stewart goes

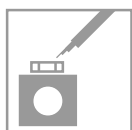
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1. 8 January 2001, p. 13.

on to show that observers are concerned at Russia's real priorities: "And a year into his presidency, there is a sense that Putin is placing a greater importance on rekindling Russia's former sense of power—based on ruthless security apparatus—than connecting his country with economic opportunities and increasing liaison with the West".

What of ourselves? When speaking to the Jews concerning the invasion of the Assyrians, God asked: "and where will ye leave your glory?" (Isa. 10:3). The "glory" referred to here was

wealth acquired by exploiting the poor through "unrighteous decrees" (v. 1), the antecedents of the traditions of the scribes, which the Lord Jesus condemned (Mt. 15:1-9). Regarding the impending events of A.D. 70 James wrote of how the Jews in those days were pointlessly acquiring wealth: "Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days" (Jas. 5:3). Let us ensure that, as we see the day approaching, we lay up for ourselves "treasures in heaven" (Mt. 6:20) where no one speeding to the spoil and hastening to the prey can break through and steal.



## Correspondence

*Comments on articles appearing in the magazine are always welcome, and should be addressed to the editor in whose section the article appears.*

# From the Editor's postbag

## Comments on items received from readers

### Autocratic Europe

I began the previous "From the Editor's postbag" (Nov. 2000, p. 422) by referring to an article which compared the developing united Europe of today with the medieval empire of Charlemagne, a comparison interesting to us because of the way Revelation 17 predicts a revival of the beast of Revelation 13 before the return of Christ. On this same theme, a reader has passed on to me an article by the chairman of W. H. Smith, published in the *Financial Times* of 19 October 2000, commenting on the Danish people's rejection of the euro in a referendum. He expressed himself pleased with the result, not so much because he is against the euro, but because of what he sees as an increasingly autocratic Europe, one which pays little regard to the views of ordinary people.

Having referred to the rejection of the euro by the Danes as

"a distinctively protestant act", he goes on to draw a very interesting parallel between the Europe of today and the Europe of the Middle Ages:

"I use the word 'protestant' deliberately. For the EU is increasingly taking on the forms and habits of the late medieval papacy. To the Church's economic clout it adds sway over princes, its millennial ambitions, its relentless propaganda, its idealistic origins, its power for good and evil, its control over its own myth . . . The relationship of modern heads of government to Brussels eerily parallels the tension between renaissance monarchs and popes".

The purpose of the article is to plead for the move towards a more authoritarian structure in Europe to be halted, and for there to be greater room for democratic participation in decision-making, even if this slows

the development of a united Europe. He concludes the article with the following thought: "Meanwhile the extremist, populist Danes and the xenophobic, isolationist, centrifugal British public are playing an invaluable role in encouraging the EU, with all its achievements and all its promise, to question its own infallibility". Cutting through the irony, he sees Britain having a significant role in directing the EU down more democratic paths. But is this really so? Are we not seeing a developing rift between Britain and Europe as the latter develops into a Catholic-dominated superpower?

### Threat to oil

In the October "Publishing Editor's column" I commented on how the blockade of oil depots in Britain in the previous month had shown the vulnerability of modern society, with its heavy dependence on transportation of goods by vehicle, and its