

THE FUTURE (11)

—H. L. Heijkoop

The Future of Russia

When we read the prophets Daniel, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, we are struck by a great difference. Daniel speaks about the time which starts with the exile of the Jewish people to Babylon, and ends with the destruction of Israel's enemies by the coming of the Lord Jesus in glory to the earth. Daniel describes for us the four world empires that will rule successively over Palestine and gives us their history and judgment.

Jeremiah and Ezekiel don't speak of these empires. Jeremiah is more occupied with the moral wickedness and the idolatry of Judah and he shows us the complete restoration and blessing of the Jewish people. He especially shows what God accomplishes when He writes His law in their hearts.

Ezekiel's purpose is more to reveal God's glory in Israel. The first eleven chapters show us the living creatures (cherubim) leaving the temple, the city (Jerusalem) and the country. Then in subsequent chapters we find their final return to dwell there forever, when Jerusalem has become Jehovah Shammah (Jehovah is there). Daniel gives us the Jewish history between those two points in time.

In Ezekiel 36 and 37, we find the restoration of Israel. The people have returned to the land of Palestine and Israel has regained its own national existence. But it is not merely that: God's Spirit has worked in them and He has sprinkled pure water upon them and given them a new heart and a new spirit (36:25-28). He has given them David as king and made a covenant of peace with them, Judah and Israel have been reunited into one nation (37:15-28).

From chapter 40 onward, we find the description of the glorious condition of the people at that future (Millennial) time. We see the Millennial temple and the priestly service, the inheritance of every tribe, and the blessing flowing from the sanctuary.

But the intervening chapters 38 and 39 have an entirely different character. Here we read of the invasion of Palestine by a mighty prince who unites many nations in his armies. We observe here the last enemy of Israel being destroyed before the eventual blessing comes.

This army is from the great North-Easterly confederacy of nations which forms the last instrument in Satan's hand through which he seeks to destroy God's chosen people, Israel, when it dwells in the land under the protection of the Messiah. Salvation brings us into favour with God, but it also makes us a target of the attacks of the entire power of the enemy (Eph. 6); this is so today and it will be so then.

When will this invasion take place?

To get a clear insight into these chapters, we must understand that David and Solomon are both a type of the Lord Jesus. David is the one who is first rejected and persecuted by his people, but later he rules in the midst of his enemies, conquering all of them. After David's reign, we see the rule of Solomon as a type of the peaceful rule of the Lord Jesus in the Millennium. There is not an enemy who dares to rise up against Solomon.

Ezekiel 38 tells us that Gog invades the land when the people of Israel dwell in safety (v. 14) — when they dwell "without walls and having neither bars nor gates" and as those "that are in quiet" (v. 11).

At that time the battle near the Mount of Olives where the armies of the Roman Empire are destroyed, has already taken place. The King of the North, referred to in Daniel, has also found his end by this time. Those two great enemies of Israel will be the first to be judged by the Lord when He comes from Heaven (see Rev. 19 and Dan. 11). Only after that judgment does Israel live restfully. At that time Gog comes with all his armies in an effort to capture the land.

Chapter 38 clearly shows us that Gog's attack is at this later time. Verse 8 says that it will be "after many days ... at the end of days." Verses 8, 12, 14 and 16 confirm that Israel, after having been dispersed and persecuted among the nations, has

returned to the land. It also mentions that the land, that was wasted at one time, is then inhabited. Then verses 11-14 say that the people will be in rest and will no longer fear danger, Gog is aware of all this.

Who is Gog?

Ezekiel 38-39 clearly answer who Gog is. In chapter 38:6,15 and 39:2 we are told that he comes from the North. Literally it says he comes from the extreme or uttermost parts of the North. Most of the new translations render it this way. The New Translation by J.N.D. and the N.A.S.B. do so. To understand this geography we must take Palestine as our point of reference. These chapters deal with Palestine, God's centre of the earth or literally "the navel of the earth." Once we realize this we can see that Gog can be no other country than Russia since only a part of Asia Minor and then Russia is situated to the north of Palestine. Further, the prince of the part of Asia Minor laying immediately north of Palestine is referred to as the King of the North (not the extreme north) in Daniel and at this moment he is judged already (Dan. 11).

Moreover, the names given in Ezekiel 38 and 39 also verify that these verses speak of Russia. The word translated "chief" in chapter 38:3 and 39:1 in the King James version is actually a proper name and should have been left untranslated. The rendering would then become: "Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal." The oldest translations of the Old Testament and most linguists of today put it this way as do both the "New Translation" and the "New American Standard Bible".

In the words Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, we recognize very easily Russia, Moscow and Tobolsk.

Who will be the allies of Russia?

Persia, Ethiopia (Hebrew: Cush), Phut, Gomer and Togarmah are mentioned in these chapters as allies of Russia in her invasion (vv. 5-6). Both Cush and Phut are sons of Ham, some of whose descendants lived along the Euphrates River (Gen. 10). Gomer is the patriarch of the Celts.¹ The house of Togarmah are the Armenians. These countries are either subjected by Gog or are associated with him. Thus Russia's influence is apparently to increase in the Near-East and in the countries as far as the Euphrates River, which was the old boundary of the Roman Empire. They will be under the dominion of Russia. In connection with this, it is remarkable that, when the judgments on the Roman Empire are announced in Revelation 16:12 it says that the Euphrates will be dried up so "that the way of the kings coming from the rising of the sun might be prepared."

What will be Russia's character?

We saw that the character of the Roman Empire was enmity against God and blasphemy of His Name. But, from Ezekiel 38-39, we see that Russia is characterized by an insatiable desire for wealth and power and a total disregard of God.

When Russia invades Palestine, the Lord Jesus has already descended from heaven in judgment. He has destroyed both the Roman Empire and the King of the North, Russia's ally. No doubt Russia is aware of this but Russia doesn't believe in God.

According to Scripture, two great masses of people will oppose one another in the time of the end. These are the Roman Empire and the North-Eastern confederacy headed by Russia. Scripture mentions all the sons and grandsons of Noah when it describes these two groups. It follows from this that there will not be a third power of equal strength on the earth.

Until this time, the political condition of the world, had been kept in balance because both powers restrained each other. The Roman Empire is powerful, not merely due to its mighty armies but more specifically because of the capability of its commanders. They can do wonders and are even able to bring fire from heaven (Rev. 13). But Russia's power is in her large armies, its massive manpower. This is seen when the armies of Western-Europe are destroyed in Revelation 19: then only the birds are called to eat, but when Russia is destroyed, both the birds and the beasts of the field are called to eat (Ezek. 39:17).

When Russia hears that the armies of Western Europe are destroyed, it supposes that it can expand its influence over the entire world. And where else to establish it but in the Middle East, the centre of the earth where there is a rich nation that (seemingly) does not have any means to defend itself.

¹ *The Celts lived first in continental Europe north of the Alps, later fragments of their tribes settled in England and Wales. — The Editor.*

The judgment of Russia!

But Russia does not reckon with the presence of Jehovah. When it enters the land, its mighty armies will be shamefully defeated: they will oppose each other and sickness as well as powers from heaven will destroy them. The Lord does not even bother to judge them personally as He did with the Roman Empire and the King of the North.

It is very remarkable that the Lord stresses the point that He *Personally* draws Gog to Palestine. This does not mean that it conflicts with the wishes of Gog. Ezekiel 38:9-12 make it clear that Gog's own thoughts form the motive for his attack. But verses 4, 7 and 8 as well as 39:2 show that God works these thoughts in Gog's heart to judge him.

God knows the history of Russia and all the abominable things and unrighteousnesses that have occurred there. God does not forget. Just as it is elsewhere mentioned that God will punish Israel because they served idols during the desert-journey some 3500 years earlier, so God will judge Russia for all that happened in its history up to that time. Verse 8 says that God will visit the land, which means judgment over the things that took place.

We find the same thing in a great event in Israel's history which is a foreshadowing of the things we find here. In Egypt the Passover and the plagues revealed that Israel had a special position of favour with Jehovah, even though they were poor, oppressed and in bondage. When Pharaoh consistently disobeys God by refusing to let the people go, God hardens Pharaoh's heart. God did so with exactly the same purpose as indicated here in chapter 39:7, namely to show God's power and glory in the judgment of all that rise up against Him.

The judgment as described in the last verses of chapter 38 is terrible. This judgment is not confined to the armies. Russia itself and its allied nations will undergo the judgment of God. "I will send a fire on Magog and among them that dwell at ease in the isles; and they shall know that I am Jehovah" (ch. 39:6).

The greatness and the might of the attacking army is very evident from chapter 39. For seven years the Israelites will be able to use the wood of the weapons for fuel so that no further wood is needed. The entire population of Israel will need seven months to bury the bodies and even then they will not be entirely finished. There will be so many graves that an entire valley will be blocked by them. In memory of this judgment of God and of the salvation that the Lord brought about through it, the valley will be called: *the valley of Gog's multitude* (v. 11).

Finally we must keep in mind the difference between this event and the one involving Gog and Magog in Revelation 20. There it is after the millennium, some 1000 years after the events in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Gog is not mentioned there as being a person. As far as I understand, the names in Revelation 20:8-9 are merely used to indicate the tremendous mass of people involved in this judgment.

To be cont'd

GOD'S BLESSING OR GOD'S PRESENCE?

—J. van Dijk

Many Christians assume that where God blesses, He must be present. As a result, they never question whether or not they are where God wants them to be. To them it is a foregone conclusion: God blesses us, so: God is present with us. But let us look at Genesis 26.

There was a famine in the land. Yes, in the very land God promised to Abraham and Isaac there is a famine. That happens today too. God, at times, allows a spiritual famine to test where our affections are. And how do we respond to such a test? Often we do what Isaac did, we go to the land of the Philistines. That land is characterized by its relationship to Egypt. It has its own way of leaving the world behind (Ex. 13:17), a way not leading through the Red Sea (Christ's death for us), the Jordan (our having died with Christ), and not via Gilgal (the putting off of our flesh). The people of that land claim the heavenly promises, but they make provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14) and their manners are those of the world. It may be that God allows us to sojourn there, so that we may learn — and anything we learn there, will be learned with shame. But we go and dwell there (just as Isaac did) oblivious to the fact that the Lord's presence is not with us there.

How do we go to the "land of the Philistine"? First of all we replace obedience by expedience, then we exchange God's Word for our conscience. But in doing so, our approach has become identical to the approach taken by the mere professor. We have come on his terrain, and through his habits he lures us away from our "Well." If we turn again to God's Word, he may concede that God's Word is in the Bible; but don't become specific, because you will soon find that he will

not allow you to say of any particular part that it is the Word of God. He effectually plugs the well! When he notices that you still read the Word, he will say that it is a book written by wise and devout men. Here again he shows himself to be a Philistine claiming the well for himself. These are the people we live among when we replace obedience by expedience (true, it was only to escape famine!) and God's Word by our conscience (we did it with a clear conscience!)

But not only do we suffer the activities of the Philistines, we ourselves must compromise our bridal affections, just as Isaac did. We must give up things that characterize us as a bride waiting for her Bridegroom. Our fathers, who had been there before (Gen. 20), knew this and told us; but we, like Isaac, have to learn the lesson all over again. We seldom learn from our fathers' experience.

Can God bless us in that land? "Isaac sowed in that land and received in the same year a hundredfold; and Jehovah blessed him!" (v. 12). A hundredfold! That is the maximum rate of fruit bearing mentioned in Matthew 13:23! Yes, blessings may be there, but let us not forget what happened to the wells! The authority of God's Word over our souls will be greatly hindered. We will soon forget the value of the question, "What does God's Word say?" To ask this, will only seem troublesome to us.

What a grace, when God makes us feel our lack of water. It caused Isaac, slowly but surely, to return to his God-given place. Isaac came to Beersheba, and Jehovah appeared to him in the same night (vv. 23,24). God renews His promise there, and Isaac builds an altar and worships.

How sad, if the blessings God gives us darken our discernment for God's path for us. You may have heard the remark: "in town 'A' all is really dry, (there is a spiritual famine), but in town 'B'... God is present, look at the numbers, look at the activity for God, look at the blessing!" Yet when you look closely, you notice that the ways of the world are adopted, what appeals to nature is used to secure those blessings. How many of us rejoice in the blessings rather than in the presence of their Giver? God's presence is more than His blessing. John 14:23 connects His dwelling with us to the keeping of His Word. When we keep His Word we will discover that the joy of obedience is greater than the elation of activity. Besides, in God's place we will enjoy His presence and (perhaps after a period of testing and trial) His blessing.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q-3. Is it right for a Christian to help a fellow student during examination?

A-3. Of course it is right to help your fellow student and you should always be ready to do so. But... what is help? How did you intend to help him? I suppose you meant slipping him a note that answers the problem he has to solve or perhaps giving some indication to let him know that he is on the right track, or something in that vein. But is that really help? Sure, he may pass the examination as a result. Someone may present him a piece of paper stating that he successfully passed the examination, but did he really? It would be a paper that gives — unwittingly — a false testimony. It would not be a very "Christian" situation.

How can we help then, if we cannot do it this way? I think of Moses when the Lord asks him, "Who gave man a mouth? or Who maketh dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? have not I, Jehovah?" (Ex. 4:11). Am I wrong if I add to this little list, Who gives man his memory Who makes him capable to recall vital information at the time when it is needed? And Who gave a brother that is concerned about my examination results? Is it not the same God?

What I am trying to convey is this, we should realize that God controls all these practical situations of our lives. You notice that your fellow student needs help? That is an excellent opportunity to bring him in prayer before God, you can do that even during your examination. God hears us always, and He cares. What is more, He knows exactly why your friend should or should not be successful; that is more than you know! And so if you want to help your fellow student, go right ahead, as long as you use prayer as the means and do not resort to deceit.

The wisdom of the prudent is to discern his way; but the folly of the foolish is deceit (Prov. 14:8).

GUIDES TO SPIRITUAL HEALTH — EXERCISE

—G. W. Steidl

Most good exercise books (which we find much easier to read than to follow) tell us, "exercise regularly"; "proceed from simple to complex exercises"; and "don't overdo it."

It also works this way in the Christian life. Spiritual exercise involves actively serving the Lord — putting into practice the things we learn from His Word, the Bible.

Philip was a model exerciser. He started in a small way helping to care for some needy widows in his community. As his activity developed, so did his faith and spiritual abilities.

Driven from his home by persecution, he went to a city called Samaria and preached Christ. Things were going great — there was great joy in that city as Philip led many to repentance and faith in his Saviour. Even the opposition added only fuel to the Gospel fire blazing there.

Then God said in effect, "This exercise is finished. I have another one for you." Philip was sent to the Gaza strip, and on his way there he met the treasurer of Ethiopia, travelling homeward from Jerusalem (Acts 8). Imagine his joy and surprise when Mr. Treasurer invited him to join him in travel and explain to him the Scriptures. Philip presented Jesus Christ, and the Ethiopian received Him joyfully as his Lord and Saviour.

Philip's spiritual exercise involved him in adventure, danger, and above all, the joy of sharing his Saviour with others. We can have similar experiences if we, like Philip, allow God to direct our lives. It all starts with just a little spiritual exercise.

SEEK YE MY FACE

—*J. van Dijk*

Christian, do you look for blessing
Coming from the hand of God?
Is your longing for refreshing
From the Well, the Word of God?

Once I too looked for God's blessing,
But I later understood
That his presence far exceeded
All the joys I would call "good".

In His presence, I learned secrets
That the Father's heart reveals.
In His presence, I experienced
His Own hand that with me deals.

No, it was not only blessing
As I count it, that He gave.
No, He disciplined and chastened,
But for good, and all in love.

His own presence, He assures us,
Will be ours when we obey;
When in humbleness we follow
Everything that God did say.

Now I rather have His presence,
Whether it bring rod or bliss;
Either is for my upbringing,
For the hand that deals is His.

Looking first of all for blessing,
I did miss the greater bliss
Of the Father's hand chastising
Me. — The part of sons this is.

Fellowship with God the Father,
In His presence, 'bout the Son
Whom He gave in love on Calvary
Is the blessing I have won.

Psalm 27:8; John 14:23; Hebrews 12:5-11