

MILESTONES 2015

Don
Pearce



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Don Pearce

don@MilestonesUK.org

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MILESTONES TO THE KINGDOM

***A Review of the
World Events of
2015 in the Light
of Bible Prophecy***

Don Pearce

Further copies of this book are available from:

- *Milestones*

DON F. PEARCE

76 High Street

Hillmorton

Rugby CV21 4EE

England

Phone (01788) 54 2408

Fax (01788) 82 4256

Email: don@MilestonesUK.org

Website: milestonesuk.org

- *Christadelphian Scripture Study Service*

85 Suffolk Road

Hawthorndene

South Australia, 5051

Australia

Phone (08) 8278-6848

Email: csssadelaide@webshield.net.au

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Preface

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It would be fair to say that in 2015 there has been more general excitement over the fulfilling of Bible prophecies than any year since 1967. Time after time we have been surprised at the speed of events and the extreme significance of them as we put them alongside the ancient words of the prophets of Israel. Many Christadelphian ecclesias throughout the world have been very excited to see the number of political actions for which they had expectations now, almost suddenly, opening up before our eyes. We thank God for this great encouragement. As the world becomes increasingly mysterious (“men’s hearts failing them for fear”!) to even its leaders, so our hearts are strengthened as we see the Hand of the Living God in all that takes place.

“Surely the LORD God will do nothing, but He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets”! Is the Lord soon to be on earth again? Surely this must be so!

It has been a year of remarkable changes and reverses. This time last year the G20 nations were in strong agreement of punishing Russia for its invasion and occupation of the Crimea and of an eastern industrial section of Ukraine. They were demanding of each other stiff sanctions against Russia for its immoral and unconscionable behaviour towards a fellow European nation. They were furious about the Russian missile that destroyed the KLM airliner and its 280 passengers over eastern Ukraine and even more so the callous indifference of the Russians to the investigation of the crashed airliner. The bold, unflinching lies of the Russian President were seen not only by world leaders but by the average man in the street. Appointments with many forums were cancelled and Putin felt a cold chill when he attended the G20 Conference in Brisbane and left early and unwanted.

It is no exaggeration that 12 months later Putin is seen as the key, powerful figure in international diplomacy. He was appointed to the Committee that drew up an amnesty with Iran to reduce sanctions on Iran for her support of world terrorism. The sanctions are now being relaxed, Russia is seen as the key player and has gained many advantages in trade and weaponry in her updated relations with Iran, the inspirer of terror organisations. Russia has stepped up the number of nations in her EEU trading block and others like Armenia, Azerbaijan, South Ossetia (and Israel) are wishing to participate! Russia has built two naval bases in Syria, one in Cyprus, two in Crimea and is negotiating with other eastern Mediterranean powers. Russia’s most dramatic move, though, in 2015 has been her rapid advance in Syria where in three to four months she has established another port, two air bases and several other army bases. Russia stole the march on the international Conference on ISIS (Islamic State) and under the guise of acting against ISIS

she had herself welcomed by the official Assad government and has gained control of all the Syria-Iraq-Iran Hezbollah complex. Her very best missiles are now implanted on Syrian soil and there is no power likely to challenge her in the sky or on the land or sea. “No-one messes with us”, says Putin.

So Gog is suddenly on the border of Israel and no-one saw this happening quite like it has! Others will join to fight off ISIS but Russia will not loosen her hold in Syria.

Incredible!

Alas for Israel?

The chapters dealing with Israel in brother Don’s book are remarkably tragic. Russia is successfully wooing Israel, portraying herself as friend and supporter, drawing closer to playing a role in the marketing of the Leviathan gas and the Golan oil. Israel is booming and in her new-found wealth she is vulnerable to the peace and security message that she hears in Moscow or from Russian ambassadors, “This is the semblance in all the earth” said Zechariah and it is sadly true! Israel is playing with Russia and forgetting her God and maintaining her refusal of Judah’s King.

It is wonderful to see all this and brother Don’s work will fill it out very helpfully.

Let us make sure that all our ecclesias and their many children in our Sunday Schools know the day of our visitation!

“The Spirit and the bride say Come”!

Brian Luke

Secretary.

January 2016

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Abbreviations used

EU European Union. Was the Common Market, EEC, then EC, now EU
m = million; **bn** = billion; **GDP** = Gross Domestic Product. **GNP** = Gross National Product (Similar to GDP but includes balance from foreign sources of income/payments.)
 \$1= £0.68; €0.92; A\$1.37; CA\$1.39; NZ\$1.46 at 31-12-15 rates.
 \$1 million = £677,000, \$1 billion = £677,000,000 approx. \$ always US\$.

Author’s important notes

I would like to especially thank my family, Bre. Kevin Allison, Alan Clarke and Stephen Whitehouse and the CSSS for their helpful comments on the draft. It is all put together in three weeks at the end of the year, so please bear with its imperfections! *Milestones* quotes extensively from overseas sources, and as **I retain original spellings, etc., check whether it is a quote before blaming my excellent proof-readers!**

Conventional religious terminology is used, sometimes put within “”, but often not. Readers will appreciate my understanding on the falseness of many of these terms. Conventional names are used: e.g. West Bank, Palestinians, Pope. Dates are always day-month-year. Any

items in **bold** are my emphasis, i.e. not emboldened in the original, unless stated. I am very grateful for items sent in; please ensure date and source indicated.

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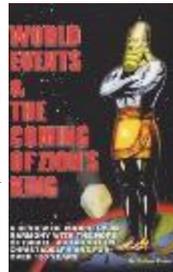
by Bro Graham Pearce

This 72-page booklet looks at the Hope of Israel and the meaning of the New Covenant.

World Events & the Coming of Zion's King

by Bro Graham Pearce

This 100-page booklet examines most of the scriptural passages concerning the time of the end events and puts them in a logical order. At the same time Bro Graham Pearce looks at some of the newer ideas and show where they fall down when examined by Scripture. For brethren and sisters looking for the return of their Master, it is essential reading.



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Sent out 2 or 3 times a week, these are the items that catch my eye and form the basis of writing the *Bible Magazine* quarterly updates and the annual *Milestones*. Consisting of about 8 pages, it keeps you up-to-date with events from around the world of interest to Bible students. Each article is indexed and cumulative indexes are published quarterly. See inside back cover for details. Email to don@MilestonesUK.org (See www.MilestonesUK.org for sample copy)

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A SYNOPSIS

2015 has been a year for Watchmen on Zion's wall to lift up their heads

We live at a time when spiritual darkness covers much of the world and in the UK we are now being told it is no longer a Christian country and we must adjust to this fact! Yet as our hymn goes—the gleam grows in the East! Even the sceptical amongst us can't deny that several of the things we have been looking to, as heralds of the Master's advent, have increased momentum. Last year it was Russia moving into Crimea and establishing a forward base to the north of Turkey.

This year it has been the aggressive and swift move by Russia to establish a new forward base to the south of Turkey. Month by month since September, we have seen Mr Putin skilfully deploy his weaponry in base after base in Syria. This is no temporary move! He looks as if he is hunkering down to stay! The Russian bear's paw prints are now visible in many places in the Middle East.

This is not the immediate prelude to Armageddon—the Master must be back in the earth well before then, but it is a great sign to our community, if not to the world. As Bro Thomas penned nearly 170 years ago: *When Russia makes its grand move for the building-up of its Image-empire then let the reader know that the end of all things, as at present constituted, is at hand.* We acknowledge that there have to be more steps before ISIS is contained and the Syrian problem sorted, in order for Russia and Israel to build up a friendship which will result in a period of peace and security; yet these steps can take place after the return of the Master to his household. The speed at which things have moved forward this year should be a great motivation to us to be watchful. We must be alert to the seriousness of our position, for shortly we must give account of our lives to the angels that are overseeing our lives and to our Master, who gave his life to give us hope of life with him in his Kingdom.

We increasingly see the force behind Balaam's prophecy that there will be a latter-day Asshur power which Gog will have to deal with, before he enters into Israel.

We too see the relevance of words which we probably have read many times, but only now do we see their significance. Isaiah Ch. 2 paints a picture of unfaithful Israel making alliances with those in the east and making pacts with strangers. This is just what we see! As the EU turns against Israel, Israel turns eastward. The vaster markets of India, China and Japan lie to her east! She is making trade and defence alliances with Russia—joining the Eurasian Union. She is a founding member of a Chinese Development Bank; she is making overtures to Japan and India regards her as a very special ally! God spoke through Isaiah some 2,700 years ago and in the mid 2010's these words spring to life with fresh application!

In Isaiah ch. 10, God explains that the one who eventually smites Israel is the power that Israel had been trusting in for her peace and security! So we can see, what has already started, a growing dependence on the military might of Russia, now firmly planted in Syria, to calm the Middle East and bring a period of stability.

We have seen the continuing trend for Britain to work with Israel, boosting each other's economies. Britain is returning to the Middle East with a new naval base in Bahrain; restructuring her armed forces to face 21st century threats, instead of 20th century ones. She has joined forces with America, Russia and France to bomb the ISIS forces in Syria. She is building bridges to the Gulf States. She is turning to her position as a world trader, after 40 years in the EU wilderness.

With Europe flooded with migrants, Britain is trying to re-negotiate her position to prevent her hospitality being abused. But the rest of Europe is having none of it! Much against David Cameron's wishes, he is having to face the possibility of leading a Brexit from the EU. How often have the angels used circumstances to change the natural inclinations of people! We see the Bible coming alive in our midst!

The Master warned of coming troubles. They took place in the lead-up to the events of AD 70. We see the same fears filling people's hearts today. In a 13-day period over 400 people lost their lives to terrorism, over Sinai, in Beirut and Paris. It is almost an inevitability that Britain will again see such terrorist acts. America has already experienced smaller scale blood-shed. We see a practical outworking of the promises to Abraham. Friends of the Jews get to share their intelligence information! They are second to none in getting warnings of planned attacks. With the EU increasingly showing their dislike, it would not be surprising if Israel is not as forthcoming as she generously has been. For Britain, with close ties to Israel, this has no doubt already been a great help in nipping planned attacks in the bud.

Meanwhile the growing tide of anti-Semitism is sweeping the world in preparation for bringing the nations against Israel. Fear stalks the Jews of Europe, more and more are making that life-changing step of making aliyah. In Israel, the 3rd intifada is underway with almost daily incidents of Jews being targeted by lone youths armed with knives and seemingly picking victims at random. Israel's response has been sharp, attackers are shot.

Meanwhile our ecclesias are under threat. At a time when there is so much happening to keep us on our toes, there is so much apathy as the world takes over our minds, rather than the power of the Word. The challenge of science is causing many ripples, yet it is nothing new. In 1948, Ralph Lovelock was advocating just the same ideas which were as irreconcilable with the Bible then, as they are today. We have to educate our young people, give them the tools to deal with *the opposition of science, falsely so called*. The weight of evidence is for special creation, as day by day the astounding complexity and order and information in life makes a mockery of the concept that pond scum eventually became man!

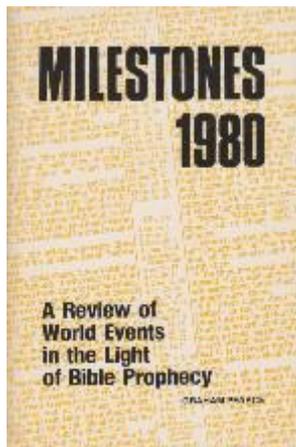
2015 has been a tough year personally for my family with the loss of Sis Anthea, my travelling companion, for 50 years. The end was very sudden and the timing was unexpected. Three weeks after being diagnosed with cancer, she fell asleep, her life as it were, snatched away. Our Master's coming will be like that. We know it as a thing that will happen. When it happens we surely will all be caught off guard. How thankful we are that we have a Saviour and a hope of resurrection. So this issue has been written in a shorter than normal time, so please bear with its imperfections. Come quickly Lord Jesus, we do need you to take control!

FROM EARLY MILESTONES—1980

Once again we turn the clock back 35 years—half a lifetime! What were the issues of the day that my father wrote about? This issue ran to 80 pages and in the preface my father wrote that it had been a quiet year! Never-the-less there seems to have been much going on.

Chapter 1 was entitled **Signs of his coming in the book of Revelation**. He pointed out that the Bible gives us three different standpoints regarding the return of Jesus Christ.

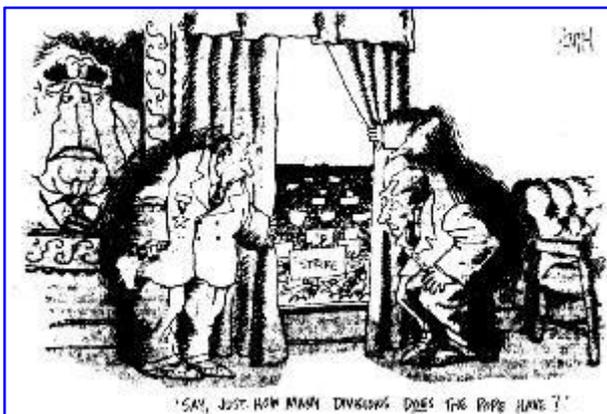
- 1) As it affects the believer
- 2) As it affects the nation of Israel
- 3) As it affects the world.



It is very much concerning the third aspect, that the book of Revelation details signs of Christ's coming in judgement. It directs us to see what is important in the world events, with the emphasis on God's judgments on the Harlot system. In the Vials it gives us a sequence of events, and gives us the detail of the frog-like spirits which go forth into the whole world and details events just before his appearing.

So he spent the rest of this chapter looking at the growth of the Harlot system; the effects of the 6th Vial in drying up the River Euphrates and the going forth of the frog-like spirits from the Dragon, Beast and False Prophet. In 1980 this was in embryo, what progress has been made in the intervening 35 years! The fall of the Soviet Union lay another 11 years ahead. The remarkable thing was the frog-like spirit coming out of the False Prophet. The Vials had very much been God's judgment on the Papacy with the events of the French Revolution. So it was amazing that the scriptures painted a picture of this Harlot system embracing the spirit of the French Revolution that had brought such pain to the Papal system! So the gradual changes being seen in 1980 were very significant. What he wrote was a prelude to his 2nd chapter which was entitled **The Vatican-Moscow Alliance**. Older readers might recognise this as the title of a book by the remarkable writer, Avro Manhattan, who, as a prominent Roman Catholic, had a unique insight into the political workings of the Roman Catholic church. It had recently been published (1977) and my father was able to show just how, step by step as Popes came and went, there was a fundamental shift in the Vatican's attitude to the Soviet. We know that finally the powers of Europe and Russia and their religious systems, in Rome and Moscow, work together to come against God's people of Israel. Having sketched the lives of the Popes from Pius XII (1939-1958) onwards he showed how the then current Pope, John Paul II had made remarkable inroads into the anti-Catholic spirit of the Communist system, and under this Pope was changing dramatically the lot of his fellow Polish compatriots, who were looking for the freedom (as expressed in the

French Revolution) to be able to organise their own affairs! The frog spirit was now being seen out of the mouth of the False Prophet. There was reproduced this cartoon from the *Washington Post* 14-Sep-80 showing the Communist leaders looking at the Solidarity Movement strikers in Poland. Yes, the Pope had many divisions at his command!



Bro Graham then turned to look at the situation generally in Europe, with the long heading, **Western Europe swings away from America towards the Soviet.**

In the year under review the growing coolness between Western Europe and America has been for us an important item of news, as we look for those changes that will lead to the Confederation of all Europe. The swing away from America has had its counterpart to swing towards the Soviet.

Russia had invaded Afghanistan in December 1979 and America had imposed sanctions and boycotts to show her displeasure. America was shocked by the indifference of Europe, there was little enthusiasm for similar sanctions. Europe was more interested in detente with the Soviets rather than conflict. The French instead sent the President of the French National Assembly for a ten-day visit to have talks with the Kremlin. Mr Gromyko paid a return visit to Paris and President Giscard d'Estaing met President Brezhnev in Poland in May 1980. In July it was Germany's turn and Chancellor Schmidt of West Germany went to Moscow. So Europe made it clear that they were not wanting to pursue the American line. The Americans felt greatly aggrieved at the lack of gratitude for what America had done for Europe!

The mood in America is that they are tired of defending Western Europe, when the nations of Eastern Europe do so little to defend themselves, and do not support America in her efforts in the Middle East and against the Afghan invasion.

1980 also marked the coming together of France and Germany, with Giscard d'Estaing paying a five-day state visit, the first since 1962!

We again marvel at the progress in these matters since 1980.

Bro Graham then turned to Britain, with a much briefer headline—**Whither Britain?** Mrs Thatcher and the Conservative Party had come to power in the May 1979 elections. This was the era of her austerity drive as she struggled to turn the economy around, as well as battling with the burdens laid on Britain by the Common Market as the EU was then called.

A *Daily Telegraph* quote from 17-Apr-79 indicated how bad things were (and yes, I can remember that they were bad!)

Wherever one looks—from the continuing horror of Northern Ireland to the blind misery of the rising generation of blacks in the inner cities, from the continuing steady erosion of the English countryside under the impact of technology to the almost unbelievable triviality of much of our Press and television, it seems that nationally we have been moving slowly and helplessly down into some gathering moral, social and political darkness.

It then talked of the two dreams: the Capitalist Dream and the Socialist Dream and concluded.

Deep down, few of us really any longer believe these dreams, because we know we are approaching some tremendous crisis in our civilisation—one that will require a change of heart and perspective far deeper than anything which has yet touched any of our public representatives.

One can only admire the insight of this Telegraph writer!

“What are the signs that Britain is moving in the direction of sanity, if any?”, my father asked. He saw some signs of a religious revival both here and more especially in the United States, that gave him hope that there would be a change in Britain’s fortunes. What would he say now? Yet economically the country has been turned around, but it has taken half a lifetime to achieve!

The rest of *Milestones* was occupied by looking at the involvement of the US in the Middle East and the awaking of the Commonwealth countries to use their naval forces to stand up to the increasing Soviet threat. Of relevance to us today was Russia’s ties with Syria.

The most significant events relative to Russia and the Middle East that year were the increasing ties with Libya and Syria.

Russia had supplied arms to Syria ever since she was forced to leave Egypt in 1972. In November 1980 Russia signed a 20-year treaty of ‘friendship and co-operation’. This “effectively ties President Assad [father of current President. D.P.] closer to Moscow than any other Middle East leader,” quoting from the *Daily Telegraph* 09-Oct-80. That was significant news, because, although the details of the Agreement hadn’t been released, they were thought to be very much involved in a close defence relationship. Here in 2015 we have seen it reach fruition!

Turning to Israel, in 1980 the Knesset had passed the “Jerusalem Law Act”. Having taken the whole of Jerusalem in 1969, this set out their strategy to make Jerusalem their capital and to strengthen the Jewish presence in the city. Again matters which occupy the news today.

Finally, there was a section on the growing climate of anti-Jewish feelings. Again how much stronger has this become in the intervening years, as we shall see.

Milestones 1980 ended with several pages of extracts from *Eureka* showing that if we desire the Blessings promised to those *that keep the sayings of the prophecy of this book* (Rev. 22:7), then we have to be changed persons.

PROPHECIES THAT TELL OF ISRAEL PRIOR TO INVASION

Within the many prophecies of the Bible that concern Israel's restoration to their land and their ultimate restoration to God's favour, are passages which tell us of Israel's ways and features, just prior to that time. Some are well known, such as the economic state of Israel. Others speak of Israel's state of mind. Still others speak of Israel's alliances. Then there are those that speak of God's thoughts about His people. Finally, there are those passages which speak of the coming contest in terms of a Holy War! So we will try to bring these together as our main section on latter-day prophecy, which is our custom as we start our review of the past year in Milestones. It will not be a comprehensive survey—that would fill the whole issue, but I hope we will get a sense and flavour and as we peruse the Daily Readings, we can add other relevant passages. In Ch. 10 we shall see in greater detail how these matters are being fulfilled before our eyes.

The state of Israel—economically

Our minds go to the passages in Ezekiel chapter 38:

*To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have **gotten cattle and goods**, that dwell in the midst of the land.*

*Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a **spoil**? hast thou gathered thy company to take a **prey**? to carry away **silver and gold**, to take away **cattle and goods**, to take a **great spoil**? Eze. 38:12,13*

A clear picture of a nation that is certainly prospering to such an extent that she has become a desirable prey to her enemies, which points to a pretty exceptional state of affairs. It also tells that the land was desolate before those who have returned to its land changed that aspect and made the land productive.

Joel also speaks of the nations plundering Israel.

*Because ye have taken my **silver** and my **gold**, and have carried into your temples my **goodly pleasant things**. Joel 3:5*

Isaiah speaks in similar language:

*Their land also is **full of silver and gold**, neither is there any **end of their treasures**; their land is also **full of horses**, neither is there any **end of their chariots**: Isa. 2:7*

As we have seen over the years in *Milestones*, Israel has achieved remarkable prosperity. She is a world leader in many aspects of agriculture. It is true, that because of limited water availability, she has had to limit the crops now grown to those that give the biggest return per litre of water supplied to them. This has inspired her to develop strains of plants that can grow with limited, poor quality water. Her

development of drip irrigation as the most economical usage of water was driven by necessity and she is the world leader. Her agricultural knowledge base is extremely valuable to any nation desiring to take away *a spoil and a prey*—goods and people.

The state of Israel—spiritually

In contrast to Israel's economic wealth, it is clear that Israel is far from pleasing God. The sobering picture given is that because they trust in their own abilities, rather than trusting in their God, when God's judgments fall on Israel to change them, only a third of those living in the land survive. (Zech. 13:8,9) The survivors will be those that do turn to God, who cry out for help and will be delivered by Christ and the saints who come to their aid in their final hour of trial. They will be refined and purged and walk in faith having been baptised into Christ. (Zec. 13:1, 9, Mal. 3:3,4 etc.) Prior to this the prophets paint a gloomy picture. It is at this time, prior to Gog's coming down, that they are described as dwelling in *peace* and *safety*.

*... and they shall dwell **safely** all of them.*

*... thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of **unwalled villages**; I will go to them that are at **rest**, that dwell **safely**, all of them dwelling **without walls**, and having **neither bars nor gates**,*

*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? Eze. 38:8,10,11,14*

This is a very clear picture of Israel in a state of security which we have not yet witnessed. In chapter 10 we will look and see how such a situation could flow out from the current situation in Syria, but for now we are only concerned with what we are told in scripture. Because this is still in the future, it is reasonable to think that it could well take place after the return of the Master to his household and the resurrection and gathering of the saints to Sinai for judgment. So it could be thought that it comes about because of a Divine blessing on Israel. But this cannot be the case. Israel are not in a state of faith. This time of peace and safety comes about through Israel's own prowess and negotiations and is abhorrent in God's eyes, because they are not trusting in God's protection. It will be a situation such as we find echoed in the times of the Judges and the Kings of Israel and Judah, when man-made treaties replaced faith in their God. There can be no doubt that this will again be the case because God, through Ezekiel, tells us just that! We concentrate on Ezekiel chapter 38 and tend to neglect the important details in chapter 39, which is a continuation. Looking back, after God has saved His people, God comments:

Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD; Now will I bring again the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy upon the whole house of Israel, and will be jealous for my holy name; Eze. 39:25

So which captivity is this referring to? Clearly not the Babylonian or the Roman. It is a captivity yet to come at the hands of Gog and his many "Christian" and a few "Muslim" companions listed in the opening of Ezekiel 38. God is going to restore (*bring again the captivity of*) the Jews from that scattering, by the hand of their King and Messiah. So when is this restoration to take place?

*After that they have borne their **shame**, and all their **trespasses** whereby they have **trespassed against me**, when they dwelt safely in their land, and none made them afraid.* Eze. 39:26

So they are to be shamed by their behaviour, because then they will realise how ungodly the nation was in God's eyes. Yet, never let us lose sight of the fact that God is still prepared to speak of today's Israel as "my people" on "my mountains" (Eze. 38:14,16,21) Let's look at the preceding verses.

And I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them.

*So the house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God **from that day and forward**.*

*And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their **iniquity**: because **they trespassed against me**, therefore hid I my face from them, and **gave them** into the **hand** of their **enemies**: so **fell they all** by **the sword**.* Eze. 39:21-23

Again, this emphasises that this period of peace that is about to dawn, is a trespass in God's eyes.

120 years before these words to Ezekiel, God had spoken through Isaiah the prophet. His words are in a similar vein. In chapter 2, we concentrate on the wonderful vision in the opening five verses which describe the coming Kingdom in majestic language. But how is this time of praise and blessing to God achieved? As is so often the pattern in scripture, the rest of the chapter is spent setting out how this end is attained. So the language abruptly changes. We have already quoted the 7th verse, but we repeat it in its context.

*Therefore, thou hast **forsaken** thy people the house of Jacob, **because** they be **replenished** from the **east**, and are **soothsayers** like the **Philistines**, and they **please themselves in the children of strangers**.*

*Their land also is full of **silver** and **gold**, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also **full of horses**, neither is there any end of their **chariots**:*

*Their land also is full of **idols**; they **worship the work of their own hands**, that which their **own fingers have made**:*

And the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself: therefore forgive them not. Isa. 2:6-9

So, in addition to their riches, it is telling us several things about Israel of today. Let's look at each one in the order that they appear.

Replenished from the east. Or filled from the east. To the east of Israel lie the southern Arab States, and further away, India, Japan and China. As we have been watching over the past few years, Israel has strong ties to India. In June the Indian Prime Minister Mr Modi made an historic visit to Jerusalem. As one headline put it:

Israel is India's 'Most Trusted Ally' in the Middle East, Among Top Friends in the World.

The effect of the increasing hostility of the EU is to drive Israel to seek other markets, even though the EU (as a block) is Israel's 2nd largest market. Increasing frustration with the EU is driving Israel to make agreements with other nations, especially to the east such as China and Japan.

Israel's ties with the Southern Arab nations are steadily growing, mainly in behind-the-scenes cooperation on intelligence. The United Arab Emirates have approved an Israeli diplomatic office in their country in a move the *Washington Institute* 30-Nov-15 headlined [Israel's Gulf Breakthrough](#).

I have just counted up over 20 articles posted in Snippets in the past six months about Israel's ties with the Gulf States.

Soothsayers like the Philistines. Not an easy phrase. The Philistines, like many surrounding nations, tried to foretell the future. (1 Sam. 6:2) Israel too, is anxious to keep ahead and is very sophisticated in its intelligence gathering. After the recent Paris bombing, it was Israel that provided them with the leads to apprehend those behind the atrocities. Likewise, it was the Israelis who were able to give the Russians their breakthrough with the downing of the Russian passenger plane over Sinai. I do know of a Mossad agent having talks with a Christadelphian in their desire to find out what others thought Israel's future to be. He was told what their own scriptures foretold concerning Israel!

They please themselves in the children of strangers. R.V., "strike hands with", that is, doing deals, making alliances with other nations. Israel has trading agreements with many nations, she has just signed many deals with the Chinese. China is her third biggest trade partner, with over 1,000 Israeli companies operating in China. This year, Israel became a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). The Chinese are investing in Israel and in the first six months invested more than \$2bn in Israeli companies. The Chinese conglomerate Fosun International in June this year bought a 52% stake in the Israeli conglomerate Dalek Group, part of the consortium that owns the Tamer and Leviathan gas fields and who were forced to divest under Israeli Government monopoly fears. Forsun in September bought up the well-known Ahava cosmetics firm.

Israel is now courting the Japanese. Last year PM Netanyahu visited Japan and this year the Japanese PM Abe visited Israel.

We have mentioned the close ties with India and the many agreements that exist between the two countries. Later in this chapter we will look at Israel's relationships with Russia, who turns out to be a treacherous friend!

Full of horses ... and chariots. It seems reasonable to turn these to their modern day equivalents. The horses pulled the chariots and were their weapons of war. Today we talk in terms of tanks, planes and missiles. Isn't it interesting, how Israel through living amongst hostile nations that seek her destruction, has had to develop a fearsome range of military equipment. The world turns to Israel for out-the-box solutions to many military problems. The problem is that Israel has come to rely on their superior defence equipment, whilst neglecting the real Defender of Israel!

... full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, ... own fingers have made

What is an idol? It is a substitute for God. Often in the form of one of God's created creatures. Hence the folly in worshiping that which God has made, rather than God Himself! It represents that which the worshipper puts his trust in. When the golden calf was made, this is what the people thought:

*... and they said, **These be thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.*** Exo. 32:4

So what are the idols that Israel is serving today? Surely they are trusting in the defences *which their own fingers have made*. One couldn't put it any clearer! Much of Israel's military hardware is home-designed and it has been extensively battle-tested! As God said of Hezekiah's incredible defence systems—the rebuilding of the walls, diverting the water supply through what we know as Hezekiah's conduit (an incredible feat of engineering) and construction of ditches between double defensive walls:

*... **but ye have not looked unto the maker thereof, neither had respect** unto him that fashioned it long ago.*

And in that day did the Lord GOD of hosts call to weeping, and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth:

And behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh, and drinking wine: let us eat and drink; for to morrow we shall die. Isa. 22:11-13

Israel is in a similar situation today. It is a sobering exhortation to us. It is easy to build up a defence around us, good pension pots, money in the bank, insurance policies, so that we don't need to feel dependent upon God's care for us.

For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Mat. 6:21

That certainly is very true, and is so applicable to most of Israel today. They are proud of what they have done. In order to be responsive to their Messiah's coming, that pride has to be taken away, when her defences are found to be useless in the face of the massive onslaught made upon them by the nations. Their heart of stone will be turned into a heart of flesh through the circumstances that God will bring upon them for their ultimate good.

... the mean man boweth down, and the great man humbleth himself.

The Hebrew for *mean man* is Adam and the word for *great man* is ish. We have a contrast between low and high in Israel, they all bow down to the idols and abase themselves. So in the words of Isaiah, *forgive them not*. Forgiveness comes after their repentance and their seeking to their God for deliverance, then their sins will be washed away. Then the remnant who escape will be baptised into the Name of the Lord Jesus, in the newly springing waters that will flow from Jerusalem.

In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness. Zec. 13:1

Other passages indicate that Israel will be dwelling on *the mountains of Israel* and *in the midst* [AV. mg. navel] *of the land*. (Eze. 38:8,12) This would point to Israel retaining her presence in the West Bank, for this area is the mountainous, middle of

the land. This would indicate that a two-state solution, so beloved of the West, will not become a reality, or if it does will be short-lived.

Israel's alliances

We have referred earlier to Israel's alliances with those of the east and children of strangers as found in Isaiah ch. 2:6. In a later chapter in Isaiah, there is another important snippet of information. It tells of Israel's relations with the nations.

*And it shall come to pass in **that day**, that the **remnant** of Israel, and such as are **escaped** of the house of Jacob, **shall no more again stay** [lean, support oneself] **upon him that smote them**; but **shall stay** upon the **LORD**, the **Holy One of Israel**, in **truth**.*

*The **remnant** shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, **unto the mighty God**.*

*For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a **remnant** of them shall return: the **consumption** [destruction] decreed shall overflow with **righteousness**.*

*For the Lord GOD of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined, in the **midst of all the land**.* Isa. 10:20-23

So clearly in this chapter's latter-day fulfilment, we are told that prior to their deliverance, they will be leaning on, trusting in, the power that eventually defeats them and robs their treasures (v13). We know who this latter-day Assyrian power is! It is Gog of Ezekiel ch. 38 or the King of the North of Daniel ch. 11:40-45. So we expect that at the time when Israel are dwelling securely (Eze. 38:8,11) it is because of alliances with Russia. No wonder Israel's God considers this a time of trespass [acting unfaithfully] (Eze. 39:26) when they trespass against their God, by trusting in their own strength, rather than trusting in God. It is not surprising that God's judgments are so severe upon His people, until they recognise their error in this misplaced trust, and then turn to the only One who can save them, Yahweh their Saviour.

So can we see Israel today trusting in the protective power of Russia? The answer is, yes. We have been privileged to see the beginning of this process, doubtless it is a matter that will grow. We will consider the details of the remarkable friendship Putin has towards the Jews because of the kindness of his Jewish neighbour when he was growing up in a very poor family, when we reach chapter 5. If Israel has been trusting in her friendship with Russia to protect her from her enemies, then we can see the full force of the phrase used in Ezekiel 38:10, that Gog will *think an evil thought* or as the AV mg. puts it, *conceive a mischievous purpose*. It will be an act of treachery. Now it might not be Mr Putin in charge at that time when Israel is invaded. There is, waiting in the wings, one of whom it can be said that he is *of the land of Magog* and *prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal*. That is George Mikhailovich. With a German prince as his father he inherits the title *Prince of Prussia* and with the claimant to the Romanov throne as his mother, he is called the Grand Duke of Russia! He is considered the *tsesarevich*, or heir to the Russian throne!

The rest of the passage quoted above indicates that there is a time of great trouble, but that *a remnant* escape and these trust in Yahweh their God.

There is a further piece of interesting information in subsequent verses in Isaiah ch. 10:

*Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD of hosts, O my people that dwellest in Zion, be not afraid of the **Assyrian**: he shall **smite** thee with a **rod**, and shall **lift up** his **staff against thee**, **after the manner of Egypt**.*

*For yet a very little while, and the **indignation shall** cease, and mine anger in their destruction.*

*And the LORD of hosts shall stir up a scourge for him according to the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb: and as his rod was upon the sea, so shall he lift it up **after the manner of Egypt**.*

*And it shall come to pass in that day, that his **burden** shall be taken away from off **thy shoulder**, and his **yoke** from off **thy neck**, and the **yoke** shall be **destroyed because of the anointing**. Isa. 10:24-27*

We can draw from these verses the clear understanding that the latter-day Assyrian power, Gog, is going to be in possession of Jerusalem for more than a fleeting moment. Daniel 11:45 says that *He [the King of the North] shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas in the glorious holy mountain*. This seems to confirm he might be there some time. The Jews who remain have to show their repentant spirit which leads them to recognise that God alone can save them from this crisis. The language of Isaiah is couched in terms of the servitude in Egypt. *A burden* (as Exo. 1:14); *smite with rod* (as Exo. 5:14); *a yoke on their neck*. (as hinted in Exo. 6:6) So we should contemplate that perhaps for a year or two, Israel is in bondage under the later-day Assyrian yoke. Wonderfully, Isaiah reveals who will break that yoke—the *anointed* as AV, NKJ and WEB have *anointing oil*, a wonderful link to the Messiah, the Anointed Prophet, Priest and King!

God's thoughts about His people

Much of the above shows us what God thinks of His people at the moment. It is a time of trespass in God's eyes. The wonderful thing is that in God's foreknowledge, He can see that the pathways He has taken His people on, will lead to their repentance. As in the past, when Israel's idols proved to be worthless and they have been brought to times of great distress by their enemies, that then those who are of



faith come to the fore and will again lead the nation to repentance. How powerful will be the sign shown to them when Israel's enemies are dramatically defeated by some unknown power, newly emerged upon the scene. And that Deliverer has a multitude of followers, who appear invincible. And when they closely look upon their leader, lo, his hands and feet show scars from wounds, the kind of wounds one would associate with death by crucifixion! And so the dramatic words of Zec. 12:10 will be fulfilled.

*And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon **me** whom they have **pierced**, and they shall **mourn** for him, as one mourneth for his **only son**, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for **his firstborn**.*

The veil that covers their eyes will be lifted. They will serve the Lord in holiness and righteousness all the days of their life, under the wise guidance of the 12 Apostles. God, knowing this, is prepared to still care for His People, in spite of their present faithlessness, for He sees the coming glory of His people, singing His praises and exalting His Name.

The coming conflict—a Holy War!

It is clear that the invasion of Israel under Gog is more than a desire for the prey that will fall into their hands, considerable though that is when one considers the treasures of gold and energy in Egypt and the energy and technological skills of Israel. And yes, Ezekiel makes it clear that Gog's desire for spoil and prey is an important motivating force behind his advancement into the Middle East. But we would be wrong to miss the other scriptural passages which indicate that religion plays a bigger role. The coming clash upon the mountains of Israel will have strong religious overtones; a 21st Century Crusade!

*Proclaim ye this among the Gentiles; **Prepare** [Sanctify] **war** [or Make Holy War!], **wake up the mighty men, let all the men of war draw near; let them come up:** Joel 3:9*

Remember, in the language of Revelation chapter 16 there are three elements involved. *The Dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet*. It is easy to overlook the latter, yet we can see throughout the book of Revelation that it revolves around the persecution of the true believers and the non-conformists, by the Roman Catholic Church. As far as God is concerned, it is a battle between Rome and Jerusalem, Babylon versus Zion.

*For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, **to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.** Rev. 16:14*

Yes, it is God's battle! And the constant echo of the many prophecies that touch upon this latter day clash is, that the nations might be brought to know Yahweh, Israel's God. That He alone, is the only God and the religions of the world, including what is seen as Christianity, are built upon a lie.

*Thus will I **magnify myself**, and **sanctify myself**; and I will be known in the eyes of **many nations**, and they shall **know** that **I am the LORD.** Eze 38:23*

So will **I** make my **holy name known** in the midst of my people **Israel**; and I will not let them pollute my holy name any more: and the **heathen** shall **know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel**. Eze. 39:7

O **LORD**, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the **Gentiles** shall come unto **thee** from the ends of the earth, and shall say, **Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit**. Jer. 16:19

So it is not surprising that we are returning to a time when religion plays a key part in the disputes of nations today. Whether we see it in the rise of militant Muslims; the surge in anti-Semitism; or the persecution of the Christians; what is so interesting is that this has coincided with a rise in Christianity. The downfall of the Communist system in 1991, released the power of the Russian Orthodox Church and we looked in last year's *Milestones* at the tremendous growth and influence of the Church in the daily and political affairs of Russia. This is not a coincidence!

As again we saw in *Milestones 2014*, it is the result of the re-flourishing of the Babylonian tree that King Nebuchadnezzar saw cut down in his dream in ch. 4. It was to be banded with a band comprising of two metals, *brass* and *iron*! Greece and Rome! Seven times were to pass over it before it would re-flourish. We saw that in the short-term this was the 7-years madness that fell upon the King, before he re-flourished in his Kingdom for a brief time, before Babylon was cut off in the night by Cyrus, King of Persia, in the days of his grandson, Belshazzar, enabling the Jews to return to their land and rebuild the Temple.

In the longer term, the seven times (7x360 days = 2,520 days) become 2,520 years, after which the Babylonian tree would flourish again, before eventually being cut down at the end of the Gentile night. This will be the work of the greater Cyrus ('sun') who will restore Israel to their land and build the Temple in Jerusalem. Since the 1980's (2,520 years on from the fall of Babylon) we have seen the growth of corrupt Christianity in the Roman Catholic Church in the West and the Russian Orthodox Church in the East. This is a necessary step, just like the establishment of Israel in their land, as a precursor to this coming clash between corrupt Christianity and the God of Israel. When one examines the list of Gog's companions given in Eze. Ch. 38, and the nine countries listed, they are nearly all Christian countries! (Persia, Phut and Libya being Muslim.)

Russia a guard unto her companions

Although this interesting aspect involves Russia, it has a practical outworking for Israel. It is nothing new, we have looked at this concept several times in the past, but we come to see it has perhaps a meaning that we had not appreciated.



**Dan Ch. 4.
The iron-brass band**



*Be thou prepared, and prepare for thyself, thou, and all thy company that are assembled unto thee, and be thou a **guard unto** them.* Eze. 38:7

Guarding can have at least two senses. A prison guard ensures his prisoners do not escape, like the jailer at Philippi. (Acts 16:23) A safety guard is a piece of equipment that ensures people are shielded from harm. In the passage here, Gog is a guard *unto* his companions, rather than a guard *over* them. Gog is providing the protection from harm to his companions. We see this in the arms that are being sold to many of these companion countries. There may be another aspect. The chief companion—at least it is top of the list—is Persia or Iran. Iran fears Israel above any other nation. And likewise Iran ‘s nuclear ambitions greatly concern Israel. In our next paragraph we will contemplate how Russia could play a considerable role in the bringing of peace for a brief time to the Middle East, through her role of keeping Iran under control. Likewise Russia could prove to be that guard that Iran needs as a result of her influence on Israel, that there could be a two-way control. Israel prevented from unleashing her weaponry against Iran in return for Israel being left in peace by Iran.

In the closing months of 2015 we saw several remarkable examples of Israel working with Russia, to the alarm of Iran. The stronger that Russia establishes herself in Syria, the more influence she can bring to bear on her companions in exchange for them leaving Israel at peace, for the moment! Russia tolerated Israel’s targeting of Hezbollah leaders, who are supported by Iran. Russia is establishing her position so that she can influence both Israel and Iran and thereby proving to be a *guard unto* Iran. We expect from Scripture that this guarding will extend to other companions.

Peace & Safety is a test of our faith—potential stumbling block

Ezekiel ch. 38 is so emphatic that before the invasion of Israel, they will be living in what seems like quite changed conditions from what we see today.

*... and they shall dwell **safely** all of them.*

*And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of **unwalled villages**; I will go to them that are at **rest**, that **dwell safely**, all of them dwelling **without walls**, and having **neither bars nor gates**,*

*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**?* Eze. 38:8,11,14

For many, a Middle East peace seems an impossibility and ingenious solutions putting it in the past were concocted. However, the context is clear, “*wilt thou not know it*”, shows the sign is applicable at the time just prior to the invasion. How often seemingly strange circumstances alter the outcome of matters. Who would have thought that a migrant crisis triggered by the events in Syria would potentially destabilise Europe and push the British towards voting to leave the EU? So I believe that this is here as a test of our faith. Are we humble enough to accept that this will be fulfilled? We shall look in Ch. 6 at the changes that are taking place with Russia in Syria and in Ch.10 at Russia wanting to work with Israel. We shall see how this could temporarily solve the present conflict in the Middle East and lead to a time of peace and security.

BALAAAM'S ANCIENT PROPHECY NOW VERY RELEVANT

One of the oldest Bible prophecies is to be found in the words of Balaam, at the end of the wilderness journey, some 3,400 years ago! There is a place mentioned there that seems very relevant to the present situation, that of Asshur. So we revisit the remarks that we made in Milestones 2014 and see that Balaam can give us valuable guidance as to how things will work out. It is clear that we should not be looking for the total destruction of IS, unless another power is due to arise on the same spot, as there has to be an Asshur power at the time of the Invasion of Israel. We would expect it to be curbed and primarily confined to the area between the Tigris and the Euphrates.

Balaam's prophecy comes to life

It was Balaam's third and fourth prophecies that speaks so clearly of a far distant time when Israel's King would be victorious over Israel's enemies. This parable opens with these dramatic words:

How goodly are thy tents, O Jacob, and thy tabernacles, O Israel!

As the valleys are they spread forth, as gardens by the river's side, as the trees of lign aloes which the LORD hath planted, and as cedar trees beside the waters.

*He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters, and **his king** shall be **higher** than **Agag**, and his kingdom shall be exalted. Num. 24:5-7*

So the subject is made quite clear—this is a parable concerning some future time in Israel's history. At the time, they were still to the east of Jordan, they hadn't yet gone across to Jericho and started their conquest of that part of the Promised Land that lay to the west of the River Jordan. They were God's nation, but awaiting their inheritance, but Balaam sees them settled there and having a King, it would be another 350 years before they had their first king! Israel's king was to *be higher than Agag!* Agag means 'I shall be head'—the role of Gog as the head of the nations who come against Israel. Agag is translated by the Septuagint version as Gog! It was a hereditary title of the Amalekites, as we see from Saul's mission to slay Agag. (1 Sam. 15:8) The Amalekites had shown themselves as enemies of Israel and wished to eliminate her from being a nation in an incident quite early in the Wilderness Journey while at Rephidim. Their attack on Israel and their defeat is described in Exodus 17:8-16. After they were driven off, God pronounced this curse upon them.

And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.

And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovahnissi:

*For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn that the **LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation**. Exo. 17:14-16*

Although the Amalekites have long disappeared from the earth, yet it is clear that the term is used to describe that class of people who desire the elimination of Israel. There always has been Amalekite-type people. Notable was Haman the Agagite of Esther's day, who sought to destroy the Jewish people. Remembering that Balaam had been hired by Balak the King of Moab to curse Israel, we can appreciate how upset Balak would be to hear the following!

I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a Sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth.

And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also shall be a possession for his enemies; and Israel shall do valiantly.

***Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion**, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city. Num. 24:17-19*

Balaam—speaking from God, then returns to the theme of the destruction of Amalek in these words.

*And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he **perish for ever**.*

And he looked on the Kenites, and took up his parable, and said, Strong is thy dwellingplace, and thou puttest thy nest in a rock.

Nevertheless the Kenite shall be wasted, until Asshur shall carry thee away captive.

And he took up his parable, and said, Alas, who shall live when God doeth this!

*And ships shall come from the coast of **Chittim**, and shall afflict **Asshur**, and shall afflict **Eber**, and he also shall perish for ever. Num. 24:20-24*

This prophecy is amplified in the detail given in Ezekiel 38 and 39 which outline Agag's, Gog's, initial triumph, and amply showing the spirit of Agag in attacking God's people of Israel. It also shows the utter destructions of the Gogian armies on Israel's mountains, brought about by Israel's newly returned King! Israel's King will indeed be exalted.

Chittim, Asshur and Eber

What is so fascinating are the three places mentioned by Balaam: **Chittim**, **Asshur** and **Eber**.

Chittim or Kittim is Cyprus. This seems to be describing the latter-day Amalekite, coming forth with many ships to take Israel and Egypt as foretold in Daniel 11:40. He needs to secure Cyprus—where the British have their naval bases. Earlier this year, Russia acquired rights to use Cyprus' port facilities. Gog wants more—control of the island! His next steps involve action against Asshur.

Asshur was the name of the Assyrian Empire and the ruins of its capital city Nineveh lie just across the River Tigris from Mosul, Iraq's second biggest city and now in the hands of IS.

When Gog—Russia, assisted by Europe—comes down into Egypt and Israel (Dan. 11:42-45) there is evidently a need to secure Asshur.

Now we know Iran (Persia) comes as the chief companion of Gog (Eze. 38:5), so it would appear that there is in Asshur a power that is not favourable to Gog's plans and that needs taking. If Northern Iraq and Syria were still in ISIS hands, then we can see good cause for Gog to seek to secure this northern flank, as well as Egypt, the southern flank to Israel.



Eber So who is Eber of Balaam's prophecy? This is Israel! Eber = the region across (usually of a river) according to Brown, Briggs, Driver. Hebrew = the descendant of Eber, Abraham's great, great, great, great grandfather. Abraham crossed over the Euphrates on leaving Haran to go to the land "across the river".

Does Balaam's parable indicate that Assur, like Eber, will be in the hands of those not with Gog? This seems the logical conclusion. We watch events in Syria and Iraq with interest to see how they unfold. It is so interesting to see as the year closes that Russia is concentrating on pushing ISIS back across the River Euphrates! This map from last year's *Milestones* indicates how far west of the Euphrates ISIS had penetrated; but no more, the roll-back has commenced. Putin is attempting to push them as far eastward as possible before the possibility of a political solution to the problems of Syria is found. Putin is anxious to carve out as big an area in any final settlement to ensure the Assad family has a strong foothold in western Syria, as we shall see.

So having looked at these prophecies which are all very relevant for today, we will now look at some of the important events in 2015 from a Biblical perspective. The main events must be Putin's push into Syria, but before looking at that, let's see what a successful year 2015 was for Putin's grip on power!

TSAR PUTIN CONSOLIDATES HIS POWER

From Pariah to power-broker in just a year, not bad going! That was the headline to an article on Mr Putin in The Guardian 18-Nov-15. Yes, it has been a remarkable journey for him. A year ago the world was ranged against him for seizing Crimea, now he is the one taking action in Syria to try to stem the flood of refugees by sorting out the mess in Syria. At the same time, he is bringing comfort to fellow Christians who were being cruelly persecuted not only by ISIS, but the majority of the “rebel” organisations lined up against President Assad. So let us see the progress he has made.

Tsar Putin I is on a roll

This was the headline to an interesting *Washington Post* article 19-Nov-15. Although he is answerable to the Russian elected assembly, the Duma, yet Vladimir Putin acts as his name Vladimir means—a “Prince”. He appears to have total control. For many Russians there have been 3 great Vladimir’s in their history! Vladimir the Great, the Duke of Kiev who brought Christianity to Russia in 988; Vladimir Lenin the first Communist leader and now Vladimir Putin.

In the days before the Soviet revolution, when the Russian aristocracy reigned supreme in its glory days, many of this elite group refused to speak Russian, they would only speak French, the language of beauty, sophistication, snobbery. The French hold a special place in the Russian heart. Wealthy Russians today flock to France on a monthly basis, import French furniture and adore French wine.

With this in mind, I found it fascinating that Russian President Vladimir Putin masterfully manipulated his domestic audience by commanding Russian forces in the Middle East to communicate with and work with France as allies against the Islamic State. **In one fell swoop**, the **chess master** stroked Russian public opinion, **drove a wedge into NATO**, and **pushed America** further into the shadows of irrelevance.

Russia is now **king** in the **Middle East**. Vladimir Putin is leading the world against the Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL). Barack Obama is angry at Republicans again and has succeeded in his goal to mortally weaken American power around the globe.

If you play this scenario out a few months in advance, you can see the West relaxing sanctions on Russia for its help in keeping the ISIS wolves at bay. France is practically begging Tsar Putin to fight the bullies. I would put serious money down in Vegas that Secretary of State John Kerry has opened a backdoor channel to the Kremlin to make that exact deal. Meanwhile, the conflict in Donbass simmers with Ukrainian soldiers dying regularly. *Washington Post* 19-Nov-15

A year ago the situation was quite different. At the November 2014 G20 Summit in Brisbane, the world leaders shunned him, and he left the Summit meeting early.

What a difference a war makes. Twelve months ago, Vladimir Putin was on the menu at the G20 summit in Brisbane. Western leaders queued up hungrily for a piece of Russia's president following his armed intervention in Ukraine and illegal annexation of Crimea.

Fast-forward to this week's G20 summit in Turkey and everything, it seems, has changed. Putin was pictured in a friendly huddle, chatting animatedly to Obama and the US national security adviser Susan Rice. He also held reportedly productive talks with Cameron and other leaders. No longer ostracised and browbeaten, Putin was the man everybody wanted to meet.

The reason is not a mystery. Under merciless attack from Islamic State, flailing on the refugee crisis, and consequently desperate to end the war in Syria, European leaders, backed by Obama, have come to an uncomfortable but, in historical terms, not wholly novel conclusion: **they need Russia**.

The smug American assessment that Putin is an able tactician and a poor strategist now looks hopelessly wide of the mark. His Syrian intervention, rather than weakening him, has **returned Russia to its place at the top table**. No longer on the menu, Putin is diplomacy's new maître d'. *The Guardian* 18-Nov-15

Although the West is still imposing sanctions, they are resigned to the fact that Crimea is lost to Kiev. Now they have to cooperate with Russia as she has been invited by both Syria and Iraq to come to their aid. She therefore has a legitimate reason to be there, while America, Britain and France and their companions, haven't!

There is no doubt that Putin's timing to go into Syria was well judged. It followed a period of calming down in Eastern Ukraine, Putin didn't want to have his venture in Syria derailed by a flare up in the conflict in Ukraine. Largely the Ukrainian cease-fire has held, and he is hoping that sanctions may shortly be lifted if the lid can be kept on the situation there, whilst dealing with Syria. A strong foothold in Syria brings many advantages, because it gives him strong leverage in the Eastern Mediterranean area, as well as tightening the noose around Turkey. We shall look in our next chapter at Syria in more detail. Putin, we can be sure is working to a Master Plan, he wants control of the Middle East and its energy reserves. Russia has suffered from the free-fall in oil prices, as Saudi Arabia refuses to cut back production and so the market is over-supplied and oil prices have fallen to levels that make it uneconomical for many producers to extract their liquid gold. Putin would like to be able to exert the kind of control that Saudi Arabia is refusing to do, in order to lift oil prices and so meet their budget which has been based on \$50 per barrel.

Putin's Christian Faith is Central to His Policies

In order to understand how Putin works one has to understand where he is coming from. The surprising thing, if we didn't have the scriptural guidance, is that religion, both Orthodox and very interestingly Judaism, play a role in his life and actions. We will explore the Judaism aspect in the next section.

He has striven to bring Church and State together as it was in the days of the Czars.

Separation of church and state is a concept which was born in America in the 18th century, and later spread to Europe in the 20th century. It is one of the most important founding principles of the American political system.

Contemporary Russia profoundly disagrees with the West on this point, seeing great advantages in the union of church and state (which is the same as saying there are profound problems with separation of church and state). It is one of the fundamental philosophical differences between Russia and the West.

The article then quotes some points that Mr Putin made in a speech in 2013 as to why he thinks union of church and state is a good idea, namely:

Because it is the cement of social morality.

Because throughout history the church saved Russia from state-threatening crises: 1612, 1812, 1941-45.

Because its persecution and absence in Russian society in the 20th century coincided with depravity, bloodshed and civil war. *Russia Insider* 12-Sep-15

This talk was to the closing session of the 2013 Valdai Discussion Club.

The **Valdai Discussion Club** was established in 2004. It was named after Lake Valdai, which is located close to Veliky Novgorod, where the club's first meeting took place. The club's goal is to promote dialogue between Russian and international intellectual elite, and to make an independent, unbiased scientific analysis of political, economic and social events in Russia and the rest of the world. *Extracted from <http://valdaiclub.com> on 18-Dec-15*

In the presence of many Western academics, he condemned the West's departure from Christianity at the root of their policies.

“We can see how many of the Euro-Atlantic countries are actually rejecting their historic roots, including the Christian values that constitute the very basis of Western civilisation.”

“People in many European countries are embarrassed or afraid to talk about their religious affiliations. Holidays are abolished or even called something different. Without the values embedded in Christianity, without the standards of morality that have taken shape over millennia, people will inevitably lose their human dignity.”

“We consider it natural and right to defend these values. One must respect every minority's right to be different, but the rights of the majority must not be put into question.” *RussiaInsider* 05-Jan-15

The article then listed some of the laws that Putin had championed, for example: laws that practically outlaw abortion; clamp down on homosexuality; ensure compulsory religious instruction in all schools; make religious holidays State holidays; rebuilding of churches; supporting production of religious and patriotic films.

Today the Russian Orthodox Church is, by far, the most conservative, traditional and anti-Communist religious body in the world. It has gone so far as to canonize

dozens of martyrs killed by the Communists and celebrate the Romanov tsar and his family who were brutally murdered by the Reds in 1918.

Significantly, since 1991 over 26,000 new Christian churches have opened in Russia, and the fact that Christianity is being reborn in Russia has not gone unnoticed among some Christian writers in the America and Europe, although generally ignored by the secular press. *RussiaInsider* 05-Jan-15

Those in the know say that Putin's religious convictions are not for show, but that his beliefs are genuine.

His popularity ratings remain very high, much higher than Western leaders.

Russia sees itself as the dragon slayer. St George is the patron saint of Moscow. (His) statue is a few meters from the Kremlin.

For the modern outsider, Orthodoxy may appear a confronting relic of the past: a highly ritualistic liturgy suggesting an imprisonment to empty tradition; a disturbing refusal to embrace such modern imperatives as gender-neutrality, the men obstreperously growing their beards long with the women underfoot meekly covering their heads; no guitars, rock 'n' roll or a general concern to become relevant and get with the program. In a word, an insouciant disregard for the importunate demands of the world.

But what may mark the Orthodox Church as archaic and anachronistic may actually serve to reveal a church focussed on the permanent over the ephemeral. Church ritual that has essentially remained unchanged for over a millennium may speak to a steadfastness that stands solid against history's buffeting gales rather than as representing some antediluvian oddity. Indeed such steadfastness stands in marked contrast to much of the Western Church that instead stands today like a candle in the wind.

The resurgence Christianity has experienced in Russia following the end of communism belies charges of the Church's irrelevance. More than 26,000 churches have either been restored or built anew, which translates to opening about a thousand churches every year. Over 800 monasteries have also been opened, with no shortages of new monks and nuns. Baptisms of hundreds of people in a single day at a normal church in the city or village have not been uncommon. Reviving the concept of Symphonia, whereby the Church and State are seen to complement each other, the Orthodox Church has resumed its role in Russian tradition of occupying a prominent role in public life, sitting alongside the State. *Russia Insider* 16-Nov-15

Putin's Jewish friendships

This interesting phenomenon has been mentioned in the past, but has come to the fore recently through an article with this very long title: [As Putin Becomes One of World's Most Powerful Players, His Surprising Jewish Connection is Revealed](#) *BreakingIsraelNews* 02-Dec-15

In the long history of Jews in Russia, the government has rarely been an ally, and often been the source of persecution. Current Russian president Vladimir Putin,

however, is a **powerful exception**, with **Jews** playing a **significant role** in his **personal history** and his **inner circle**. With the Russian army a major player in the potentially explosive multi-national puzzle unfolding in Syria, this personal element could become an **important, perhaps decisive**, factor in how the conflict unfolds.

At the International Assembly of Chabad Representatives in 2007, Russia's Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Berel Lazar, often referred to as "Putin's Rabbi", told a remarkable story about the Russian leader, which he heard from Putin himself.

"When he was a young child, he grew up in a very poor family. His parents were always out at work. He was fortunate that the next door neighbor was a Hasidic Jewish family, and they always made sure to invite him over," Lazar explained. "They were extremely kind to him, and he realized that not only were they kind to a child that wasn't theirs, not only were they kind to a child that wasn't Jewish, but they were kind to a child in a time and place when it was dangerous to do that."

"Thirty years later, because of the gratitude he felt for that family, and for the respect he felt for the Jewish people as a whole, as deputy mayor of the city of Leningrad, he granted official permission to open the first Jewish school in the city."

Putin's Jewish connection was not an anomaly limited to his childhood memories. In 2005, when Putin made an official visit to Israel, he visited his high-school teacher, Mina Yuditskaya Berliner, who lived in Tel Aviv. He even bought her an apartment in the city when he heard she was living in poor conditions.

In fact, Putin has **surrounded himself** with rich and successful Jews ... Perhaps due to his connection with Jews on a personal level, Putin can be said to view Russian Jews as first and foremost **good Russian citizens**. This has already had international repercussions. When Putin met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in September to discuss the developing situation in Syria, the meeting produced positive results, with Putin expressing his **strong connection** with Israel.

"We never forget that in the State of Israel reside many former Soviet citizens, and that has a **special implication** on the relationship between our two states," Putin stated. "Every Russian action in the area has always been very responsible. We are aware of the artillery against Israel and we condemn it." In 2014, Putin was one of the few political leaders who supported Israel's Operation Protective Edge.

Putin is a powerful player in the explosive situation in the Middle East. There are clearly political and military considerations that cause him to **look upon Israel** as an **ally**, but it might be the personal connection he has with Jews that has led him to be the **most pro-Israel Russian leader the world has seen in a long time**.

Putin has just had a law passed against Anti-Semitic Biblical commentary.

Russian president continues to surprise with his strong stance against anti-Semitism.

At the initiative of Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Duma (Russian Parliament) has legislated a law outlawing “distorted and/or extremist” commentary of Scriptures.

The purpose of the unusual law, it is widely understood, is the prevention of cynical advantage being taken of Biblical verses for anti-Semitic purposes.

Russian history has seen many instances in which anti-Semitic elements announced “shocking new revelations” from the Bible and Rabbinic writings to encourage violent anti-Semitism.

Putin, a former KGB agent, has long been known to oppose anti-Semitism, and violent attacks against Jews in his country have in fact been on the decline in recent years. He also conducts warm relations with Israel—even as he does the same with Iran.

In 2012, Putin arrived in Israel to take part in the inauguration of the Victory Monument in the city of Netanya, commemorating the sacrifices of the Red Army on behalf of Jews during World War II. Putin said on that occasion, “I am very excited to be here today.... The Jewish Holocaust was the most shameful and dark event in human history, and the Soviet Army was the one who crushed the head of the Nazi monster... This amazing monument strengthens the respect I feel towards to the Jewish people and the State of Israel.” *Arutz Sheva* 10-Dec-15

Coping in spite of sanctions

The double blow of falling oil prices and Western sanctions have blown Russia’s budget off course. At his annual Media Question and Answer—a 3-hour marathon session—on Dec. 17th, Mr Putin revealed that the budget for 2014-15 was based upon Brent Crude at \$100 a barrel. For 2015-16 they had to slash that to being based on \$50/b. Now that looks optimistic with it now below \$40/b. However, he felt confident that they had passed the peak of the crisis. The grain harvest had been very good, agriculture had expanded 3%, steps to replace imports with home -produced items was beginning to bear fruit and in the 3rd quarter of the year there was growth in the GDP, small, but in the right direction. The government has managed to repay all the loans as they came due. They had to dip into their reserve funds, but these still remained reasonably healthy.

The falling value of the rouble has helped. At the start of 2014 there were 32 roubles to the \$, at the start of 2015 they got 58, at the year-end they get 73. So when they sell oil in dollars, the amount of roubles that it converts to, is greatly increasing. On the other hand, any purchases of dollar items are increasingly expensive in rouble terms, hence the drive to ‘import substitute’. The drop in imports has hit Germany hard, and there are many who would love to see the sanctions against Russia lifted.

Naval doctrine, smaller but meaner

Putin is concerned at the activity of NATO, seeking to encroach nearer and nearer to Russia. She sees this as part of an American-led drive to box Russia in. In recent

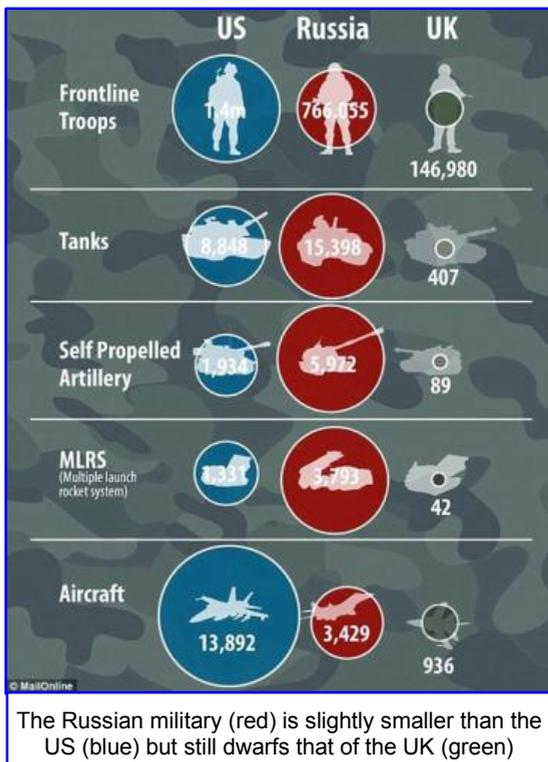
years, the Russian armed forces have been the recipients of vast sums of money, though much smaller than America is able to spend. This chart from the *Daily Mail* 13-Aug-15 gives a quick overview of the relative strength of the two nations, with Britain as a comparison. This year's May Day parade was especially done to show off Russian new-found military might. Our greatest interest lies in the expansion of Russia's navy because this is picked out in Daniel's prophecy of the King of the North in the latter-days. He comes *with many ships!* (11:40) With the collapse of the Russian economy following the fall of Communism, many of Russia's ships rusted away in their berths. No more!

There is an extensive ship-building programme, building smaller, but much more sophisticated, ships. Their capabilities were shown off to the world in Russia's attacks in Syria. The West suddenly took note at the advances made. Russia is able to launch Cruise missiles from much smaller ships than had been imagined possible. She is also capable of launching them from submarines, thus joining a very exclusive club—until this year only the US and Britain were thought to have that capability.

The Russian Federation intends to restore prestige and territory lost with the fall of Soviet Union.

The key military objectives associated with this geopolitical thrust are confronting the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) over the European continent and denying the United States free access and power projection in the global commons, specifically in the maritime domain. Vladimir Putin personally announced a new Russian maritime doctrine reflecting these objectives. In this process, the Russian Navy is showcasing characteristics reminiscent of Sun Tzu's Art of War.

Sun Tzu's famous dictum is that all warfare is based on **deception**. He counselled that one should appear **weak when strong** and **strong when weak**. He advised showing presence at places where not expected by the adversary and striking at weak points. Denial and deception were the key tactics employed by Russia when annexing Crimea and gaining the warm water port of Sevastopol permanently.



The Russian Navy played phantom games within the territorial waters of Baltic countries and buzzed US warships in the Black Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

It is imperative to deny other navies from gaining an upper hand in these zones either for military strikes or for reinforcing diplomatic manoeuvring. ... This makes it imperative for the Russian Navy to adopt the asymmetric means of warfighting. **Therefore, the Russian Navy is enumerating the art of sea denial by constructing an ‘arc of steel’ between the Arctic and the Mediterranean via the Baltic and Black Seas.**

By operationalizing a local but strong sea denial construct, the Russian Navy is setting a limit on its competitors’ power projection capabilities. ... By aggressively parading the navy and establishing its sea denial construct, Russia is aiming to **incapacitate** the navies of the US and NATO from performing their **fundamental roles** of protecting trade, safeguarding global commons and power projection. The Russian naval threat has driven the logic of numbers and maritime strategy of the US Navy to ground, forcing an overhaul. Without the American naval support, the NATO forces would also experience serious constraints. Thus the navy is emerging as the **spearhead** of **Russia’s re-emergence** and offence against its adversaries by simply referring to Sun Tzu. *The Center for International Maritime Security (CIMSEC)* 25-Nov-15

CIMSEC is a US, non-partisan, think tank. The author of the above article, Vidya Sagar Reddy is a Research Assistant at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. It recently pulled together a whole series of articles under the intriguing heading:

Russia Resurgent Week Kicks Off on CIMSEC

Welcome to Russia Resurgent Week at CIMSEC, where we attempt to shed some light on Russia’s objectives, capabilities and constraints. Russia has occupied the headlines for a variety of reasons in recent weeks, but this is not the place to visit for the latest updates. Rather, this week investigates the broad phenomenon of post-Soviet Russia’s rise. What are its tools? What will it do with them, and where? How do recent events fit into a broader strategic framework?

An impressive stable of international writers has contributed on a variety of Russia-related subjects. Interspersed are some pieces published earlier on CIMSEC that complement the latest work. We hope that by the end of the week Russia will be slightly less of a mystery, if still an enigma. *CIMSEC* 23-Nov-15

It was Churchill who described Russia as an enigma, in a broadcast 01-Oct-39

I cannot forecast to you the action of Russia. **It is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma; but perhaps there is a key.** That key is **Russian national interest**. It cannot be in accordance with the interest of the safety of Russia that Germany should plant itself upon the shores of the Black Sea, or that it should overrun the Balkan States and subjugate the Slavonic peoples of south eastern Europe. That would be contrary to the historic life-interests of Russia.

So stunned were American observers at Russia's display of prowess, that the US Office of Naval Intelligence issued its first unclassified report since 1991. It was entitled, *The Russian Navy: A Historic Transition!*

Moscow has put in place a large shipbuilding program that will result in “a new 21st-century Russian Navy.”

The sea force will involve multipurpose submarines and surface ships capable of conducting aerospace defense, anti-ship and anti-submarine warfare unlike their Soviet-era predecessors, which tended to focus on single missions, the report states.

“**Russia has begun, and over the next decade will make large strides in fielding a 21st-century navy capable of a dependable national defense**, an impressive but limited presence in more distant global areas of interest, manned by a new generation of post-Soviet officers and enlisted personnel.”

In all, the Russian navy possesses 56 submarines, 31 major surface ships and 99 minor surface vessels. *Stars and Stripes* 17-Dec-15

Putin's latest Maritime Doctrine

Putin has recently finalised his latest Maritime Doctrine, setting out their future plans to give Russia a navy which can match the West's.

The doctrine itself is a comprehensive look and revision of Russian naval goals and strategy, from improving living standards of sailors to expanding Russian naval reach in the North Atlantic and Arctic regions. The ultimate goal is to restore the Russian Navy as a blue water force.

With Russian concerns over NATO once again coming to the forefront, the document outlines a plan to have a permanent naval presence in the Mediterranean as well as increasing the existing Russian naval presence in the Black Sea, Atlantic, and Arctic oceans. The Arctic is seen as key to the Russian Navy strategy due to the abundant natural resources in the region, as well its position as a strategic link between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Control of the Arctic would give the Russian Navy an easy passageway connecting the North Atlantic and North Pacific.

With a sustained presence in the Crimea, Russia now has greater access to the Black Sea and possibly the Mediterranean, especially if Russian attempts to improve relations with Turkey and Greece are successful. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was primarily to ensure Russian control of the naval base at Sevastopol, which had been heretofore leased to Russia by the Ukrainian government. To this end, the document notes improving the infrastructure at the Sevastopol base as a priority, as well as the completion of further strategic infrastructure in the Black Sea region. *Centre for International Maritime Security* 03-Sep-15

Vladimir Putin's multibillion-dollar, triple-decker war room revealed

Following the shooting down of the Russian civilian aircraft over Sinai in November, the world's press was invited to Putin's latest military toy. It is an incredible 3-storey, state-of-the-art command centre, which coordinates Russian troops activities

under one—
enormous—
roof! We
feature one
view of it on
the front
cover of this
Milestones
and here is
another. It is
said to
outperform
“three-fold”
the US
Military
Command



Center used by the Pentagon! It is buried underground on the banks of the Moskva River a couple of miles from the Kremlin. It was completed in 2014. Vast banks of screens enable breath-taking shots of the military in action. You don't spend that kind of money for fun. Putin is serious about being able to stand up to the West.

France, Germany & EU

Vladimir Putin is troubled by the US backed NATO. And he is working to prevent the EU leaders from supporting NATO so much. We shall see in Ch. 7 how France is cooperating with Russia in Syria. For now, we wish to look at the impact that sanctions against Russia, because of Crimea, have had on those who have instigated them. The US was the main driver of these sanctions, but the impact on her is minimal. She doesn't do much trade with Russia, exports amount to less than 0.1% GDP, so sanctions don't have much impact. It is Europe, much closer to Russia, who have suffered.

Germany: Exports To Russia Post Steep Decline

German exports to Russia decreased by almost 31 percent yearly in the first half of 2015, down to around 10.5 billion euros (roughly \$12.11 billion), according to an Aug. 25 report from the German statistical office, *Die Welt* reported. The Eastern Committee of German Industry now expects exports to Russia for the whole year to be half of those in 2012. German trade with Russia had already decreased in 2013 due to weaknesses in the Russian economy, the report said, and they declined further in 2014 due to Russia's sanctions on European products. Russia is facing a perfect storm of an economic crisis. *Stratfor 25-Aug-15*

Many EU countries are likewise hit by the sanctions and there is growing pressure for these to be lightened or lifted.

Germany Tests the Waters With Russia

Germany sent a signal Wednesday that it is rethinking its relationship with Russia, when Vice Chancellor and Economy Minister Sigmar Gabriel met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. The visit's official purpose was to discuss

bilateral trade, but since trade is linked to EU sanctions on Russia, the meeting suggests that Berlin is looking for ways to modify or even lift the current punitive measures against Moscow. However, such a decision would probably create friction between Germany and most Central and Eastern European countries, which means that Berlin is still not ready for a formal change of direction.

During the first half of 2015, German exports to Russia contracted by 31.5 percent compared with the same period in the previous year. Russia is only Germany's 13th most important exports destination, but at a time when Europe's economic recovery is still fragile and China's growth is slowing, Berlin probably thinks it needs to diversify its exports as much as possible. The EU sanctions against Moscow make exporting goods to Russia complicated. In addition, Germany and Russia had planned to increase trade before the crisis, with talks for trains, chemical plants and other projects on the table.

Germany may think it has reasons to push for a softer stance on Moscow. In recent months, the situation in Ukraine has become relatively stable, with only sporadic cease-fire violations. There were no major security breaches during Ukraine's regional elections this past weekend (though certain parts of eastern Ukraine did not vote), and the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic recently started the second stage of withdrawing light weaponry.

Germany is also interested in improving its ties with Russia for energy. On Oct. 8, Gabriel met with Gazprom's CEO in Berlin to discuss new infrastructure projects for Russian natural gas, including an expansion of the Nord Stream pipeline. As part of his visit to Moscow, Gabriel will also meet with Russian Energy Minister Alexander Novak on Oct. 29. Germany is the largest consumer of Russian natural gas. This fact forces Berlin to make sure that German and Russian energy companies continue to cooperate. It also forces Berlin to balance between containing Moscow's influence in Central and Eastern Europe and making sure Russia continues to sell natural gas at affordable prices.

In addition, Germany sees Russia as a key player in solving the crisis in Syria, which is directly linked to the increased arrival of asylum seekers in Europe. Most of Syria's asylum seekers are heading to Germany, which is putting political stress on Berlin. Germany has been softer than other Western European countries and the United States when it comes to discussing the future of Syrian President Bashar al Assad's government and the Syrian conflict. *Stratfor* 29-Oct-15

Iran Escaping Isolation, Becoming Russia's Key Partner

The growing friendship between Russia and Iran has been quite remarkable this year. With America's negotiations to try to stop Iran becoming a nuclear power having finished, it is clear that Obama's negotiators were happy at a fudge that enabled them to pull away from trying to contain Iran. Iran has blatantly said that she is not restrained by any agreements. With the gradual lifting of sanctions against Iran, there has been a mad scramble on the part of many European countries to grab what they can of the lucrative trade to be had, as Iran emerges from the tight restraints imposed by the West. Through-out all the negotiations, Russia has remained very supportive of Iran, vetoing much of what America had intended to do.

Putin is in a prime position to benefit from trade with Iran. The above headline was taken from the Russian news site *Sputnik* 24-Nov-15

The Gas Exporting Countries Forum summit, held in Tehran on November 23, has sent the world a loud and clear message: Iran has left its state of isolation and is becoming a very important partner in gas production, its relationship with Russia is at a zenith, signifying new alliances in the region, according to Middle East expert Dr. Rasool Nafisi.

“It is remarkable that **Iran and Russia’s relationship is at a zenith**,” he said, adding that it is the warmest it has been for at least the last century.

“So, we are witnessing a new sort of **alliance** in the region which hovers around a number of issues: from security, mainly dealing with terrorism, to social and economic sections.”

The expert also stressed that the high level gathering also signified that Russia is a **major partner in shaping the Iranian economy** in the future, taking into account its participation in the refashioning and rebuilding of the Arak nuclear site, “possible and very probable participation” in Iranian defense, especially supplying S-300 anti-aircraft missiles. In addition, Russian forces have already been involved in training Iranian officers.

Dr. Rasool Nafisi also noted that while Russia is seeking a partner “in the area of gas”, Iran has every chance to become a close ally.

“That is what President Putin had in mind,” he said, “because to him, the monopoly on exporting gas to Russia is quite important for Russia. We heard that Russian gas was sort of banned by Europeans.”

“The Iranian parliament actually started asking for Iran to unilaterally export gas to Russia and start building more pipes, using the existing pipeline. For me, this is an opportunity for **Iran and Russia to come closer** and we will come closer because now, more than ever, it is the right time to do so.”

Ezekiel 38 shows Russia having Iran as a companion and being a guard unto her!

Turkey—from friend to foe

Until November, Russia and Turkey were allies. On Mr Putin’s visit to Ankara in December 2014, Putin had declared that the South Stream Project to bring Russian gas across the Black Sea into Bulgaria and onwards to Europe was now dead. He blamed the obstacles that the EU had placed in the approval of this line. Instead, it would become the Turk Stream and bring Russian gas to Turkey and up to the borders of Greece. If Greece wants to export to Europe that’s up to them. However, things came to an abrupt halt in November when Turkey shot down a Russian fighter plane which allegedly strayed into Turkish airspace. To add insult to injury the pilot baled out but was shot dead by local forces. Putin reacted with fury; it was a stab in the back by its ally Turkey. He immediately imposed sanctions on Turkey, preventing Russians from holidaying there—Turkey was the top holiday destination for Russians, so this will hit them hard. There are many food imports that Russia has banned and talks on the Turk Stream gas pipeline have been cancelled. This may

prove a boost for Israel, as she has been trying to increase the number of Russian holiday makers spending their vacations there. Also Israel had already been looking to increase her exports of food crops to Russia.

Ukraine quietening and Crimea strengthening

There have been many skirmishes in Eastern Ukraine in 2015 and it looked as if there would be an assault on the strategic port of Mariupol, but towards the end of the year a cease fire was drawn up and the situation has quietened down. It is clear that Putin is anxious not to upset the West further in the hope that sanctions would be lifted. Also he had seen the window of opportunity to send troops to Syria.

According to *Reuters* 23-Sep-15, Russia has started the construction of a major new military base near Valuiki, in Russia, some 40km from the Ukrainian border. It also stated that Russia was planning to turn an old military base at Boguchar into a base; again just 45 km away from Eastern Ukraine. (See map on next page.)

Meanwhile the situation in Crimea was consolidated, with this peninsula being turned into a strategic forward base, bristling with the latest ships, submarines and aircraft. In 2014, Russia invested 34bn roubles and in 2015, 23 bn. roubles (\$400m) in the Crimean infrastructure, which had been very neglected whilst under rule from Kiev. (*The Moscow Times* 25-Mar-15) A further 68 billion roubles (US \$1.2 billion) were allocated in May 2014 to add 30 vessels by 2020.

Russia would restore its lost glory in the region, and move further in the Mediterranean.

The reason for this activity is intimately tied to Russia's reasons for annexing the Crimean Peninsula in the first place—the perception that NATO is aggressively encroaching on Moscow's interests in the Black Sea region.

The threat of losing Sevastopol to an ostensibly pro-Western government factored heavily into Russia's decision-making. Not only were there fears of losing the base, but also fears NATO ships would eventually be stationed there. *DefenseNews* 12-Apr-15

There are many historical palaces, reflecting Russian and Romanov history which have been very neglected. *Royal Russia* 17-Apr-15 reported the investment of 1.4 billion roubles in a restoration programme.

On Crimea live the Crimean Tartars, Muslims, who originated from Turkey. They are unhappy at the Russian presence and in November blew up some of the pylons carrying electricity from Ukraine to the Crimea, plunging much of the peninsula into darkness. The Tartars refused to allow the Ukrainians to repair the pylons, so life was severely disrupted until the power supply across the Kerch Straits which was in process of being laid, could be hurriedly pulled forward to give them a power supply.

A new road and rail link is under construction that will connect the southern end of the Kerch Straight to mainland Russia. Work began in March of this year with the construction of the first of three temporary bridges. It is scheduled for completion in December 2018. At the moment Crimea is dependent on road links to Ukraine and sea and air transport.

THE BEAR HUNKERS DOWN IN SYRIA

One of the important events of 2015 for Bible watchmen was the march of Russia into Syria, bringing her much closer to her final destination—the swallowing of Turkey and the taking of Egypt and Israel. Much has occupied the pages of the world's media since the first decisive moves at the end of September. We are not concerned with a detailed history of events; we wish to try to make sense of current events with Bible in hand. Looking at the current situation helps to advance our understanding of latter-day prophecies and their fulfilment before our eyes. We begin by a brief look at the relevant, step-by-step, movement of Russia southwards.

Picking up the Bear tracks

Our front covers for 2014 and 2015 have shown a regional map with paw prints superimposed. There are many more paw marks this year!



There are the two new bases in Russia, close to the Ukraine border, mentioned in the previous chapter. Paw prints in Armenia as Russia has had a base here since 1995. The remaining new ones have to do with events in Syria. In February, the Russians made an agreement with the Cypriot government to be able to utilise port facilities for refuelling, restocking and resting their personnel. Russia has had a long-term base just across in Syria at Tartus, but this could have been subject to problems if the Assad regime had fallen. Cyprus was a good fall-back position and was one-in-the-eye for Britain, with her sovereign bases on the Island. Putin's new Naval Plan included a strengthening of their presence in the Eastern Mediterranean. There has been a steady build-up of ships, which have been put to effective use for operations in Syria. A further paw print in the Caspian, where Russian ships have free passageway and share the waters with the surrounding countries. Few took note of Russia's small sized boats that plied this land-locked Sea. That was, until they started firing cruise missiles at targets in Syria, nearly 1000 miles away! It introduced a new technical term—distributed lethality—spreading your lethal weapons across several smaller ships rather than all on one big one!

The operation was a good demonstration of the concept of distributed lethality, Clark said, where weapons and sensors do not need to be concentrated on a few large platforms but can be spread out to multiple units.

“The Russians are adopting distributed lethality faster than the US,” he noted. “The arguments made for distributed lethality are to put firepower on a bunch of smaller ships, have them disperse, in turn increase targeting problems for the enemy, and you may be able to generate the same kind of firepower if you concentrate the platforms.

“With the Russians, these 900-ton corvettes are harder to find than a [4,000-ton US] littoral combat ship. You can buy them in larger numbers, and they also carry land-attack weapons,” unlike LCS. “It would seem to give you a much more effective land-attack lethality than what the US Navy is pursuing.” *DefenseNews* 11-Oct-15

The rest of the paw prints are in Syria and Iraq which we will consider next.

Quick march into Syria

Putin has seen the importance of a strong presence in the Middle East, if Russia is to prevent America being the sole major world power. As in the past, the countries that controlled the Middle East were powerful as a result. It also fits with two long-term objectives for the Russian nation, to possess two strategic cities, Constantinople and Jerusalem! The first is from where Prince Vladimir brought Christianity to the Russian peoples, thus securing its religious roots to this city. He has waited and tried unsuccessfully on several occasions to free the city from the infidel, and restore it to Christianity. Jerusalem, because it was the origin of Christianity. The Russian Orthodox Church has extensive land-holdings in Jerusalem. The Israeli Knesset is built on land leased from the Church, as is the Prime Minister's official residence! What we are seeing is strategic planning, prior to attaining those two objectives, probably in the same future campaign. We have seen the effectiveness of the forward bases on Crimea. From there, weaponry and troops have been moved to Syria. Many

can see the great strategic advantage for Russia to have a concrete presence in Syria. As the *Cyprus Mail* 18-Oct-15 put it:

Whoever still thinks the war in Syria is about toppling Bashar al-Assad’s regime or annihilating ISIS militants is surely mistaken. From the onset, this war has been about **one thing only: control over the Eastern Mediterranean**. With the recent Russian intervention in Syria, what began as a revolution in 2011 against dictatorship has evolved into an international conflict. The ultimate victor of this long, brutal war will not only become **the new authority in the region**, but **the heart that pumps the blood around the entire world**.

The fact that Russia is putting in equipment which is far more sophisticated than required to fight ISIS, indicates that this is a strategic move on the Middle East chessboard. ISIS doesn’t field an air force, yet sophisticated defence and anti-aircraft systems are being put in place, Russia’s equivalent of Israel’s Iron Dome anti-missile systems place the whole region under Russian control. Likewise, the types of ships off the coast of Syria are very advanced and are capable of defending Syria from sea and land attacks.

Inside Kremlin’s creeping military campaign in Syria

Matthew Chance, a CNN reporter was flown to Syria to be shown first-hand what Russia was doing.

... the sun rose over the mountains on the horizon, casting light on the vast air base—and the **sheer scale** of Russia’s military involvement in Syria.

First hand, it’s clear that Russia is **all in** on Syria, **militarily** and **politically**.

It has deployed its **most modern, sophisticated** air weapons to the country and is using them to relentlessly pound the enemies of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, the Kremlin’s Syrian government ally.

He was taken off-shore to one of Russia’s ships.

The Moskva, is one of the most important Russian ships in the region and a key part of the **Kremlin’s creeping military campaign in Syria**.

It was deployed off Syria immediately after the shoot-down of a Russian Sukhoi 24 bomber by Turkish interceptors in November.

As well as being able to carry nuclear missiles (which we were told it is not), it is armed with a **highly sophisticated** air defense missile system.

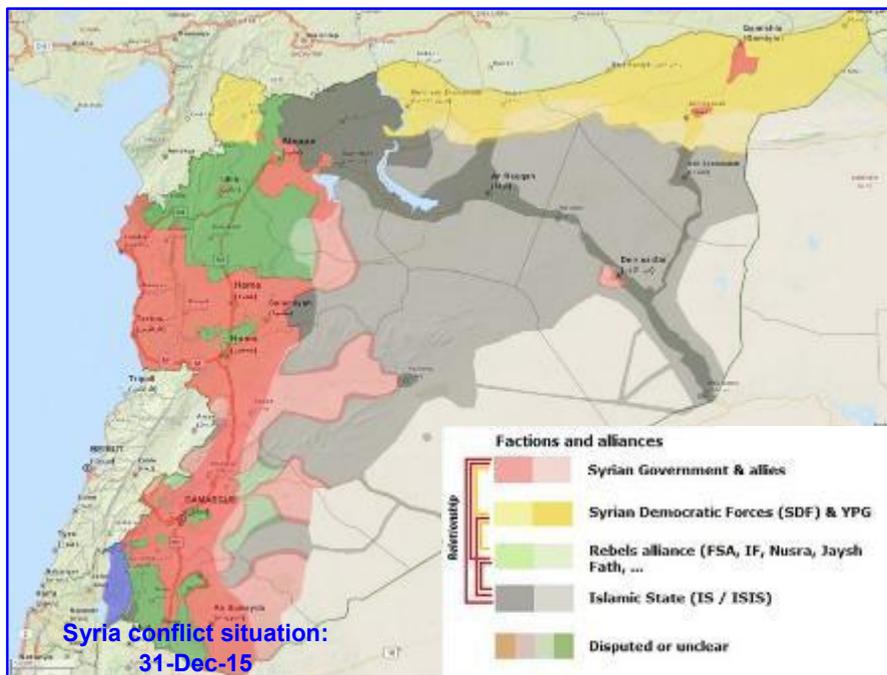
Along with **advanced systems** now deployed on the land in Syria, it means that Russia now has the ability to **control** the **skies** over Syria.

Actually, the range of the powerful systems means it can control the skies over southern **Turkey**, Northern **Israel**, **Cyprus** and **Lebanon** too.

The captain of the ship, whose actual rank is “commander,” told me the number of U.S.-led coalition planes flying missions over Syria has significantly decreased since his ship arrived—without even firing a shot. *CNN* 21-Dec-15

Defending Assad

The Syrian Civil War has been raging since 2011, devastating many Syrian cities and displacing about half Syria's original 22 million population, with about a half of these having fled the country. To make things more complicated, as well as battles raging in Syria, ISIS had been establishing themselves in parts of Syria, and are anxious to expand their territory. Until this summer, American planes from bases in Turkey and the Gulf States had been in action against the ISIS forces, but one can hardly say that they had made much progress; it seemed rather half-hearted.



Things began to go very badly for President Assad in 2015, forcing him to appeal to Russia to intervene with greater support. Both Russia and Iran had kept a steady flow of weapons to the pro-Assad forces, making full use of the naval base at Tartus. Assad's homeland is down the coastal strip. He belongs to the Shiite minority group, the Alawites, rather than the Sunni majority in Syria. About 10% of Syria's population were Christians who were protected by Assad. They have had a very difficult time, facing brutal treatment at the hands of ISIS and the anti-Assad forces.

Assad made his formal appeal for help in July and the Iranian commander of the Quds force visited Moscow to co-ordinate details. Russian forces began to land shortly afterwards, together with planes at a base south of Latakia. By September, Russian warships had taken up positions. On the 30th September the Russian parliament gave approval to Assad's request for help and the same day Russian airstrikes began. It was soon clear that ISIS was not the main target, much of the action was against the "rebel" forces arraigned against Assad. Putin needs an Assad

ally in Syria; if the Assads were swept way, the pieces would soon be picked up by the rebels, who are largely anti-Russian.

Amazing exercise in moving men and equipment

Latakia is an ancient port going back to the second century BC. It is a little to the south of here that Russia has established its main base.

The Greek geographer Strabo, writing roughly at the time of Christ's birth, described Latakia thus in his *Geographica*:

It is a city most beautifully built, has a good harbour, and has territory which, besides its other good crops, abounds in wine. Now this city furnishes most of the wine to the Alexandrians, since the whole of the mountain that lies above the city and is possessed by it is covered with vines almost as far as the summits. And while the summits are at a considerable distance from Laodicea, sloping up gently and gradually from it, they tower above Apameia, extending up to a perpendicular height. *Wikipedia* Accessed 21-Dec-15

Laodicea, or Laodicea de mare to distinguish it from the Laodicea of the Letters to the Ecclesias in Revelation, was an earlier name for Latakia. It is about 80km/50 miles to the north of Russia's existing base in Tartus and is the main port for the enclave that contains the supporters of President Assad. His home town of Al Qardahah is in the hills above the port, about a 45-minute journey away. Eighty kilometres to the NE lies Aleppo the ancient capital of the Seleucid Empire during the Greek Empire. (There was also an eastern capital in Babylon; such was the vastness of the Empire). Latakia is also Syria's closest point to Cyprus.

The timescale and the size of this base is amazing and was detailed by *Debka*, the Israeli Intelligence company on 11-Sep-15.

1. On June 29, Syrian Foreign Minister Walid Moallem arrived in Moscow. His visit was the cover for the secret arrival of a large Syrian military delegation. Syrian and Russian officers then sat down to establish the Russo-Syrian Military Commission (RSMC), a brand new body for the clandestine organization of the Russian military deployment to Syria.
2. The RSMC, working full out, had an advance Russian military team ready to travel to Syria during the first half of August, along with prefabricated units to accommodate a staff of hundreds at the Jablah airfield near the Syrian port town of Latakia. This airfield has been transformed into a regular military base.
3. On Aug. 18, six advanced Russian MiG-31 interceptors (NATO-named Foxhound) landed at Mezze Airbase, the military section of Damascus international airport. They were quickly followed by giant Antonov An-124 transports (NATO-named Condor), which unloaded 1,000 Kornet-9M133 anti-tank guided missiles.

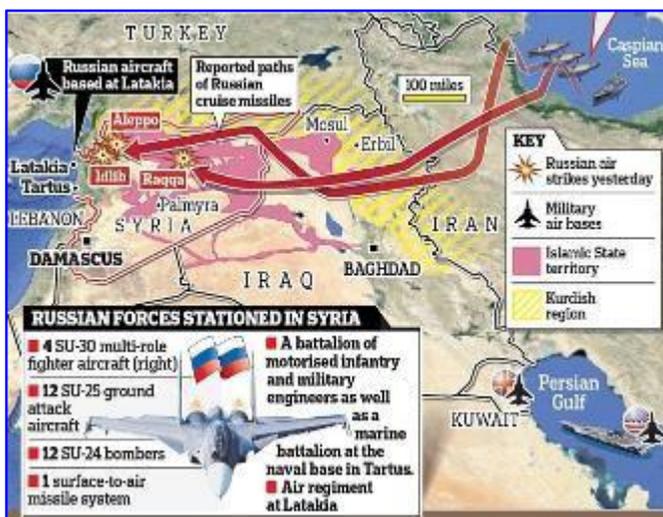
Air cover for the incoming ground forces was therefore in place ahead of their arrival. Troops and equipment continue to flow in. Russia launched her bombing raid on the 30th Sept. and has continued in volumes far exceeding that of the US.

At the year-end the situation has improved in Assad's favour, to some degree, though it is clear that it will take "feet on the ground" to effectively drive back the ISIS forces and to push back the anti-Assad troops. President Assad has, for the first time, felt confident to leave his country for a few days. His first trip was to Moscow in October, his second was to Iran in December.

The UN is trying to broker a political settlement, which is intensifying the efforts of both Russia and the rebels to secure as much territory as possible in case a cease fire is agreed. In the longer term, one looks for a parcelling up of Syria between Assad, the rebels and ISIS. If our understanding of Balaam's prophecy that we looked at in chapter 4 is correct, then we are not expecting Russia to have a firm grip over the whole area; there is a need for the future destruction of Asshur.

Russia showcases her advanced technology to the world

Russia's unexpected fire power from relatively insignificant vessels, caught the world by surprise. Who would have thought of being able to launch a cruise missile attack from vessels weighing less than 1,000 tonnes against targets 900 miles away! Sweeping away her normal secrecy, Russia released videos for all to see these missiles being fired! Some of the weapons have been seen for the first time.



Taken together, the operations reflect what officials and analysts described as a little-noticed—and still incomplete—modernization that has been underway in Russia for several years, despite strains on the country's budget. And that, as with Russia's intervention in neighboring Ukraine, has raised alarms in the West.

The operation in Syria—still relatively limited—has become, in effect, a **testing ground** for an increasingly **confrontational** and **defiant Russia** under Mr. Putin. In fact, as Mr. Putin himself suggested on Sunday, the operation could be intended to send a message to the United States and the West about the **restoration** of the **country's military prowess** and **global reach** after decades of post-Soviet decay.

"It is one thing for the experts to be aware that Russia supposedly has these weapons, and another thing for them to see for the first time that they do really exist, that our defense industry is making them, that they are of high quality and that we have well-trained people who can put them to effective use," Mr. Putin

said in an interview broadcast on state television. “They have seen, too, now that Russia is ready to use them if this is in the interests of our country and our people.”

In a report this month for the European Council on Foreign Relations, Gustav Gressel argued that Mr. Putin had overseen the most rapid transformation of the country’s armed forces since the 1930s. “Russia is **now a military power** that could overwhelm any of its neighbors, if they were isolated from Western support,” wrote Mr. Gressel, a former officer of the Austrian military.

Russia’s fighter jets are, for now at least, conducting nearly as many strikes in a typical day against rebel troops opposing the government of President Bashar al-Assad as the American-led coalition targeting the Islamic State has been carrying out each month this year. *New York Times* 15-Oct-15

According to the *Daily Beast* 17-Nov-15:

The Russian air force just pulled off **one of the biggest and most complex heavy bomber missions in modern history**—sending no fewer than 25 Backfire, Bear, and Blackjack bombers on a coordinated, long-range air raid against alleged ISIS forces in Syria.

The Tuesday mission signalled a significant escalation of Moscow’s air war in Syria—and heralded the **rebirth of Russian heavy bomber squadrons** that once had withered from a lack of funding.

Russia’s bomber raid was certainly impressive, and has propaganda value in addition to bolstering Moscow’s operations in Syria. When 25 of the planet’s most powerful warplanes attack at the same time, it’s more than a mere air raid. **It’s a statement to the whole world.**

The firing of cruise missiles from a Russian submarine again marked a first for Russia; only the US and Britain were known to have this capability.

Expanding bases in Syria & Iraq

As well as using facilities at Latakia and Basel al-Assad airport to the south, Russia has used the facilities at Damascus airport. New bases are being constructed at Hama and Tiyas. In Iraq, Russia has taken over a base to the east



of Baghdad to secure a foot-hold in Iraq. There are plans to enlarge the port facilities at Tartus, which have played a vital role in the bringing of equipment and supplies to Syria. There has been a steady stream of ships through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles, Russia's only access to the Mediterranean. There have been a number of incidents which have delayed the transit of Russian ships, and although freedom of passage is guaranteed for Russian vessels, a further incident like the shooting down of the Russian fighter for allegedly crossing Turkish territory, could spark a major incident.

Turkey—post elections

Recep Erdoğan was Turkey's Prime Minister from 2003 to 2014, when, after three terms he had to stand down. Last year he was elected as Turkey's President and the Prime Minister's role was filled with the election of Ahmet Davutoğlu who had been hand-picked by Erdoğan to lead his AKP party. In the elections for the Prime Minister's office, Davutoğlu won virtually 50% of the votes and a comfortable majority of the seats. Many regard Erdoğan as still holding the reins of power, and there have been concerns at the repressive measures against the press and the absence of much democracy, as the country slides towards a Muslim State.

There is opposition to Assad's rule in Syria and also opposition to the Kurds gaining a state from the ruins of Iraq and Syria. This puts Turkey on a collision course with the West and Russia. Erdoğan wishes for Turkey to be a great power again in the Middle East. The Lord God has decreed otherwise; already it is considerably "dried up" and Turkey is eventually to disappear under the control of Russia.

Iran-Russia Cooperation in Syria Defies US Hegemony

Russia has been a long-term friend to Iran, stretching back to the Soviet days. Russia has sided with Iran in the long drawn-out talks over preventing Iran becoming a nuclear power. The relationship has had its ups and downs over the years. Putin endeavoured at times to curry favours with the West, especially over the completion of the Bushehr Nuclear Power station and the S-300 missile defence system.

They have a common friend in President Assad, it suits both of them to keep him in power; for the Iranians, he is a fellow Shiite in the midst of a Sunni world. Iran has competing aims to Turkey, she wants to be the regional power! We know that Iran, Persia, is listed as the companion of Gog, whereas Turkey is not—save that Togarmah—Armenia/Georgia of today—might in the past have include a bit of Northern Turkey. We know Turkey's destiny is to be swallowed up by Gog and cannot therefore be one of his companions. So we would expect, as part of Gog's work of *preparation* and being *a guard unto* Iran, that they would be working together prior to the invasion of Israel, which is the situation we see today. Both are determined to push America out of the Middle East. Under Obama, America has concentrated more on the Far East, giving Russia the opportunity she wanted, to be more deeply involved in the Middle East, as she had been in the Soviet days. The section heading was the headline to an article in a recently launched (Nov. 2014) Russian site called *Sputnik*, operated by the Russian Government.

A senior Lebanese military analyst underlined that the alliance between Iran and Russia that has grown stronger in the war against the terrorists in Syria has challenged the US hegemony in the world.

“In the current stage that Russia has strengthened and Iran has also grown stronger militarily and economically, cooperation between Russia and Iran is considered as a serious threat to the US plots and hegemony.” *Sputnik* 28-Nov-15

Iran has been supplying fighters to work in Syria to aid Assad’s men. Putin made his first visit to Iran since 2007, in December 2015. There was much discussion about the battle against ISIS and propping up Assad. There were many commercial agreements signed, as Iran emerges from under the shadow of the crippling sanctions imposed upon her by the West. There is considerable work to be done to modernise Iran’s oil industry, which Russia has the expertise to do.

Championing the Christians and blessed by the Pope

We have seen earlier the drive that Christianity had in Putin’s Russia. Putin looks to being the champion of the persecuted Christians in the Middle East.

... what’s often lost in the shuffle is the clear religious subtext to Russia’s operation, and, more broadly, its evolving geopolitical role.

Back in February 2012, Vladimir Putin vowed to the Russian Orthodox Church that the protection of persecuted Christians around the world would be a cornerstone of his foreign policy. After he announced plans last month for anti-ISIS strikes, a spokesman for the Church declared it a “**holy fight**”.

A growing swath of the Christian minority in the Middle East, who are among the primary targets of ISIS, can’t help but respond with gratitude. Last year, the *Global Post* website quoted a Syrian Christian woman as summing up the sentiment: “Thank God for Russia!”

Traditionally, there was an informal division of labor among the great powers in terms of providing cover for the Christian communities of the Middle East. Russia billed itself as the patron of the Orthodox, France for the Catholics, and Great Britain for the Protestants.

Today, it’s increasingly common among the Christians of the Middle East, and their sympathizers around the world, to say that **only Russia** seems to be taking its responsibility seriously.

Journalist Melik Kaylan summed up the situation aptly in a May essay for *Forbes*.

“Putin and Assad have maneuvered to become the **explicit protectors of Eastern Christianity**,” he wrote. “As the U.S. and Europe are too tangled up in ideological confusion and contradictory goals to step into the breach, we furnish Moscow with easy triumphs in this area as in so many others.”

Allowing Putin to package himself as the best friend of Christians under fire has clear strategic consequences that are hardly limited to the Middle East. *Cruix* (“All things Catholic”) 01-Nov-15

Mr Putin visited the Pope again this year in June, his second meeting with Pope Francis. In the communique released by the Vatican, one area covered was:

The Middle East, where Christians are fleeing their homes by the tens of thousands before the advance of a radical Islamist movement called ISIS, and where Russia over the centuries has played the role of the protector of the Christians in the region. *Moynihan Letters* 10-Jun-15

At the end of the meeting, Putin said to the Pope through his translator:

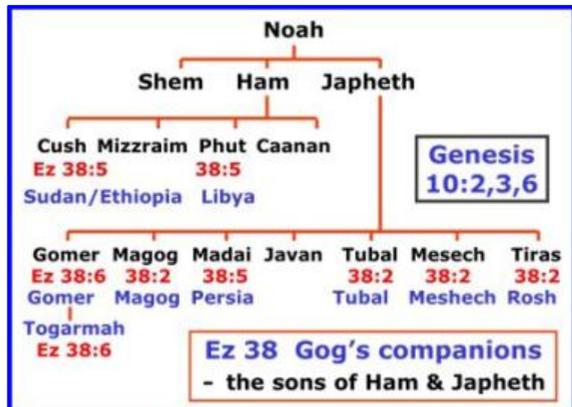
“It was a great pleasure and honor to meet you. **Until our next meeting....**” *ibid*

GOMER LEADS EUROPE BACK TO RUSSIA!

We have had to wait a long time to see France exerting her power. She was the lead country in the early European Union days, as Germany was content to take a back-seat and rebuild herself after the disastrous consequences of Hitler's drive to make Germany the 'Master Race'. However, France had her own economic problems and this has coincided with Germany's boom years and a rising generation that had no connection with WWII, determined that Germany should play her role as a military power on the world stage. It is clear from Ezekiel ch. 38 that the latter-day Gomer is a companion of Gog. We believe that in today's world, the country of France is indicated. Let's briefly trace the scriptural connection between Gomer and France.

The latter-day Gomer

The nine nations mentioned in Ezekiel 38 are all descendants of Japheth except for Cush and Phut, sons of Ham. Gomer was Japheth's firstborn and they are mentioned in the Assyrian inscriptions under the name of Gimarrai, but are called by the Greeks Cimmerii. It is Herodotus that tells us that "the Cimmerians were a people who came unquestionably



from the region now called the Ukraine, north of the Black Sea, between the Danube and the Sea of Azov." He says that they inhabited what we today call Crimea and the region near the Don and the Danube. They were driven out by the Scythians who were to the north. Some came eastwards and southwards into Turkey, others south-westward into today's France. History knows them as the Celts and the Gauls. Some Celts crossed Britain to Ireland, but others settled in France, to be conquered under Caesar's Gallic Wars (58-51 BC) and incorporated into the Roman Empire. So it is to France that we look for the latter-day Gomer. First, a look at the cost of sanctions.

Russian sanctions to 'cost Europe €100bn'

This was the heading to a *Newsweek* 19-Jun-15 article. We have already mentioned the difficulties that the sanctions against Russia for seizing Crimea, have had on trade with Europe. Sanctions penalise the imposer as well as Russia.

Now the independent Austrian Institute of Economic Research in Vienna (WIFO) has estimated that, as a result of the political fallout with Russia, both the sanctions and counter sanctions imposed by Russia are putting around €100bn in potential export revenue and economic development at risk.

Germany would be one of the biggest losers in terms of jobs, as reduced trade with Russia could put 465,000 German jobs in jeopardy, while Poland would be second, with 335,000 jobs at risk. Italy is the third with 215,000 and though Spain and France are also in the top five, relative to their size their projected losses of 160,000 and 145,000 respectively are considerably lower. WIFO estimate that the UK could lose around 110,000 jobs.

In terms of export revenue, Germany is the major European economy which would be most affected with a possible loss of 1.6% over the next few years, while Italy, Spain, France and the UK would each lose less than 1%.

Both France and Germany believe that the burden is too great, especially as America, which actively promoted the sanctions, suffers very little from them. The Europeans have for a long time wished that the US would leave them to run their own affairs.

France prepared to work with Russia in Syria

France was the first country to want to start co-operation again with Russia. Following the Paris atrocities in November, there was great anger against ISIS and the country was ready to help Russia in her battle against them. They had the support of many other countries. For the first time, France invoked article 2.7 of the European Treaty which allows one member to ask for help from other members when they are under attack. In the past, nations in such a position would have turned to the US or NATO for help, invoking NATO's article 5 which says an armed attack against a member state "shall be considered an attack against them all." This shows a significant shift in attitude in Europe, as NATO is very much American led. As we shall see in Ch. 13, there is a strong desire on the part of France and Germany for an inner core to integrate further and to provide Europe with its own military.

Russia welcomed this move and Mr Putin gave instructions that all help should be given to France and that she was to be treated as an ally, so that she could add her not inconsiderable weight behind the efforts of Russia in Syria. France's flag-ship aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle*, with its 26 aircraft on board, is now positioned off the Syrian coast and her airplanes are supplementing the existing 12 French aircraft operating from Jordan and the UAE. Britain has provided a vessel to act as a shield against attempts to attack the aircraft carrier.

Putin had a phone call with French President, Francois Hollande and after the conversation, Kremlin released a statement saying that "**the two leaders focused their attention on bilateral and multilateral cooperation in combating terrorism.**" The statement continued saying the cooperation, "includes closer ties and joint operations between the military command and intelligence services of Russia and France in Syria." *New Europe* 18-Nov-15

Germany building bridges to Russia

Although Angela Merkel has said that sanctions should continue against Russia, yet there is division within her government. The German Vice Chancellor, Sigmar Gabriel is seeking an end to sanctions.

The German government has, as of late, become increasingly nervous. It has been trapped by the U.S. administration; the sanctions against Russia have killed their

exports, particularly since Germany's most important export industry was sent reeling by the recent Volkswagen exhaust scandal. There is, however, not much left for the Germans than to issue an appeal for help—Germany is wedged, and it is the people that suffer.

Reuters recently reported that Germany's minister for economic affairs, Mr. Sigmar Gabriel "encouraged" the lifting of sanctions—essentially, he appealed strongly to the U.S. to cease imposing its sanctions. Those very sanctions by which the nations of Europe must abide were imposed upon them and enforced by the USA, putting huge pressure on the EU to bring EU member-states into line, regardless of local political will or economic consequences.

Mr. Gabriel argued that it would make very little sense to ask Russia for support in Syria, while simultaneously keeping the sanctions in force. In his words; "Everybody should be smart enough to realise that you **cannot keep sanctions on the one hand and ask for cooperation on the other.**" Gabriel stated last Friday in Berlin that a new and fairer relationship with Russia should start with a second pipeline (that is to say, a "Northern Stream") and end in the lifting of sanctions. *German Economic News* 03-Oct-15

Mr Gabriel then paid a visit to Moscow at the end of October.

Germany sent a signal Wednesday that it is rethinking its relationship with Russia, when Vice Chancellor and Economy Minister Sigmar Gabriel met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow. The visit's official purpose was to discuss bilateral trade, but since trade is linked to EU sanctions on Russia, the meeting suggests that Berlin is looking for ways to modify or even lift the current punitive measures against Moscow. However, such a decision would probably create friction between Germany and most Central and Eastern European countries, which means that Berlin is still not ready for a formal change of direction.

Before Gabriel's visit to Moscow, the German Ministry of Economy issued a news release focusing primarily on bilateral trade. According to the statement, during the first half of 2015, German exports to Russia contracted by 31.5 percent compared with the same period in the previous year. Russia is only Germany's 13th most important exports destination, but at a time when Europe's economic recovery is still fragile and China's growth is slowing, Berlin probably thinks it needs to diversify its exports as much as possible. The EU sanctions against Moscow make exporting goods to Russia complicated. In addition, Germany and Russia had planned to increase trade before the crisis, with talks for trains, chemical plants and other projects on the table. *Stratfor* 29-Oct-15

Using energy to divide Europe—Nord Stream

Germany and Russia have agreed to double the capacity of the two pipelines which bring Russian gas directly into Germany via the Baltic sea bed. This avoids any problems with transit countries. Germany and Russia, with French help, are planning to lay another two pipes, thus doubling the current capacity. Germany still imports most of her gas from the North Sea and sees Russian gas as a cushion against the slow decline in North Sea supplies. However, it puts them at logger-heads with other member countries who profit by having Russian gas shipped across their countries!

MEN'S HEARTS FAILING THEM FOR FEAR

The Lord Jesus spoke to his disciples of the coming troubles that the Jews would experience because of their rejection of their Messiah. Known as the Mount Olivet Prophecy, it detailed signs that were applicable to the events which would culminate in the destruction of Jerusalem at the hand of the Roman armies and the scattering of the Jewish nation. Parts have a secondary application to our day.

And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring;

Men's hearts **failing them for fear**, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

And then shall they see 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. *Luke 21:25-28*

Following the terrorist bombings, many people are afraid of going to city centres, especially at night. There have been many references to WWII. Europe is wracked with financial problems and concerns about the migrants flooding various countries of Europe. The war in Syria goes on. Where is it all going to end? The scriptural answer is that it is going to get a lot worse, before it gets better!

Europe and the refugee crisis

Reference has already been made to the problems facing Europe over the refugee crisis. This report was from *Reuters* 22-Dec-15:

More than 1 million refugees and migrants came to the European Union this year, while almost 3,700 died or went missing in perilous journeys which reaped huge profit for smugglers, the International Organization for Migration [IOM] said.

“This is three to four times as many migrants and refugees coming north as we had in 2014, and the deaths have already far surpassed the deaths last year,” IOM chief William Lacy Swing told Reuters.

Almost all those arriving came across the Mediterranean or the Aegean Seas, and half were Syrians fleeing the war. Another 20% were Afghans, and 7% were Iraqis, IOM and the U.N. refugee agency UNHCR said in a joint statement.

People smuggling operations probably accounted for the majority of journeys and likely earned at least \$1 billion, Swing said, taking “anywhere from \$2,000 to maybe \$6,000 depending on how many members of the family and depending on which smuggling ring it is”.

IOM estimates people smugglers in Europe have made \$10 billion or more since 2000, maybe much more. “They are certainly getting very well paid for their services,” Swing said.

The **record movement** of people into Europe is a symptom of a **record level of disruption** around the **globe**, with numbers of refugees and internally displaced people far surpassing **60 million**, UNHCR said last week.

Swing said the war in Syria was only one among many causes, including Ebola and Boko Haram in West Africa, an earthquake in Nepal, conflicts in Libya, Yemen, South Sudan, Central African Republic and Afghanistan and Iraq.

“No wonder you have such a large flux coming north. This is an **unprecedented scale of simultaneous complex protracted disasters** from the western bulge of Africa to the Himalayas, with very few stable, peaceful spots in between.”

A grim picture, and one that will only get worse as the problems in Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan appear to be increasing.

Anti-Semitism driving the Jews back

Many European Jews are fearful of this Muslim influx, for most Muslims, whether from the Sunni or Shiite sides have an inbuilt hostility to the Jews, even though they are largely of the same Semitic family. Anti-Semitic events which had been rising sharply in 2014, have leapt again in 2015.

Since the beginning of 2014, there has been an **increase of 400 percent** in the number of anti-Semitic incidents in Europe and around the world as compared with 2013.

The report, coming almost seventy years after the Holocaust and the end of World War II, shows that there is **real concern** for the future of **world Jewry**, and particularly **European Jewry**.

According to the report, the intensity and nature of the anti-Semitic wave that erupted in Europe last summer during Israel's Operation Protective Edge in Gaza indicated cooperation between networks of extreme leftists and immigrants from Arab countries that hold extreme Islamist views. In the United States, the main growth came in the form of anti-Israel activity on college campuses across the country which had anti-Semitic overtones.

The report's conclusions dovetailed with the results of a survey conducted last year by the Anti-Defamation League across 102 countries and including more than 50,000 people, which found that **one in four people** holds anti-Semitic views or beliefs.

The highest rates of antisemitism in the world were found in the Arab world, where 93 percent of the residents of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank had negative views of Jews. Similarly high results were found among respondents from Iraq, Yemen and Algeria.

When it came to Holocaust denial, the ADL's survey revealed that two-thirds of the world's population did not know about the Holocaust or flat out denied its occurrence. In Western Europe, however, only 6 percent of respondents denied the Holocaust or were not aware that it occurred. *The Algemeiner* 15-Apr-15

Even the UK has seen a jump in incidents

The number of reported incidents from January to June 2015 hit 473, including two which were classified as “extreme violence”. During the same period last year, less than half the number of incidents were reported, and 2014 was already a record year for anti-Semitism in the UK, according to the Community Security Trust.

Across Europe, Jews are feeling an undercurrent of anti-Semitism, particularly in response to Israel’s policies, which are unpopular on the continent. In addition, social tension over immigration and economic hardship have served to make far-right parties popular. Two major incidents—a shooting attack in a kosher grocery in Paris which killed four, followed by another attack in Copenhagen in which two died—fueled the fears of European Jewry, which may have led to the increased reporting of incidents in 2015. *BreakingIsraelNews* 03-Aug-15

In the wake of the Paris bombings carried out by a Brussels-based cell, the Belgian government has promised to protect the Jews.

Last week, the government promised to install CCTV and steel doors strong enough to withstand Kalashnikov rounds on Jewish or Israeli-linked organisations.

In the wake of a series of terrorist attacks, some of Belgium’s 45,000 Jews are now considering leaving.

Belgian government figures recorded 130 reports of anti-Semitic incidents last year, a 10-year high and a 50% increase on the year before. *the Algemeiner* 29-Nov-15

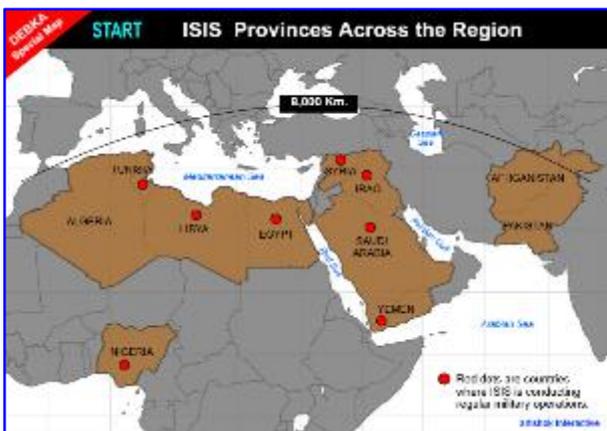
The investigations into the Paris bombings revealed that Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the alleged “mastermind” behind the terror attacks in Paris on November 13, was planning to carry out attacks against Jewish institutions. A couple of days before the attack, Abaaoud said, according to a quote in the investigation:

“We will do even more huge damage, mainly to Jews, and will carry out activities against schools and transport in the city”. *Ynet* 30-Nov-15

ISIS’s extensive reach

What frightens people is the broad reach of ISIS. From the countries where she is active she supplies sleeper cells to Europe and America, ready to act as required.

The bombing of the Russian passenger plane over Sinai, defined the Islamic State’s evolution into a multi-tasking, multinational terrorist



organization capable of plotting large-scale terrorist attacks against strategic targets and pulling them off across several borders.

ISIS has grown into a bigger, better-organized and far more dangerous menace than Al Qaeda was in its heyday in the late 1990s and the early 2000s. It operated proactively in 11 countries—Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Nigeria—not to mention cells in France, Britain, Belgium and Holland. *Debka* 13-Nov-15

The tide does seem to be turning in the battle to contain ISIS. It is hard to remember that it was but a year in July, since it proclaimed itself a caliphate, demanding the allegiance of the world's Muslims and ultimately sovereignty over the entire world!

Iran a loose cannon?

The greatest fear for many in the Middle East, is Iran. The deal struck by President Obama to prevent Iran becoming a nuclear state has proved to be the hollow victory that many predicted. Iran seems to have no intention of submitting to America's wishes. It may be that as part of a regional stability which brings peace to Israel for a brief time, that Russia manages to contain Iran's ambitions. In the meantime, her neighbours are very troubled at the prospects of what a nuclear armed Iran could do.

The Doomsday clock advances 2 minutes!

A group of scientists periodically assess the risk of a coming "Armageddon"—midnight! In 2010, the Doomsday clock showed 6 minutes to midnight; that was shortened to 5 mins in 2012. This year their assessment was 3 minutes to midnight!



"The clock ticks now at just three minutes to midnight because international leaders are failing to perform their most important duty—ensuring and preserving the health and vitality of human civilization." *thebulletin.org/timeline* Accessed 27-Dec-15

Disturbed weather patterns

Under the headline [The weather outside is 'frightful' and promises to become even more extreme](#) *The Extinction Protocol* 27-Dec-15 carried a disturbing list of current unusual weather phenomena around the world. I acknowledge that this source does look to sensationalise such matters, but even with a bit of hyperbole, one can sense that matters are tending to extremes. In the UK we are enjoying unseasonably mild weather for the past few months. This has resulted in a series of storms that have hit Northern England and Scotland especially. In the last few days of 2015 there are many areas flooded, with the whole month's rain fall dropping in one day! In Australia the weather has been exceptionally hot, leading to bushfires in the sweltering temperatures. South America is experiencing many floods, North America is experiencing unprecedented, high temperatures, with deadly tornados.

The nations of the world met in Paris at the end of November for the *UN Climate Change Conference 2015*. Many speeches were delivered; impossible promises were made, which everyone knows are going to be quietly ignored by the majority of the world. People are right to be worried and it will only get worse!

ISRAEL AN ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

Israel continues to be a bright star in the Middle Eastern financial world. This tiny country is such an innovative powerhouse and its prowess in innovation and technology is second to none. It has also recently discovered vast reserves of energy. Against overwhelming odds, Israel is still here and her enemies have experienced just how strong Israel is militarily. Yet as we have seen and will see in the next chapter, this has been achieved by trusting in her own might. We see God's Hand at work, making her a desirable spoil and a prey so that Gog and his companions will seek her wealth. We long for that time when Israel will be strong and the 'number one' nation, because of their trust in God and the wise guidance delivered to them from their immortal rulers! In the meantime, we marvel at the amazing abilities that the Jews have shown throughout the ages, of enduring and surviving to prosper again. God had promised that even in His punishment of His people, He would be a little sanctuary in the countries where they shall come. (Eze. 11:16)

Israel a bright spot in Middle East

Israel celebrated her 67th birthday in April this year—it is just the way the Hebrew calendars align with ours, so it is not always in May. An interesting article entitled [Israel is nothing short of a miracle](#), listed some of the great changes in just the last thirty years.

In 1984, the population of Israel was 4.1 million. Thirty years later, the population doubled to stand at 8.2 million. The average number of rooms per person increased by 37% during that time. In 1984, the number of vehicles per 1,000 people was 157. Last year there were 364 vehicles per 1,000 people. Today, the gross national product is \$307 billion, but 30 years ago it was a mere \$30 billion. That is an increase of more than 900%! In 1984, the GNP per capita was \$7,000, and in 2014 it climbed to \$36,000—an increase of more than 400%.

In 1984, Israel's foreign currency reserves amounted to \$3 billion. Thirty years later, our reserves skyrocketed to \$90 billion—an indication of financial stability. The national debt was 280% of the GNP in 1984, but by 2014 it had dropped to 66% of the GNP.

Security expenditure comprised 20% of the GNP then, and only 5% today, and it stands to be even less in the future. The tax burden was 45% and has gone down to 32%. American aid was 10% of the GNP and is now only 1%!

In 1984 Israel's exports were valued at \$10 billion, and 30 years later they are valued at \$96 billion—that's an 860% increase. In 1984 high-tech exports were valued at \$1 billion, and at \$37 billion in 2014—a 3,600% increase. Not bad. The national deficit made up 17% of the GNP in 1984 and today only 3%—an 82% decrease. *Israel Hayom* 01-May-15

It went on to say that over the last five years, the cumulative economic growth was 21%—the second highest rate among the 34 member nations of the Organization for

Economic Cooperation and Development. Also Israel has a youngish population, with the highest birth-rate in the Western world, as well as a steady flow of Jews immigrating. As a place to live, Israel ranks No. 20 in the world, above the UK, France, Italy and Japan. She ranks first in innovative capability, second in entrepreneurship and third in global innovation.

Quite an achievement when surrounded by people wishing to see you disappear from the face of the earth!

Moving forward on Leviathan at last

Most recent issues of *Milestones* have carried a paragraph or two on Israel's gas and oil discoveries. Last year it was a fairly brief section as there had been stalemate over the development of Israel's largest gas field, Leviathan. We did report on a new discovery, the Royee, another potentially large source of gas. Although gas prices haven't fallen as sharply as oil prices, Israel's fields are in very deep water and so are expensive to drill. The main problem has been with the Israeli Government disagreeing over the amount of profits those developing the fields should retain. The Minister concerned resigned his post and Mr Netanyahu added his post to his own portfolio of responsibilities, and has pushed ahead with his proposals, which the exploration companies seem happy with. Hopefully there will now be movement in developing the Leviathan field; the well owners are planning to make their final investment decision sometime in 2016. It could possibly be 2020 before any gas comes ashore.

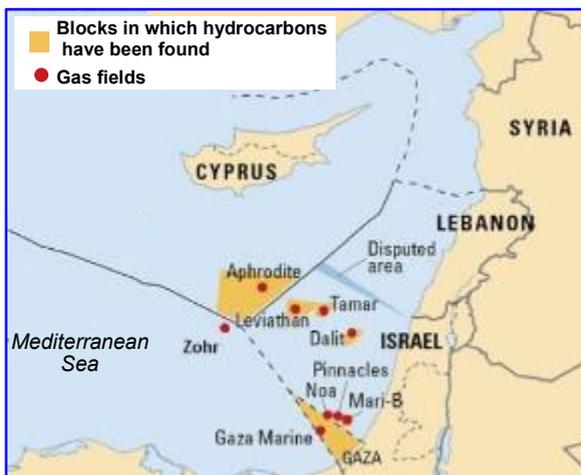
The Tamar field has been a very valuable income stream for Israel, helping to balance the losses felt by Operation Protective Edge in 2014.

More discoveries of energy

The Israeli government is inviting foreign companies to participate in future exploration of Israel's coastal waters. It is estimated that only 25% of the area has been explored and it is thought that there are other equally large discoveries to be made.

Quite close to Israel's territorial waters, the Italian drilling firm, Eni SpA, discovered a field in Egyptian waters larger than Tamar and Leviathan combined!

Eni claimed to have discovered a "supergiant" gas field with "a potential of 30 trillion cubic feet of lean gas in place." This deep-water deposit is located in the Zohr



Prospect in the Shorouk block, off Egypt’s Mediterranean coastline at a depth of 1,450 meters. The field covers an area of about 100 square kilometres and if Eni’s figures prove to be valid, it is the largest gas discovery so far in the Mediterranean Sea.

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This discovery “**is changing the game for Egypt. ... It is very important for Egypt, but also for the Mediterranean in terms of stability,**” said Eni’s CEO, Claudio Descalzi, in an interview on Monday. Egypt has seen its gas output declining since 2011 following the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak. The aftermath was a hit to investments in exploration and production. Furthermore, local demand for electricity has grown by more than 7 percent a year while Egypt’s population—currently estimated to amount to 87 million people continues to grow. Egypt started buying liquefied natural gas cargoes this year from companies including Noble Group Ltd, BP Plc and Vitol SA. Nevertheless, this is all about to change.

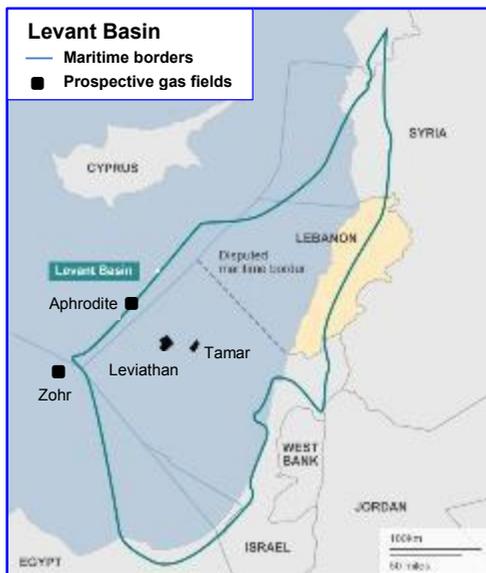
Natural Gas Europe 04-Sep-15

And to the north, where Israel’s maritime area abuts Cyprus’, the substantial Aphrodite field was discovered by the same company that found Leviathan and Tamar. Additionally, the waters off Lebanon and Syria are estimated to have large reserves. The whole region is a possible game-changer, a second North Sea bonanza! It has the potential to make nations seek peace as they seek to rebuild their shattered economies.

Seeking new energy partners

Mr Netanyahu is keen to open up Israel’s oil and gas potential. At the moment she is dependent upon the Tamar wells for her energy supplies. If anything were to happen to that supply, Israel would be in a very precarious position. Although there are a number of smaller wells in operation, the sooner there are supplies from more substantial fields, the surer Israel’s energy needs can be met.

Mr Putin is keen to help Israel develop the giant Leviathan gas field, as they have the knowhow and the equipment to do this. Also the situation in the Middle East has



changed dramatically this year, Russia is no longer a distant neighbour, but shows signs of being a strong presence, just to the north of Israel.

In November, Israel held its 2nd Annual International Oil and Gas Conference and Exhibition, a few years ago that would have raised a wry smile as then Israel was the one spot in the Middle East where there was no oil or gas industry. But no more; she sits as the linchpin to the area's hydrocarbon development. With two hungry markets, Egypt and Turkey to her south and north, any pipelines need to run through Israeli waters.

The conference was on the exploitation of these new opportunities and delegates in the well-head drilling industry

Oil & Gas Eurasia #7-8
2015
JULY-AUGUST
ИЮЛЬ-АВГУСТ

Heads Up, Russia!
Israel is an Oil & Gas Play Worth Considering

Внимание, Россия!
Почему стоит присмотреться к израильской «нефтянке»

Pat Davis Szymczak
Тит Дэйв Сэймчак

It's not a secret that at least one in eight people have Russian or Soviet roots. Russian is the most widely spoken non-official language in Israel and between Moscow and Tel Aviv there are at least five flights a day on some combination of Aeroflot, Rossiya or El Al.

But there is a lot more to Israel than the beaches and night life in Tel Aviv, the leading properties of Dead Sea mud, or the religious sites that are objects of pilgrimage for those of the world's major religions.

Did you know that Israel is emerging as an oil and gas producing nation with support from its upstream operators, receivers, and service and supply companies? Did you know that Israel is a center for technology innovation, and that exports to Israel companies in Russia are not restricted by sanctions? To be clear, the Israeli government has

and all the downstream associated equipment companies were invited to attend. What was very interesting was that in the Moscow-based trade magazine, *Oil & Gas Eurasia*, there was a full page advert for this conference, asking for Russian firms to join a delegation to visit Israel. The magazine had a front page advertorial with the

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UOG 2015, Israel's 2nd Annual International Conference & Exhibition, in collaboration with Oil & Gas Eurasia, present a unique opportunity for Russian companies to participate in a delegation to Israel. This is an unprecedented opportunity to meet with licensee holders, Israeli government officials, regulators and international companies looking for partnerships. This delegation is designed for:

- Upstream and midstream oil and gas industry suppliers.
- Oilfield and offshore/onshore service providers.
- Russian companies involved in exploration and production.
- Investors who want to participate in Israel's energy boom.

Meet key people from Israel's public and private energy sectors and learn how your company can profit from becoming a part of Israel's energy industry.

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Pat Davis Szymczak
Publisher, Oil & Gas Eurasia (Russia)
Email: pszymczak@eurasiaspress.com
Phone: +7 499 538 4441

Deidre Van Norman
Director of Operations, UOG (Houston)
Email: dev@universaioilgas.com
Phone: +1 281 216 8606

headline: **Heads Up, Russia! Israel is an Oil and Gas Play Worth Considering.** I have to confess ‘Heads Up’ is not a phrase I have used, so I Googled it! Quite surprised at the definitions! “Wake up”, “Be prepared”, “Take note”. Just the kind of phrase that Joel uses in his 3rd chapter! *Wake up the mighty men* (v9). True that is in the context of the coming invasion, but I believe this is all part of God’s preparation to draw the nations against Israel. Ezekiel 38:7 uses the similar idea: *Be thou prepared, and prepare for thyself*. The strong card that Putin holds is that he is able to protect the wells from terrorist attacks by his great influence over the many groups that would wish to harm Israel. There is an element of truth in this, as Hezbollah, Hamas and Iran probably pose the greatest threats.

Putin and Netanyahu to strike deal on Leviathan gas field

Russia wants to be the major partner in Israel’s offshore Leviathan natural gas field in the eastern Mediterranean, a top Israeli foreign affairs analyst said in Sydney yesterday.

Gazprom bid for a stake in the project in 2012 but was beaten by Woodside, which pulled out of the joint venture in May last year. Mr Yaari said with the Russians now in Syria, Mr Netanyahu was likely to reconsider.

He said Mr Putin had told Mr Netanyahu: **“We will make sure there will be no provocation against the gas fields by Hezbollah or Hamas. Nobody messes with us.”** *The Australian* 21-Oct-15

Quite! Mr Putin is used to speaking bluntly!

It would put Israel in a tricky position, as it would put American (Noble Energy, Inc.), Israeli (Delek Group) and Russian (Gazprom) firms in partnership. However, it may be that Gazprom carries out its own exploration and drilling, independent of the American company who would be loath to have Russian partners.

It is a fascinating power-play taking place before our eyes. Russia is determined to be an energy superpower. Recently, things haven’t been going her way. The dramatic drop in prices has slashed her income, America has developed fracking and looks as if it will not only be self-sufficient but an exporter herself. Add to this Europe’s drive to move away from dependency on Russian gas, (though we have seen Germany’s flouting of this aspect). It all makes it difficult for Mr Putin’s dreams.

And now we have a growing threat from Egypt, Israel and Cyprus as ‘new boys on the block’! They have the potential to be energy superpowers. Putin can’t stand idly by and see an even greater threat to Russia’s dreams. Back in 2012, when Putin visited Israel, he proposed the setting up of a junior company to Gazprom that would help develop Israel’s Leviathan gas field. As we saw earlier, this didn’t happen then; but may still happen. Israel’s greatest threat is an aggressive Iran. Putin has the influence to restrain Iran in order to participate in the development of the gas fields of Iran’s sworn enemy! It could work both ways! Russia being a *guard unto* Iran and her other companions (Eze. 38:7), may restrain Israel from attacking Iran’s potential nuclear sites, in exchange for a guarantee of peace. Time will tell; angelic hands will ensure that all aspects drop into their appointed places.

Golan Oil

Exploration for oil onshore has been going on for years with little success, only small quantities have been found, until this year, when a large source was found on the Golan. There are vast reserves of fracking shale in Israel, but environmental concerns have prevented the commercial exploitation of this. The Golan promises to provide Israel with the majority of her oil needs.

The layer is ten times larger than the average oil find worldwide, Bartov said, “and that’s why we’re talking about significant amounts. What’s important is to know that there’s oil in the rock, and this we know.”

Three drilling sites on the Golan have uncovered what is potentially billions of barrels of oil, enough to fulfil the Israeli market’s 270,000-barrel-per-day consumption for a very long time, the report claimed. *Times of Israel* 07-Oct-15

Interconnector cable starts taking shape

This headline from the *Cyprus Mail* 22-Dec-15, was a bit premature, but never-the-less this mouth-wateringly expensive project (estimated at €1.5bn/\$1.4bn in 2012) has quite a short payback time. First mentioned in *Milestones 2012* ch. 8, it is an ambitious scheme to link Israel to Greece, via Cyprus and Crete, allowing electricity to flow back and forth, thus evening out peaks and troughs in their energy needs.

According to a company announcement, the EuroAsia InterConnector officially awarded the studies to two Italian companies, CESI S.p.A. and GAS S.r.l, during a ceremony held at the European Parliament Office in Cyprus, last Friday.

The studies are for the technical design, the reconnaissance study for the optimum route and an environmental impact study. All of them are expected to be complete during 2016.

The cable will have the capacity to transmit 2,000 MW of energy along its east-west cable, selling Israel Energy Corporation’s excess electricity production to Cyprus or any other buyer further west.

The 1,518km-long subsea cable will connect Israel and Cyprus to southeast and western Europe to satisfy the continent’s need for cheap electricity.

It will connect Israel with Cyprus, Cyprus with Crete, and Crete with the Peloponnese, from where electricity supply can be distributed to Greece or further afield.

Work on the initial 329-kilometer cable link between Israel and Cyprus is expected to begin in 2017 and be completed in 2019. The second phase will connect the Greek island of Crete to Attica in mainland Greece in 2020 and the third and final phase will connect the cable from Cyprus to Crete with a view to full implementation of the “electricity highway” by 2022. *Cyprus Mail* 22-Dec-15

The Red-Dead Sea Canal

This item raises its head again after being first mentioned in *Milestones 1993*! It involves bringing sea water from the Red Sea into the Dead Sea, to stop the continual lowering of the water level and to generate electricity as it flows down. This will be

used, among other things, to power a desalination plant in Jordan; the fresh water it produces will be shared by both countries. Originally the price tag was estimated at between \$2 and \$10bn depending on the complexity of the final design. Prices have fallen and the figure mentioned below is considerably less, as it is being done in stages. Eventually it is planned to turn the canal into a leisure area, with hotels, parks and leisure facilities.

Israel and Jordan published a joint multi-million-pound tender to deliver a major water-sharing project, which is designed to help meet the water needs of both countries and replenish the dwindling Dead Sea, which they both border.

A new canal will be constructed that will carry 100 million cubic meters of water each year from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. The latter has seen its surface fall by 22 metres since 1970 and is predicted to dry up by 2050 without intervention. About 80 million cubic meters of water will be desalinated in a plant to be built in the Jordanian Red Sea city of Aqaba. Water will be divided between Jordan and Israel, which will use it to supply the surrounding Arava region. A 200km pipeline in Jordanian territory will deliver water from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. The idea for such a scheme was first raised when Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty in 1994.

A memorandum of understanding on the entire project was signed in December 2013 and made provision for the Palestinian Authority to purchase 20 million cubic metres of water from Israel. Meanwhile, Jordan will be able to purchase an additional 50 million cubic metres of water from Israel's Sea of Galilee to help address its water shortage.

Israel's Interior Minister Silvan Shalom, who signed the original agreement, travelled to Jordan yesterday to announce the tender alongside Jordanian Water Minister Hazim Nasser. The tender, which will be published today is thought to be worth £530million. *Britain Israel Com & Research Center* 01-Dec-15

This solution still leaves the Dead Sea dead! It aims to arrest the dramatic drop in the water level that has left hotels stranded a long way now from the water's edge. God's solution is much more elegant—changing the topography of the area and bringing fresh water from the Temple at Jerusalem to “heal” the Dead Sea so that it is full of fishes, and then reversing the flow of the Jordan so that it exits into the Great (Mediterranean) Sea! (Eze. 47:7-12; Zec. 13:1; 14:8-10)

Israeli Spy Sats Keep Sharp Eye on Russian Forces in Syria

Israel has a handful of satellites which orbit the world at 90 min intervals, so they can give a frequently updated picture of what is going on. The pictures that have been released show in great detail the build-up of Russian arms and troops in Syria. And these are from Israel's “low-end” satellites, whose pictures can be purchased. The Israeli military “high-end” pictures must be stunning! They enable Israel to keep tabs on what is happening. This is a small part of Israel's spy efforts.

Her Intelligence Service is second to none in its ability to penetrate her enemies very hideouts. At the year-end there was a high-profile elimination of one of Israel's most wanted enemies, Samir Quntar, head of Iranian and Hezbollah terror networks in

southern Syria. Early Sunday, Dec. 20, Israeli war-planes released their deadly guided missiles from the Galilee area, they sped across to Damascus, some 105 km/65 miles away. They entered the 2nd floor window of a six-storey residential block of flats, taking out the 2nd floor together with Quntar and fellow terrorists. Not only was Israel able to work remotely with pin-point accuracy, one remarkable feature was that Russia chose not to take out the missiles with her S-400 system. It showed that Russia was prepared to tolerate Israel's activities without retaliation. According to *Debka* 25-Dec-15, Assad of Syria and Khamenei of Iran were furious with Russia for not taking action. Accordingly, Putin phoned Netanyahu asking him to let the Russians know, next time anything was planned!

It was Israeli intelligence that was able to give the Russians vital information concerning the shooting down of the civilian Russian plane over Sinai. They also gave the French and Germans vital intelligence information after the Paris bombings.

Israel provided Germany specific intelligence on threats that led to a cancellation in a soccer match between Germany and the Netherlands last week, according to reports on Wednesday. The *Times of Israel*, based on a report from the German news site *Stern*, wrote that German authorities received “a specific intelligence warning” from Israel that led to the match's cancellation. The day after the November 13 terror attacks in Paris, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, “Israel possesses intelligence; we aren't a marginal player in this field, and the information we have we share with France and with other relevant countries, not just since yesterday. This is an important part of cooperation against the terrorism of ISIS and the terrorism of radical Islam in general.” He also told reporters that he directed the Israeli intelligence community to aid their French and European counterparts “in every way possible.” According to Israel's Channel 2, in the hours after the attacks, Israel provided details to the French on some of the Islamic State terrorists who perpetrated the attacks, even though Israel “had no advanced warning” of the attacks.

Israel's expertise in counter-terrorism has also proved invaluable to the fight against ISIS, in the aftermath of the Paris terror attacks. As French authorities attempted to capture the mastermind behind the Paris attacks, a French special police unit, RAID, conducted a raid in the Paris suburb of Saint Denis that required almost 100 officers last Wednesday. The group's commander Jean-Michel Fauvergue said that his officers used methods they learned from Israeli special forces. *The Daily TIP* 25-Nov-15

Britain's intelligence has close links to the Israeli organisation. There are advantages of being friends with Israel! It could be that Israel will feel less willing to communicate with the EU countries following their imposition of a punitive labelling system on produce and products grown and made in the West Bank settlements. It could work to Britain's advantage.

The Israeli elections

Israel went to the polls on March 17th, with the opinion polls forecasting heavy losses for Mr Netanyahu's Likud Party. The thought of Mr Netanyahu being unable to form the next Israeli government brought comfort to President Obama. He had found

Netanyahu's refusal to move forward on setting up an independent Palestinian State irritating, as this was a goal that Obama had set himself. The prospect of a different

government also pleased the EU leaders, who too had been seeking a solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Their hopes were shattered when, instead of losing seats, he gained seats, to be head as the largest Israeli Party. The Knesset has 120 seats, so it has always been necessary to form a coalition in order to secure the minimum of 61 seats to enable a government

to be formed. This is never an easy task; such are the abundance of parties and the individualism shown by each of them. Mr Netan-yahu was granted an extra 3 weeks deadline and just hours before it expired on May 6th, he was able to announce which parties had joined the government to give him the bare minimum of 61 seats. To the dismay of the US and the EU, here was a government that was united in their outlook, that a Palestinian State would not be established while in power. At first it was thought that this coalition was too fragile to survive, but it has survived to the end of 2015!

Mr Netanyahu addresses the UN

Mr Netanyahu has been very forthright with some of his speeches. At the UN on October 1st, he spoke of the great dangers that Iran has posed over a long period.

“Thirty-one years ago, as Israel's Ambassador to the United Nations, I stood at this podium for the first time. I spoke that day against a resolution sponsored by Iran to expel Israel from the United Nations. Then as now, the UN was obsessively hostile towards Israel, the one true democracy in the Middle East. Then as now, some sought to deny the one and only Jewish state a place among the nations.



Position on Palestinian State (In seat number order)	
(30) Likud:	"No Palestinian State"
(10) Kulanu:	"Hard line on security issues"
(8) Jewish Home:	"Opposes any Palestinian State"
(7) Shas:	"Currently no negotiating partner on the Palestinian side"
(6) United Torah Judaism:	"Land given by God to Jews"

I ended that first speech by saying: Gentlemen, check your fanaticism at the door.

More than three decades later, as the Prime Minister of Israel, I am again privileged to speak from this podium.

His message was the same. The preceding speeches had praised the “deal” that the US-led talks concerning Iran’s nuclear ambitions had achieved. Netanyahu warned of the dangers of lifting the sanctions imposed on Iran.

But Iran is setting up dozens of terror cells like this around the world, ladies and gentlemen, they’re setting up those terror cells in this hemisphere too. I repeat: Iran’s been doing all of this, everything that I’ve just described, just in the last six months, when it was trying to convince the world to remove the sanctions.

Now just imagine what Iran will do after those sanctions are lifted. Unleashed and un-muzzled, Iran will go on the prowl, devouring more and more prey. In the wake of the nuclear deal, Iran is spending billions of dollars on weapons and satellites.

You think Iran is doing that to advance peace? You think hundreds of billions of dollars in sanctions relief and fat contracts will turn this rapacious tiger into a kitten? If you do, you should think again.

Last week, Major General Salehi, the commander of Iran’s army, proclaimed this: “We will annihilate Israel for sure.”

And as for the Supreme Leader himself, a few days after the nuclear deal was announced, he released his latest book. Here it is. It’s a 400-page screed detailing his plan to destroy the State of Israel.

Last month, Khamenei once again made his genocidal intentions clear before Iran’s top clerical body, the Assembly of Experts. He spoke about Israel, home to over six million Jews. He pledged, “there will be no Israel in 25 years.”

Seventy years after the murder of six million Jews, Iran’s rulers promise to destroy my country. Murder my people. And the response from this body, the response from nearly every one of the governments represented here has been absolutely nothing!

Utter silence!

Deafening silence.

(At this point, Netanyahu paused for 44 seconds.)

Perhaps you can now understand why Israel is not joining you in celebrating this deal. If Iran’s rulers were working to destroy your countries, perhaps you’d be less enthusiastic about the deal. If Iran’s terror proxies were firing thousands of rockets at your cities, perhaps you’d be more measured in your praise. And if this deal were unleashing a nuclear arms race in your neighborhood, perhaps you’d be more reluctant to celebrate.

He reminded them of the millennia old attempts to eliminate Israel.

And now another regime has arisen, swearing to destroy Israel.

That regime would be wise to consider this: I stand here today representing Israel, a country 67 years young, but the nation-state of a people nearly 4,000 years old. Yet the empires of Babylon and Rome are not represented in this hall of nations. Neither is the Thousand Year Reich. Those seemingly invincible empires are long gone. But Israel lives. The people of Israel live.

He spoke also of the impossibility of negotiation with the Palestinian leaders who were not interested in peace, only Israel's elimination. He ended with this challenge.

So here's a novel idea for the United Nations: Instead of continuing the shameful routine of bashing Israel, stand with Israel. Stand with Israel as we check the fanaticism at our door. Stand with Israel as we prevent that fanaticism from reaching your door.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Stand with Israel because Israel is not just defending itself. More than ever, Israel is defending you. *Times of Israel* 01-Oct-15

We know that this is a vain challenge, that the world is going to be turned against Israel and seek to wipe her off the face of the earth.

It shows us that if Russia does continue to show herself a friend to Israel, for the time being, that Israel will grasp at this straw, for Russia has much influence over many of Israel's Middle East enemies.

Ashkelon-Be'er Sheva Railway Line

Travel in Israel has been transformed in recent years. New dual-carriage roads span the country, enabling commuters and the military alike to get from one part of the country without snarling traffic jams. One of the strategic moves that Israel has made is to open up the Negev, a vast desert area, but away from the reach of West Bank terrorist attacks. In recent years the Israeli army is gradually being re-deployed to the Negev. As part of the scheme to attract businesses to the area, Israel has been building new and upgrading existing railway links to the region, ensuring high speed transport for passengers and freight. In November, Mr Netanyahu



spoke at the opening of a twin track, high-speed link between the port of Ashkelon and Be'er Sheva (Beersheba), in the northern Negev.

The next section to the Port of Eilat which we looked at in *Milestones 2014* is still awaiting the final decision on how it is to be funded. This decision is expected soon and the first sections aim to be running by 2018.

ISRAEL'S GODLESS ALLIANCES

In our earlier chapters we saw that Scripture speaks of the godless alliances that Israel makes, prior to Israel's national destruction at the hands of Gog. She is trusting in the one that smites her and she is replenished from the east, and they please themselves in the children of strangers. (Isa. 10:20; 2:6) It is so interesting to see today that this is just the pathway we can see Israel pursuing! So let's see, in spite of, or perhaps because of the hostility of so many, Israel is trying to work out advantageous alliances with certain nations. These are mainly, but not exclusively, those that lie outside the list of her eventual enemies as given in Ezekiel ch. 38.

Ironically this need for new markets is driven in part by the actions of the EU to support the BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) movement against Israel.

What is equally fascinating is that just at this precise era, Israel has been blessed with the discovery of vast gas deposits and now oil deposits. Many Israelis think that these should only be used for Israel's own needs and extracted slowly. Mr Netanyahu sees them as important resources in his drive for peace and security. Next-door Jordan has little in the way of gas or oil, she is dependent on imports and the Syrian war has cut off most of her traditional sources. Israel is keen to be a major supplier, in spite of Jordanian popular opposition. Jordan's ruler is keen to tap into Israel's convenient location.

To the south lies Egypt with her own sources of gas and oil. Recently there has been little investment, due to internal problems and with a rapidly expanding population, coupled with gas export promises that she can't fulfil. Egypt is receptive to buying gas from Israel, even if it is unpopular with the ordinary Egyptians.

How we marvel at God's pre-planning and timing! These reserves of gas and oil would have been laid down in the Flood, millennia ago! It is only in recent times that the technology has been there to discover them. The Middle East situation has put off exploration in this region, causing Israel to be a late starter in this energy field, but it turns out that it is just at the right time!

Problems from EU spur search for other markets

There is a growing movement in many countries to campaign for a BDS against Israel because of the many settlements in the West Bank. It is led by many EU-financed NGOs (non-governmental organisation) and is quite a powerful movement which Israel spends much effort in countering. The West Bank settlements offer good employment prospects to the local Arab workforce, and many cases of Jew and Arab working in harmony and bringing prosperity to the area can be found. Without this, the Arab peoples would be much poorer, as Palestinian wages are much lower. The effect of this BDS movement is to harm the Palestinians!

The lobbying by this group has led to the EU call for all goods and produce produced in the West Bank to be specifically labelled. Only Israel has been singled out for this

labelling. There is disquiet within the EU and several countries have said that they will not implement this discriminatory and harmful legislation.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has instructed the Foreign Ministry to reassess its involvement with European Union (EU) institutions regarding the political process with the Palestinians.

Until the assessment is completed, Prime Minister Netanyahu ordered the suspension of all political contact with EU institutions and representatives on the issue.

This directive was made in response to the EU decision to label products from Judea and Samaria. The Foreign Ministry has clarified that Israel is still dealing with individual nations within Europe, including Germany, the UK and France, but not with European Union institutions. *Arutz Sheva* 30-Nov-15

The EU market is an important one for Israel, but the search is on for more sympathetic partners than the EU!

Majority of Britons see Israel as key Middle East ally

Israel's growing relation with Britain is an encouraging sign to Zion's watchmen. Although Britain is part of the EU, as we shall see in Ch. 12, there is an increasing call for a Brexit from the EU. This coincides with increasingly warm ties between Britain and Israel. In a poll conducted by BICOM (*Britain Israel Communications & Research Centre*) in November it found that 52 % of Britons saw Israel as a key ally in the Middle East. Although the BDS movement is fairly strong in Britain, the poll showed the majority were against it.

In the middle of the year, a new UK Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, was appointed: Sajid Javid who is a great admirer of Israel.

Speaking at the British Israeli Business Awards on Monday night, he told the 250-strong audience: "The past few years have been a golden era—what really excites me are the possibilities for the years that lie ahead."

Bilateral trade between the countries is currently worth more than £4.5 billion.

Mr Javid said he had a high regard for Israel.

"Over the past 67 years, Israel has made business boom in the barren desert."

"It's one of the many reasons I have long admired the country. I travelled there extensively, both for business and with family."

My department, including UKTI, are working hard to boost Anglo-Israeli trade and investment. And I, as business secretary, will do anything I can to support and promote it." *Jewish Chronicle* 09-Jun-15

It is encouraging that Israel is a good friend of Britain's especially in the light of the past when a "national homeland for the Jews" became a reality under British hands.

Obama and Netanyahu turn the clock back

Relations between the two leaders has been very rocky, especially while the Iran talks were in progress. Both men have decided to put their differences behind them

and “put the clock back” according to this headline in *Debka* 13-Nov-15. This was the first face-to-face meeting for 13 months. The talks went better than expected and there was agreement on several thorny issues.

The most important was their agreement that it was time to set aside their past differences and get back to fully-restored military and intelligence cooperation between the two countries. In the second half of 2014, when the nuclear deal was still on the negotiating table and in hot dispute between them, their longstanding and close intelligence-sharing mechanisms broke down.

US intelligence agencies once again opened up to Israel on Iran, while Israel reciprocated with a flow of clandestine data on Russian and Iranian military steps in the Middle East, and the movements of jihadist groups in the region, notably ISIS.

The Obama administration was further encouraged to go back to its active intelligence ties with Israel by a setback that we reported in previous issues of *DEBKA Weekly*, namely that Tehran chose Moscow as its leading military and intelligence partner, especially in Syria, in preference to Washington.

Ahead of the meeting, Israeli intelligence warned of “something big” was brewing in Sinai, but didn’t know the target. Shortly afterwards the Russian civilian plane was blown up.

Working with Russia in Syria.

It has been intriguing to see how well Israel and Russia have cooperated in Syria. Shortly after Turkey shot down the Russian fighter plane, a Russian plane entered Israeli territory; a quick word with the pilot and he headed back! Mr Putin and Mr Netanyahu have met several times to coordinate their actions. Putin tolerates Israel occasionally flying over Lebanon and Syria in order to destroy advanced weaponry destined for Hezbollah. There are already estimated to be 150,000 missiles and rockets in Lebanon, ready to target Israel, and Israel is greatly concerned to prevent even more advanced weapons going into Hezbollah’s arsenal. Although Hezbollah is under Iran’s control, Putin is content for Israel to take what action she thinks appropriate. Avigdor Lieberman, a former foreign minister, is an expert on Russian affairs, having immigrated to Israel from the Soviet Union in the late 1970s. He said,

“We have full coordination in real time with Russian ground forces and the Russian air force. There is an open line of communication between us, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. I hope we don’t find ourselves in the same situation as the Turks found themselves with the Russians. I see no reason for that to happen though. Everything the Russians have been signaling seems to focus on close cooperation. Just this week, Putin extended sentencing for anti-Semitic acts in Russia. They want to import more Israeli vegetables. They tell us that we’re not involved [in the conflict], at least as far as they are concerned. Russia has no problem with us. They are dealing with other interests.” *al-monitor* 03-Dec-15

When Israel took out the Hezbollah leader in Damascus as we saw in the previous section, Russia allowed this to take place—a remarkable concession. When Putin

and Netanyahu spoke on the phone three days later, the two leaders put out almost identical statements:

The two leaders agreed to continue dialogue at various levels, including coordination in the war against terrorism between the two countries, as well as in other regional matters. *Haaretz* 22-Dec-15

Mr Netanyahu has had several meetings with Mr Putin and Russian officials, as well as frequent telephone calls.

Earlier, in November, Israel made two air strikes on targets on the outskirts of Damascus. They had two objectives:

1. To wipe out the weapons stocks Iranian forces in Syria were piling up at Syrian bases around the airport, including the arms consigned for transfer to Hizballah in Lebanon.
2. To destroy the accumulation of armored vehicles and ammunition that the Iranians, Syrians, and Hizballah had collected for a major offensive to drive Syrian rebels out of the positions they hold in the South on the borders with Israel and Jordan. *Debka* 13-Nov-15

It was also a test of Russian-Israeli and US-Israeli cooperation. Mr Netanyahu had just held his summit meeting with Mr Obama two days earlier. This was a test of the strength of Russia's alliance with Israel and the US's with Israel. Both held, Russia took no retaliatory action and Obama did not condemn this attack.

Further cooperation with Russia

Following talks in December, after Russia announced sanctions on Turkey for shooting down a Russia fighter, Israel expressed interest in increasing her exports of produce to Russia.

Israel's key agricultural exports to Russia are fruit, vegetables and fruit juices. In turn, Russia sells raw materials, as well as agricultural products, like grains and cereals, to Israel.

The volume of bilateral trade between Russia and Israel has increased significantly in recent years — from \$12 million in 1991 to \$3.43 billion in 2014, according to the Russian Embassy in Israel.

In May, Russia increased its imports from Israel as the ruble began to stabilize. *Haaretz* 22-Dec-15

Israel and Russia are increasing their cooperation against cyber-attacks. The trade magazine *SCMagazineUK.com*. 21-Jul-15 reported.

Russia now plans to use Israel's national banking cyber-protection experience and technologies to minimise further attacks.

While Russia and Israel may be considered to have very different approaches to democracy, free speech and the rights of individual citizens, both are concerned about anti-state activity by sections of their populations. As a result, both Russia and Israel are planning to establish stricter control over use of the Internet, and

the exchange of data which has the potential for dual use, i.e. can potentially be used to harm the interests of the state.

In addition, the governments of both countries plan to significantly expand the IT security powers of their law-enforcement agencies including introducing provisions for pre-trial blocking of suspicious web-resources and the arrest of potential cyber-terrorists.

Separately, the US and Israel have also agreed this week to increase their cyber-cooperation, as reported by *SCMagazineUK.com*.

Israel, Russia and the Eurasian Union

Russia has been pushing her equivalent of the EU. The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) is a copy of the EU—a trading union with political overtones and a goal of a common currency. It came into force on Jan 1st 2015 with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia as members. Armenia joined the following day and, Kyrgyzstan in August. Mr Putin's goal is to enlarge the EEU to embrace all the former members of the Soviet Union, including the Baltic States who are now members of the EU. South Ossetia (formerly part of Georgia) has signed to join and Tajikistan is interested. Kazakhstan's president did invite Turkey to join, but she declined, preferring to continue to seek EU membership. The aim is to set up a Central Bank and common currency by 2025.

The present EEU has a market of 183 million people and a GDP of \$4 trillion. This compares with the EU's population of 508 million and a GDP of \$19 trillion.

Various countries are interested in signing Free Trade agreements. Vietnam has already and Israel, India, New Zealand and Tunisia have expressed their interest in joining such an Agreement. The EEU is preparing to commence talks with Israel over starting talks, and Israel has indicated she wants to proceed as rapidly as possible. It makes perfect sense, here is a large market, she has sufficient Russian speakers to cope with the tasks of doing business and it gives her another viable alternative to the EU.

Jordanian Security and Prosperity: An Essential Aspect of Israeli Policy

Israel has been cooperating with the two neighbours that she has peace agreements with. We will first look at Jordan, the more successful of these partnerships. We have already looked at the Red-Dead Sea Canal, the biggest joint project which potentially could bring enormous benefits to both Israel and Jordan. There have been gas supply agreements between the countries. Israel has made an agreement to supply gas from the yet to be developed Leviathan gas field to Jordan, in spite of local opposition within Jordan that they would be dependent on Israel for their energy. Already Tamar gas is being supplied to Israel's Dead Sea chemical works, and only a short connecting pipe was needed to supply Tamar gas to the Jordanian Dead Sea works, just across the border. Our section heading is taken from a long and thoughtful article published in the *BESA Center Perspective Papers No. 323* 27-Dec-15 Here are a few extracts:

An important common thread runs, if sometimes invisibly, through a number of apparently unrelated policy decisions and actions made by Israel in recent years.

All have to do with **Israel's strategic interest in, and long-standing commitment to, the safety, security, stability and prosperity of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.**

The article listed matters like Jordan's involvement in reducing tensions on the Temple Mount, and the ISIS advances on the Golan.

It also includes economic policy matters such as the Netanyahu government's often bitter political struggle (against a rising tide of populist resistance) to ensure the ability to export gas from Israel's offshore fields; maritime trade arrangements with Turkey and new provisions for traffic at border crossings, as well as Israel's over-flight policy; ongoing policy on water allocation to Jordan, well beyond the requirements of the Israel-Jordan peace treaty; and a move to implement the Red-Dead (Red Sea to Dead Sea) water carrier plan, including a planned large desalinization plant in Aqaba (which would facilitate mutual water supplies).

The stability and prosperity of Jordan has been a central element of Israeli national security policy for three generations of Israeli leaders—despite the wars of 1948 and 1967, and despite other times of tension.

Despite visible signs of Jordan-Israel tensions during the troubled summer of 2015, new and concrete understandings between the two countries recently have been reached at the highest political level (with the US Secretary of State in the loop). This includes an understanding to uphold the status quo on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif Compound and to curb and reduce the impact of provocateurs. Despite efforts by Palestinian Authority elements to subvert these arrangements, Israeli-Jordanian cooperation has led to a reduction of tensions surrounding the compound, even if Palestinian violence (and PA incitement) has yet to abate.

This should come as no surprise. A persistent and profound recognition of mutual interests (and mutual enemies) has led both countries—regardless of who has been in power in Israel at any given time—**to seek strategic understandings and remove causes of tension.** *ibid*

Jordan has coped with the influx of over a million Syrian refugees, putting the EU to shame, but then Jordan has had the help of Israel, for it is her interest that these don't become hotbeds of Arab dissent.

By now, gas supply is also within reach, with a small Israeli supply line already being completed to the Jordanian Dead Sea Works; to be followed by a major line for general consumption. Part of the fierce internal debate in Israel over the "outline" for use of Israel's offshore gas fields involved the strongly-held position of the **government** in favor of exporting gas to **neighboring countries** and **peace partners**, with **Jordan** at the top of the list.

There are additional arrangements under discussion to enhance stability and prosperity in Jordan. The conflict in Syria has made overland traffic from Jordan through Syria to Turkey and Europe all but impossible. Jordan's trade and economic growth has suffered tremendously. So Israel is investing in a large-scale

trade route from Turkey to Jordan (and points beyond) through the Israeli port of Haifa. *ibid*

Israel is building security fencing along the Jordan Valley, similar to the one across her Egyptian border. This is not to isolate Jordan but to help her!

Israel is not turning its back on its neighbor, nor is this an indication that Jordan is a danger of collapse. Rather, it is another tool designed to **enhance mutual security**.

By severely reducing the temptation to use Jordanian territory as a route of infiltration—now that the direct route from Sinai has been all but hermetically closed—this new barrier will actually help Jordan cope even more effectively with African migrant workers, drug traffickers, and others who abuse the present conditions. Israel's experience along its relatively new barrier with Egypt indicates that **cooperation actually** has been **enhanced** with the **Egyptians**, rather than eroded, since the barrier construction. *ibid*

Israel shares regular air force training with the Jordan air force. On joint exercises held in the US, Israeli refuelling planes looked after the needs of both countries. Israel has supplied helicopters and drones to Jordan as well as armaments. There is a good understanding between the countries two leaders.

Israel and Egypt

Similar agreements have been made to supply gas to Egypt, and in spite of the large field discovered in Egyptian waters, it looks as if Egypt will require Israel's gas; her growing economy is a voracious energy consumer. Egypt also needs additional sources of gas to meet her export commitments. Israeli intelligence information has been of great help to Egypt as it has to Jordan. Behind the scenes there is considerable cooperation, especially on handling the Gaza, Hamas situation. We saw in Ch. 9, the problem that Israel, Egypt and Cyprus share in getting their gas to the European market. It needs peace and security for them to take—from a purely human point of view—the logical step of cooperating together to achieve this. It will also need the help of the now newly growing dominant power in the region—Russia!

Israel and the Gulf States

Replenished from the east. Or, filled from the east. To the east of Israel lie the southern Arab States, and further away, India and China.

Israeli ties with the Southern Arab nations are steadily growing, mainly in behind-the-scenes cooperation on intelligence. The United Arab Emirates have approved an Israeli diplomatic office in their country. It is part of Israel's involvement under the auspices of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), a multilateral body with 144 member states, which has its headquarters in Abu Dhabi. The *Washington Institute* 30-Nov-15 article was headlined **Israel's Gulf Breakthrough**.

I have just counted up over 20 articles posted in *Snippets* in the past six months about Israel's ties with the Gulf States. This was one posted in June entitled: **A Rare Partnership. Years of Secret Saudi-Israeli Dialogue Ripens into Common Policy Against Iran**, *Debka* 12-Jun-15

In covering a meeting between Israeli Foreign Ministry Director General Dore Gold and former Saudi government adviser Anwar Eski on June 4 at the Council of Foreign Relations think tank in Washington, the *Bloomberg* writer Eli Lake disclosed that emissaries of the two governments had secretly met five times in recent months to talk about Iran.

He quoted American sources as reporting that these meetings took place in India, Italy and the Czech Republic, although the encounter in Washington was the first public occasion.

Clandestine Saudi-Israeli parleys have been going on for at least four years since 2011, as *DEBKA Weekly* has reported more than once—all of them, apart from two, taking place in Jordan.

The two sides trade intelligence on current events in the region, especially concerning Iran and Syria, and share items which one side believes is important to the other. They often coordinate actions that follow decisions agreed between the prime minister and senior princely officials.

Heads of Israel, Saudi and Jordanian military intelligence agencies have also met in Amman and Rabat, Morocco.

Israel's armaments industry moreover turns out products that meet the requirements of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf emirates. These items are kept closely secret, but the scale of the Gulf munitions market is indicated by the intensity of the interest displayed by China.

Israel and India

As we have been watching over the past few years, Israel has strong ties to India. In June, the Indian Prime Minister, Mr Modi made an historic visit to Jerusalem. As one headline put it:

[Israel is India's 'Most Trusted Ally' in the Middle East, Among Top Friends in the World](#)

“Israel is India's most trusted ally in West Asia and one dare say among the three or four closest friends India has anywhere in the world. It is not merely a key defense equipment supplier, but is willing to make serious investments in manufacture of military hardware in India, a prospect that has the potential to revolutionise India's economy,”

Additionally, Israel has helped India develop its agro-technology, from dairy production to drip irrigation and horticulture across several Indian states. Ashok Malik. *The Asian Age*. 15-Jun-15

As the EU becomes increasingly hostile, pushing for a solution to the intractable Palestinian problem and also insisting on Israeli products and produce from the West Bank, being distinctly labelled as such, Israel is turning eastward. The EU (as a block) is Israel's 2nd largest market, so she won't be turning her back completely, but increasing frustration with the EU is driving Israel to make agreements with other nations, especially to the east.

Growing ties with China

They please themselves in the children of strangers. RV “strike hands with”, that is, ‘make deals with’, ‘make alliances with’ other nations. Israel has trading agreements with many nations, she has just signed many deals with the Chinese. China is her third biggest trade partner, with over 1,000 Israeli companies operating in China. This year, Israel became a founding member of the *Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank* (AIIB). The Chinese are investing in Israel and in the first six months invested more than \$2bn in Israeli companies. The Chinese conglomerate *Fosun International* in June this year bought a 52% stake in the Israeli conglomerate *Dalek Group*, part of the consortium that own the Tamar and Leviathan gas fields and who were forced to divest under Israeli Government monopoly fears. *Forsun* in September bought up the well-known *Ahava* cosmetics firm.

Japan, “positively biased” towards Israel

Israel is now courting the Japanese. Last year PM Netanyahu visited Japan and this year the Japanese PM Abe visited Israel as part of his six-day Middle East tour, along with a 100-strong entourage; he was warmly welcomed.

The delegation comprising of government officials and executives from private enterprises sought business and investment opportunities in Israel in collaboration with government and private organizations. The general public of Japan is positively biased towards Jews and actively seeks business relationship with them. As of 2014 the total business between Israel and Japan amounted to \$ 1.75 billion.

The Israeli cabinet has approved measures to boost ties by 50 percent between both trade partners and set up grants for research projects. *Financial Buzz* 30-Jan-15

At the end of November, an Israeli trade mission went to Japan to increase Israeli exports to their vast car industry. Israel has many innovative products of interest to motor manufacturers.

Commonwealth

Israel was disappointed at the falling from power in the November elections of Mr Harper of Canada. He has been a very staunch friend and openly given his support to Israel. Justin Trudeau is unlikely to have the same enthusiasm for Israel.

Australia has been a long-term ally of Israel going back to the help they gave in WWI to Britain as she took the land from the Turks. Australia has had 25 years of a thriving economy and rising growth, until recently when the Asian market which she relied on began to falter. In a quest to diversify away from food and minerals, Australia is seeking to encourage start-ups in the high-tech industry. And it was to Israel that a recent delegation turned to see just how the experts do it!

Indeed, if there's one area where Israel actually excels, it's in start-ups. Israel ranks fifth on Bloomberg's index of the world's most innovative countries (after South Korea, Japan, Germany and Finland) and attracts more venture capital per capita than any country on earth. *Times of Israel* 09-Nov-15

We have already remarked on the trade links with India.

Israel and the PLO

Much to Hamas' fury, the PLO leadership continues to have contacts with the Israeli government, quietly and on the side-lines of meetings. In spite of President Abbas' lack of legitimacy as the PLO leader—there have been no elections for many years—he continues to cling to power. Abbas has proved to be an intractable partner in the Peace Talks, stating—especially to his Arab audiences and rarely revealed in the Western Press—that he wants to see Israel wiped off the map. In spite of the noisy rhetoric, they know that Israel has the balance of power in the region.

New prospects for Peace and Safety

From Israel's perspective, her foes lie in Iran and ISIS. Her military superiority gives her confidence that she can deal with Hamas and the PLO and even Lebanon. It is not hard to see the great strength Israel would feel to have gained, if she works in partnership with Russia. Scripture guides us that this may be the case. It will be against the wishes of Obama, though he will be out of office at the end of 2016. He has put pressure on Mr Netanyahu not to work with the Russians in the development of her gas fields. Yet it is only Russia that could bring the possibility of the security that Israel needs and that we know has to be apparent at the time of the end. So although it is impossible to entirely see how this time of peace and security takes place, yet we can begin to see in the new situation with Russia in Syria, a possible pathway. The scripturally-stated alliance with *the one that smites her*, Gog, gives us the key. Russia will be the one that thinks an evil, or treacherous thought and breaks her word, in order to smite and plunder Israel.

BRITAIN REBUILDING HER MERCHANT POWER

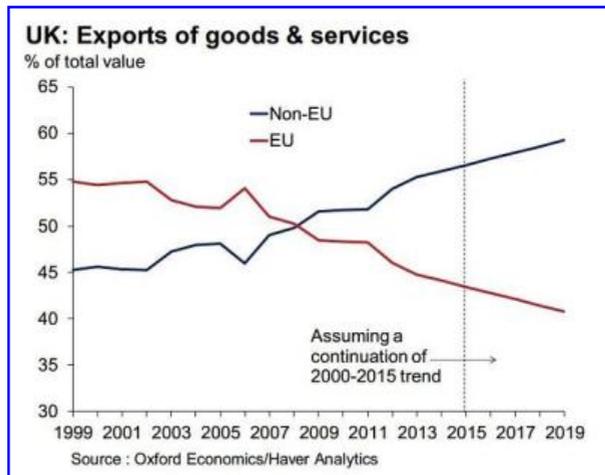
What a transformation in Britain's economy! It is hard to recall the time when she was the sick man of Europe! While the rest of Europe and the eurozone especially, is still in the doldrums, with higher than normal unemployment, Britain is doing comparatively well and the economy is growing strongly. She is forecast to overtake the economy of Germany eventually. She is straining at the lead to be free of the enmeshing regulations of the EU. She has thrived on world trade, and after the fiasco of 40 years in the doldrums, her sails are filling with the trade winds, as angelic hands move forward the destiny of Britain. In spite of the desires of her rulers, greater powers are in operation ensuring that she sails away from the coasts of Europe and ventures once again on the oceans of the world!

So our interest in Britain is not an academic one, it is so wonderful to see Britain at last desiring to be independent of the millstone of Europe, free to play the role of Tarshish as portrayed in Scripture.

British reliance on trade with the EU falls to an all-time low

Interestingly, the export figures for April show that Britain's trade with Europe has now fallen to 45%—a record low—showing that the weakness of Europe has forced UK exporters to turn to more buoyant markets.

Just 45.1pc of the goods that the UK exported that month went to the EU, down from 52pc in the previous year.



The data showed that Britain's overall trade deficit, including both goods and services, narrowed dramatically in April.

The proportion of the UK's goods that are exported to the European Union has been shrinking since the early 2000s, when it accounted for around 55% of total UK goods exports. *Daily Telegraph* 10-Jun-15

UK set to head western Europe's best-performing economies

Years of austerity for Britain are at last paying off. Having driven wage rates down to one of the lowest amongst the larger European economies, Britain has repatriated many manufacturing jobs which had been lost overseas. As living standards and

prices have risen in the Far East—the traditional low-cost manufacturing centre—they have been less competitive, especially in the light of the comparatively long lead times because of sea transport.

The UK is set to become the best performing economy in western Europe next year, and is likely to overtake powerhouses Germany and Japan in the 2030s, a report said today.

The World Economic League Table from think tank the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr), said the UK is set to rise up the world rankings due to the strength of its IT and software industries as well as its culturally diverse workforce.

The UK is currently the fifth largest economy in the world, with a gross domestic product (GDP) worth three trillion US dollars (£2 trillion) this year, behind Germany at 3.3 trillion US dollars (£2.2 trillion), and Japan in third spot at 4.1 trillion US dollars (£2.7 trillion).

“With the deficit reduced by almost two thirds as a share of GDP since its peak in 2009-10, an average of 1,000 extra people in work each day and employment rates at a record high, the Government’s plan for a more prosperous future is delivering for working people.” *Daily Mail* 27-Dec-15

Britain the new Silicon Valley of Europe

David Cameron’s government have worked hard to tap into the talent that arose due to so many university leavers being unable to obtain jobs during the height of the recession. Instead, they set up their own businesses. Such entrepreneurs were drawn into Tech Hubs and able to voice the obstacles that they were facing, in breakfast meetings at 10 Downing Street. Many changes were made to assist these new start-up companies, with grants, access to finance and incentives. David Cameron brought in an American business woman, Joanna Shields, as his digital advisor. She had held management roles in the likes of Google and Facebook and had been working in London for Facebook. She now spearheads the government’s technology initiatives, which are beginning to rival the original Silicon Valley in America! (Extracted from *Washington Post* 29-Jan-15)

Britain’s drive to bring in Israeli start-ups, who have reached the stage in their development where they need to market their products, to Britain, rather than for them to go half a world away to America, is paying off.

London overtakes New York as the world’s best financial centre

Britain has retained her position as Europe’s top financial centre, who, because of her time-zone positioning is able to trade with America and the Far East. This year she has leapfrogged New York to be the most competitive financial centre in the world.

London is the most competitive financial centre in the world, overtaking New York and utterly dominating the rankings compiled by analysts at the Z/Yen Group this year.

The capital topped every single category in the index, with the best business environment, the most developed financial centre, the most impressive infrastructure, the best human capital and the top overall reputation. *Daily Telegraph* 24-Sep-15

The Chancellor's efforts to reduce red-tape and taxation on businesses has resulted in the UK moving up two places in the annual *Doing Business Report* produced by the World Bank. Now in 6th place, she has overtaken the US and is the highest ranked of the G7 countries according to the *Daily Telegraph* 27-Oct-15. The time to set up a new business has also fallen from 6 days to 4 days, against the world-wide average of 20 days!

Britain is our bridgehead to Europe because of its world-class talent

The Nissan car company has chosen to invest still further in Britain's car-making skills, choosing their Sunderland car plant to produce their first compact luxury car. Under the above headline their chief performance officer wrote:

The decision to manufacture the Q30 in Sunderland reflects our confidence in UK production quality and efficiency. This model has been developed jointly by our engineers in Japan, our London design centre and our European technical centre at Cranfield, harnessing the world-class automotive talent based in the UK.

It represents more than £250m of new investment at Sunderland, a site where Nissan has invested more than £3bn since opening the plant in the 1980s. We are also creating hundreds of jobs in the plant—taking total employment inside the factory to more than 6,700—by expanding our production to include the Q30. *Daily Telegraph* 30-Nov-15

Who needs Europe? We can trade with the whole world, says Cameron

Britain knows what global trade is all about. In past centuries she ruled the waves with an Empire so big that there was always somewhere in it where the sun hadn't set! That she lost it, nobody disputes. If our understanding of scripture is correct, she will yet see a rebirth of the Empire, which will come to a glorious end when it is handed over to Israel's King.

The heading reflects words that Mr Cameron wrote in an article in the *Daily Mail* 24-Jul-15

When it comes to new markets, Britain means business.

We need to go to the ends of the earth to sell our wares—to recapture the outward-looking, enterprising spirit that made us great.

Next week I'll be packing a plane full of business people and heading to South East Asia—my first trip outside Europe since the general election.

This is a region on the rise, and I'm determined that Britain grabs every opportunity that brings.

By 2030, South East Asia is predicted to be the fourth largest single market in the world. In other words, the wind of economic change is blowing east—and not just to China and India.

For too long, Britain has seen the weather-vane pointing to these far-flung lands, but continued to rely on our European neighbours for trade and investment.

I want us to be nothing less than the modern world's most open, trade-minded nation. To do that, we must tap into markets outside Europe; **to look to the Commonwealth and beyond**. There's plenty of potential.

Last year, the value of foreign investment in Britain broke the £1 trillion mark for the first time. *Daily Mail* 24-Jul-15

In October the President of China, Xi Jinping was on a State visit to Britain and was warmly welcomed—the beginning of “a golden time” in Sino-British relations, said Mr Cameron.

Britain's leaders have enthusiastically embraced China. Two years ago, Chancellor George Osborne announced that London would become the first Western hub for trading renminbi and that Chinese banks would be allowed to open branches there. Then in June, Britain ignored U.S. objections and signed the Articles of Agreement of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, widely regarded as a Chinese rival to the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. During Xi's most recent visit in October, London announced not only that it would ease visa restrictions on rich Chinese tourists but also that the state-owned China General Nuclear Power Group would invest \$9 billion in the new Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, despite concerns about China gaining access to nuclear secrets. Meanwhile, negotiations with China continue for a \$16 billion investment in High Speed 2, a high-speed rail line linking London to northern England. *Daily Telegraph* 05-Nov-15

Britain reasserts itself as a serious military power

The *ships of Tarshish* are to *be broken* (Psa. 48:7) in the coming conflict that sees Israel invaded; it sees Britain humbled too and with her Biblical background, able and willing to help Christ's work of bringing the scattered Jews back to their homeland. This sounds a bit contradictory. Probably it is Britain's military ships that will be destroyed—she has a vast merchant navy—as well as “ships of the air” that could be used to transport Jews from distant lands.

The timing of Britain's quinquennial [5-year] Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), published on November 23rd, is in one sense propitious. The horrifying events in Paris, ten days before, and the preparations for an imminent House of Commons vote to authorise air strikes against Islamic State (IS) in Syria, provide a potent reminder to voters that security threats are real. The document also reflects the fact that since Russia demonstrated its willingness to redraw the map of Europe through the use of military force in Ukraine, it is no longer possible to dismiss state-on-state warfare as an outlandishly remote eventuality, the implicit assumption of the last SDSR in 2010.

The latest review sets out to repair some of the damage caused by the previous, hastily cobbled-together effort. It confirms the government's recent commitment to meeting the NATO target of spending at least 2% of GDP on defence, for at least the five years of this Parliament.

This SDSR is a step towards restoring Britain's reputation as a **serious military power**, and ending the fashion among Washington security analysts for sneering at Britain's declining capability. *Economist* 23-Nov-15

UK building first permanent Middle East base since 1971

Britain has had a long association with the Arab Gulf State, Bahrain. This was probably the original Dedan of Ezekiel 38:13. In October this year, work began on a new, £15m (\$23m) port facility, funded mainly by the Bahrainian government, for Britain to have her first permanent base in the region, since Britain's ignominious withdrawal in the '70's. It will be able to host her new aircraft carriers which are currently being built.

The military base in Bahrain is aimed at helping Britain and its allies "reinforce stability in the Gulf and beyond," says British Foreign Secretary.

For the **first time** since before the Yom Kippur War, the **UK** is to have a **permanent military base** in the **Middle East**, the BBC reported Sunday. The base, which is being built at Mina Salman Port in Bahrain, is intended to support deployments of Royal Navy vessels in the Gulf. *ynetnews* 01-Nov-15

The new facility would be one of the most important Royal Navy bases in the world and would be used for a "whole host of things" including supporting UK operations in Iraq, where RAF jets have been attacking targets as part of a US-led coalition against Islamic State (IS) militants. *BBC* 06-Dec-14

Repairing relations with the Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a key market for Britain. There have been some rocky moments when Britain has complained about human rights abuses there, but the relationship between the two countries is strong.

Saudi Arabia has approved two new programs that would enhance bilateral relations with the UK, despite recent tensions between the two countries.

The Council of Ministers on Monday approved a program that would provide training to Saudi citizens to enable them to work in the units of British industries in the kingdom, Minister of Social Affairs and Acting Minister of Culture and Information Majed Al Qasabi said, according to the official Saudi Press Agency.

The council also authorised discussions with the UK over a cooperation program between the Saudi industry ministry and the United Kingdom Trade and Investment. *ArabianBusiness.com* 03-Nov-15

Britain has long, strong, connections to Jordan and has been helping her with military equipment and training in her struggle against ISIS.

We have already had a look in the previous chapter at Britain's trade with Israel. Israel is the UK's 33rd largest market, but one that is growing and a market being targeted for growth. UK firms SBC, Barclays, Rolls-Royce, GlaxoSmithKline and Unilever have a major presence in Israel. The UK is Israel's second biggest market for Israeli exports, At least 300 Israeli firms have a presence in the UK One out of every seven prescriptions filled by the NHS is from an Israeli pharmaceutical firm.

BRITAIN HEADING FOR A BREXIT?

Ever since Britain joined the Common Market, as the EU was known then, some 41 years ago, Bible watchers have been puzzled why Britain took this step. Scripture is clear that as the latter-day Merchants of Tarshish power, she had to be in the camp of the friends of Israel and not in the European camp of hostility and a desire to eliminate her. Although there was talk of how she must leave, it didn't seem a very likely outcome. How things have changed. Britain is now chaffing at the restrictions the EU places on her as they desire to harm Britain's financial position and global trading position. Who would have speculated that one of the last straws would have been refugees fleeing a civil war in Syria! Yet this is a very real factor, as the implications of absorbing the vast numbers seeking asylum in the EU sinks in.

With English being the standard language of trade, many of the educated refugees desire to live here in Britain as it is the language they have been taught in order to exploit the power of this internet world. They are helping to boost Britain's working population and bringing their skills.

Again 2015 has been a thrilling year for Zion's watchmen as once more our long-held views on Britain's latter-day role, based on Scripture, are seen to be coming into alignment with events on the ground. Those who criticise this understanding say that we are just 'cherry picking' scriptural passages and making them fit today's events. However, they can't explain how Bible students of long ago, even well before Bro Thomas (and he goes back 160 years), were able to point the way to Britain's role, long before Israel was back in the land!

UK elections

On May 7th—the day following the announcement of the new Israeli government—the British went to the polls to elect their new government. It was at a critical time, when the UK's continued membership of the EU was a matter being widely debated ahead of the forthcoming referendum on this issue. The parallels with the situation in Israel which we looked at in Ch. 9 are quite remarkable, as if angelic watchers were telling of the allied roles of these two countries. Like Mr Netanyahu, the pollsters had written off David Cameron and his Conservative Party. The Scottish National Party (SNP) was expecting to make sweeping gains in Scotland and be available as the junior partner in a new Labour coalition. This prospect gave comfort to the EU leaders; Labour and SNP were in favour of Britain remaining in the EU. The UK stock markets however, reacted at such a prospect, billions being wiped off the value of shares.

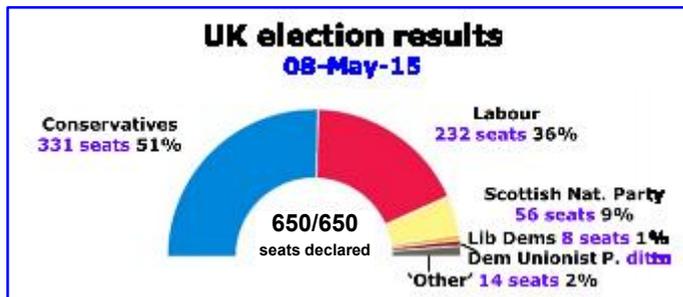
As in Israel, the pollsters were spectacularly wrong, as Cameron had sufficient seats to form a government without a coalition! The stock markets rebounded!

[General election: Pound surges and FTSE 100 gains 2.3%](#)

Investors cheered the result of a Conservative UK government, pushing sterling, share and bond prices firmly higher, with the FTSE 250 equity index of domestic

focused companies climbing to a record peak. ... The pound experiencing its largest one-day rise in five years against the dollar. *Financial Times* 08-May-15

Labour was routed and the UKIP challenge, although winning a very respect-able percentage of the votes, only ended up with one seat, under Britain's archaic election rules.



So, remarkably, both the Israeli coalition and the Conservatives have ended with 51% of the seats, a slim but vital majority. In both cases their detractors were put to shame, and the confident assertions of the forecasters came to nought.

General election: Why did political pollsters get it so wrong?

Published polls ahead of the 2015 general election proved to be a bad prediction of the results.

The Conservatives won the election, with a majority of 12 seats, but polls ahead of May 7 had suggested they would not win a majority. *BBC* 11-May-15

Once more the angels ensured that it was God's Purpose that moved forward and not man's! How right it is that, as a community, we refrain from voting, leaving it in the Hands of God to change the course of history, according to the Divine Master Plan!

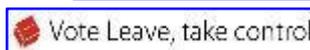
Labour in disarray

In the months that followed the election we witnessed the Labour Party and their newly elected leader, Jeremy Corbyn, in bitter infighting, reducing their ability to be an effective opposition to Britain leaving the EU. Again we marvel at angelic hands, that just at this time the one political party who could have kept Britain firmly anchored in the EU, is having its own internal problems.

Britain may well be waving goodbye!

Steadily as the year has progressed, the polls have shown a growing desire to leave the EU. For the first time they were showing a majority in favour of a Brexit. Two powerful groups backed by industry have been set up. *Leave.eu* and *Vote leave*, who are gaining ground, even as they squabble together! Cameron had hoped to get talks well under way at the December EU Summit meeting, but in

view of more pressing problems, there were some promises to make an effort to keep



Britain on board, but little of substance was agreed. Angela



Breaking the shackles!

Merkel's scowl says it all. (See the picture in full on the back cover.) The matter will be discussed at the next EU Summit 18-19th February under the chairmanship of the Netherlands. Many leaders have indicated that what Cameron is asking for is not possible. Faced with little in



Merkel to Cameron!

the way of concessions, he would have no option, but to recommend, very much against his own wishes, a Brexit! It is so interesting to see how the angels work to make men go down paths they wouldn't normally choose, but circumstances force them along new paths.

The migrant problem

What makes the UK so attractive to other EU members as well as refugees, is Britain's generous welfare system. As part of the reforms that David Cameron wants to introduce to Britain's relationship with the EU is to impose a four-year time limit before immigrants can receive welfare payments. This is causing great anger among the other members as it cuts across another fundamental pillar of the EU, of equal rights for all. However, without this concession there will be a strong British anti-EU feeling. Mr Cameron has promised a UK referendum on the matter.

Faced with an EU which seems powerless to stem the flow of migrants, there is a growing feeling that Britain has had enough and faced with having to find even greater amounts of money to finance the crisis, many are thinking they would be better off outside the EU.

The growing burden of EU membership

There are undoubted benefits of membership, but is the cost of belonging to the EU club worth the membership fees? Those that argue for continued membership do so because it is safe, we know what we are getting. They say, to get reforms Britain must stay at the heart of the EU, or she will lose any ability to make changes if outside the



central core. Similar arguments were made for those that campaigned long and hard for Britain to sign up to the euro! In hindsight one can see how Britain would have been ensnared with the euro-zone, instead of having the freedom to work her own way out of the economic recession that has so deeply affected the rest of Europe.

Those advocating Britain retaining its independence, point to the present lack of influence. With 28 members, Britain's vote within the EU now is only 8% of the total. 72 times Britain has tried to block EU regulations, only to be outvoted and has therefore had to implement as law, what she wanted to reject. Outside the EU, Britain's parliament would have relevance instead of being a rubber-stamp to the EU policy makers. She would control her own fishing and prevent the EU raids on her fish-stocks. The vast food subsidies would be removed, enabling households to save considerably on their shopping bills as they would no longer be propping up inefficient French farmers. No longer would there be increasing contributions to the insatiable EU budget, which for many years has not been passed by its own auditors.

The EU's share of the world markets has shrunk from 37% of world GDP when Britain joined in 1973, to under 20% today. No wonder Britain's exports to the rest of the world are growing nearly three times as fast as her exports to the EU.

The proposed referendum

The UK government had drawn up a referendum question that required a simple YES/NO answer as to whether Britain should remain a member of the EU. However, the electoral commission stepped in and said it was a biased question, as people prefer to say Yes rather than No! So it was amended to: "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?", with "REMAIN a member" or "LEAVE the EU" tick boxes.



The great question is what date David Cameron picks for holding it. There are various procedures that have to be gone through and so it is unlikely to be before the latter-half of 2016. It has to be held by the end of 2017. The migrant problem is expected to grow next year, putting greater pressure on a Brexit. Also the EU leaders are less likely to have much time to deal with Britain's requests for Treaty changes as the financial situation, especially for Greece, becomes more unstable. That is why Mr Cameron had hoped it could all be settled by the end of 2015!

One of the interesting influences on the Referendum will be that of the Commonwealth votes. There are many people living in the UK of Commonwealth origin. Britain joining the Common Market stopped much of her trade with the Commonwealth countries; many felt betrayed. The opportunity for Britain to leave the EU would open up Commonwealth trade again.

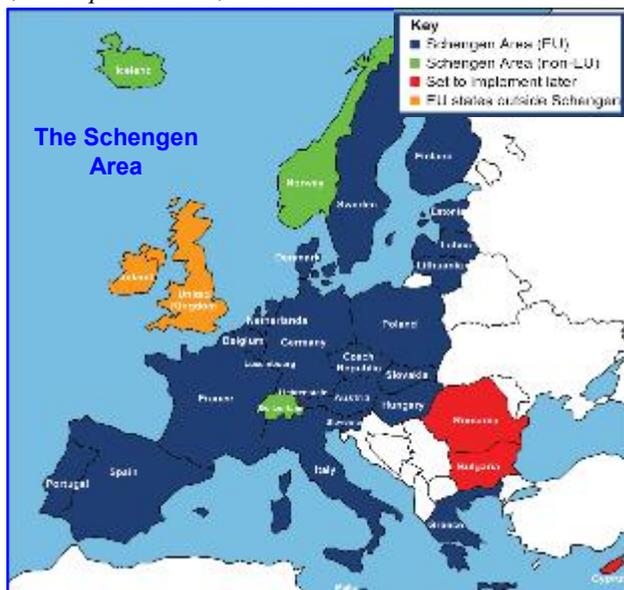
A very conservative projected estimate based on the 2011 census shows 894,087 eligible Commonwealth voters.

Those who think these numbers are insignificant are wrong. If we repeated the 2015 General Election turnout of 30 million, and all Commonwealth citizens in the UK voted, it would represent around 3%. In a simple Yes/No vote that would offer up to a 6% swing. In an unexpectedly close referendum on Britain's place not just in Europe but in the wider world, this matters. *Daily Telegraph* 11-Aug-15

We wait and watch the many influences that are coming into play with great interest, as we wait for Britain to have the courage to sail away to ports new.

THE EU—A LEANER BEAST EMERGING?

The migrant crisis has thrown the EU into turmoil. The central pillar of the EU was free movement of peoples, with open borders, so once within the EU boundaries one could travel at will without border checks. The Schengen Area covers most of the EU, the UK being a notable exception, refusing to remove the control of her borders. The problem is that the external borders are very porous and it is not difficult for people to cross by sea or land into the EU. Once there they can claim asylum and be cared for. Greece and Italy especially are easily accessed by sea. This modern-day mass



migration is having a profound effect on the running of the EU. Can it still maintain open borders when faced with this tide of humanity? Will it result in a smaller, more integrated EU, corresponding much more to the Holy Roman Empire of old?

Europe faces a tidal wave of migrants

Out of a total of 1,005,504 arrivals by 21 December, the vast majority—816,752—arrived by sea in Greece, the IOM [Int. Org. for Migration] said. A further 150,317 arrived by sea in Italy, with much smaller figures for Spain, Malta and Cyprus. A total of 34,215 crossed by land routes, such as over the Turkish-Bulgarian border.

The overall figure is a four-fold increase from 2014's figures, and has largely been driven by Syrians fleeing their country's civil war. Afghans, Iraqis and Eritreans fleeing conflict and repression are the other significant national groups. *The Guardian* 22-Dec-15

Germany earlier in the year welcomed the refugees with open arms, but later Angela Merkel had to back-track as numbers kept on increasing, putting a strain on local schools, hospitals and housing. Because Britain has one of the most generous benefit systems, she became a magnet as many tried to cross into Britain in and under the many transport lorries crossing the Channel. The Channel Tunnel was a nightly

battle ground between security staff and crowds of migrants willing to risk their lives for a new start in Britain.

In addition, were those from the newer EU Member States who could cross legitimately into Britain and claim benefits, sometimes for families that they had left behind in their home country. With UK benefits tied to wage rates, considerably higher than comparative wage rates in the poorer EU Member countries, the British Benefit system was a pot of gold! This caused Britain to want to change its welfare system to exclude those from Member Countries until a person had worked in the UK for four years. This has been greatly opposed, as it breaks a fundamental principle that where-ever you are in the EU; the same rules should apply.

At the same time Europe was facing the dilemma of how to uphold the principle of free-movement enshrined in the Schengen Agreement, faced with even greater numbers of migrants expected in 2016—some officials are talking of up-to 3 million!

The popularity of more extremist political parties also causes anxiety to the EU leaders. Could the EU begin to disintegrate? With unemployment stubbornly remaining high in the poorer southern EU States, this has led to voters turning away from the traditional parties, who have proved ineffectual, to the more radical parties, who make grand promises of a better way!

Hollande and Merkel join forces to push for eurozone integration

To help plug the porous borders, the EU announced in December the proposal to set up a full-blown Border Force to replace the existing **Frontex** (from French: *Frontières extérieures* = “external borders”).

Mr Juncker will unveil plans to create an EU Border and Coast Guard agency in a bid to halt the influx of 1.5 million refugees expected to attempt to enter Europe next year and save the Schengen zone from collapse.

In the largest extension of the EU’s powers since the creation of the single currency, the European Commission will be able to **deploy the force to countries that have not requested help manning their borders**.

“The EU appears willing to trample over the sovereignty of member states at any opportunity. **The UK will inevitably end up footing the bill for this latest Brussels power grab.**” *Daily Telegraph* 12-Dec-15

This is a “watch this space” matter, but indicates the way things are moving towards an increasingly integrated control of EU Member States.

In November, Jean-Claude Juncker, the powerful EU commission president, was calling for a European Army to be set up and also re-floated the idea of a two-speed Europe, as a means of retaining Britain’s membership, whilst allowing parts of the EU to integrate more closely. Other EU leaders are opposed to this change in the way the EU works.

In October, EU history was made as, for only the second time, the French and German leaders made a joint speech to the European Parliament.

Motivated by the urgent need for reform, the French and German heads of state will put aside their deep political differences and champion eurozone reform together, *EurActiv France* reports.

François Hollande and Angela Merkel will make a historic joint address to the European Parliament on Wednesday (7 October). Announced at the end of September, this intervention is the fruit of the efforts of European Parliament President Martin Schulz.

The idea was first raised at a dinner attended by the three leaders on 30 January this year.

While the refugees' crisis has added a new dimension to the rifts within the European Union, the initial objective of this address was to deepen economic integration.

And it is the future of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) that is behind this French-German intervention, only the second in the history of the European Parliament. 25 years ago, Helmut Kohl and François Mitterrand took to the podium together to discuss the future of Europe after the fall of the Berlin wall.

The symbolism of the occasion is strong. Heads of state from two different political families rarely come together in this way if the situation is not urgent. "But it also shows that the relationship between the French and the Germans has become closer over the year 2015," a source close to the two leaders told *EurActiv*. *EurActiv* 01-Oct-15

Juncker: 'Time to deepen European integration'

"We have to deepen economic and monetary union for a simple reason: Our monetary union is not optimal. We have an independent central bank. But we don't have a European government. So we have to have rules to replace the non-existent European government," said Juncker.

He indicated that simple facts on the ground may soon leave the EU without the luxury of debating where it wants to go and its position in the world.

By the middle of the century, he noted, Europeans will represent just seven percent of the world's population. "We are the smallest continent. Our relative part of the global GDP will shrink. Not one single European country will be a member of the G7 in 25 years from now. We will disappear in terms of our economic weight."

"So the time has come to **deepen European integration** instead of re-introducing national divisions." *EUObserver* 17-Mar-15

Political integration was one of the core visions of the founding fathers of the EU. The *Beast* system in Revelation Ch. 16 appears to be a political community.

The Dutch plans for HRE Mk II

There was a very interesting report of some plans which the Dutch government had drawn up in case the current EU begins to break up. They have not been discussed in the Netherlands parliament, or in public, only by their Cabinet.

According to *De Telegraaf*, the Dutch Cabinet recently discussed a plan to create a smaller version of the Schengen Agreement that would include only the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany and Austria. The report was only partially dismissed by the Dutch foreign affairs minister, who denied plans to create a smaller version of the Schengen zone but admitted that his government was considering an alliance of “like-minded countries” to reduce the influx of asylum seekers in Northern Europe.



The group of countries the Dutch Cabinet allegedly discussed are developed Northern European nations that have recently seen a spike in the arrival of migrants. In all these countries, increasingly popular nationalist parties have criticized the European Union’s handling of the refugee crisis. Consequently, any plans to limit the arrival of foreigners and to improve border controls would be positively received by the countries on the Netherlands’ list, or at least by significant segments of their populations.

An alliance among the governments mentioned by *De Telegraaf* is plausible even beyond asylum policies. These are nations that tend to have similar views when it comes to financial and economic matters. They also oppose the idea of the European Union as a transfer union in which wealthy countries in the north subsidize those in the south. Some economists and politicians have argued that, should the eurozone collapse, it would make sense for these economies to create their own currency union. Parties like *Alternative for Germany* have suggested the creation of a “northern eurozone” with a similar line-up of members.

Put simply, this is **not a random list of countries, but a collection of states that share deep cultural and historic links. In fact, the map that the Dutch government allegedly has in mind bears a remarkable resemblance to the Holy Roman Empire in the late 18th century.** *Stratfor* 18-Nov-15

How the Volkswagen Scandal Could Affect the Eurozone

The scale of the VW emissions scandal has the potential to have far-reaching effects on Germany. It involves the largest motor manufacturer in the world and its output accounts for a substantial part of Germany’s automotive sector exports which form

17% of Germany's exports. It seems that VW were not alone in “fiddling the figures”. The cost of recalls and potential fines have caused VW shares to plunge in value. From the high of €255 in March, they fell to €95 in October, recovering to €133 at the year end, virtually half their value from their peak this year.

... the eurozone's trade surplus relies on Germany even more than it did before, and any impact on the German export sector will also affect the eurozone-wide figures.

Thus Volkswagen's woes may expand to Germany's automotive sector, which may in turn expand to the German export machine, dimming the one bright light in Germany's plan for Europe—its own performance. But whether or not Volkswagen's problems remain localized, the German dream of the eurozone becoming an export powerhouse still looks doomed. *Stratfor* 23-Sep15

How the Migrant Crisis Could Accelerate a Grexit

The comparatively short crossing from Turkey to various Greek islands and from there by ferry to Athens, is a favoured migrant route. Then by land to Macedonian border and onwards towards Germany. However, the Macedonian border has now been sealed off with fencing, trapping many migrants in Greece. The left-wing Syriza government has been very helpful, housing them and looking after them. This is stirring the right-wing parties who are more against looking after the migrants. With the continuing euro problems for Greece's precarious economy, *Stratfor* was foreseeing this could bring the downfall of the coalition government, which has seen several of its members desert the coalition, greatly reducing its majority to just 3 seats.

The growth of anti-migrant sentiment across Europe is helping to empower the right, which traditionally takes a harder line against migrants, and Greece has the potential to experience the same phenomenon. Up to now, Greece's right-wing parties have been fairly subdued, partly as a result of dark national memories of military dictatorship in the 1970s. Nevertheless, this confluence of events could benefit the far right, which is pontificating a combination of rebelliousness, anti-austerity and anti-immigration sentiments. To complicate matters, the Syriza government is in a coalition with one of Greece's right-wing parties, the Independent Greeks. Though this party has somewhat tempered its excesses since being in government, others are as ardent as ever. Golden Dawn, a far-right party that received 7 percent of the vote in September's election, could well be placed to take advantage of these difficult circumstances. Given that Golden Dawn is extremely Eurosceptic, such a development would surely bring Greece much closer to the exit from the European Union that the country has been moving toward for the past six years. *Stratfor* 24-Nov-15

A further election and a right-wing government would bring Greece into conflict with the rest of Europe and there would be a strong call for a Grexit. Russia is waiting in the wings for just this event. Without having to fire a shot, Russia could establish a strong foothold in Greece, thus ringing Turkey and making it much easier to pull the noose around Turkey!

MIDDLE EAST—SOUTHERN STATES

As we bring our review towards its close there are two further matters we need to consider. The first is the remarkable change taking place in the southern Arab States—the Gulf States and Egypt. They are roughly on the territory of the old King of the South in the days of the Greek Empire. Our interest lies in our understanding that at the time of the end, this group has a latter-day fulfilment, based on what we are told in Daniel 11:40. The other area is the Papacy and the Orthodox Churches, for, as we saw earlier, they play an important role in gathering the nations to the battle of the great day of God Almighty. (Rev 16:15) We look at these in Ch. 15.

Saudi Arabia—a trading nation

Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil? Eze. 38:13

In past issues we have considered the evidence for regarding the Gulf States as representing the latter-day power of Sheba and Dedan. As we know, they are working with the *Merchants of Tarshish*—Britain—and *her young lions*—America and the Commonwealth countries. Now it is not a necessity that Sheba and Dedan are themselves trading nations. They are the areas where the trading powers come and set up business. Yet it is so interesting to see that Saudi Arabia, the biggest of the Gulf States, is embracing the trading concept. Saudi is a bit of a one-shop country—oil. She has seen the price of oil tumble in recent times, greatly reducing her income and forcing her to dip into her reserves to meet her budgets. Saudi had the foresight, a number of years ago, to plan for this situation. Her position spanning between the Persian Gulf on the NE and the Red Sea on the SW, as well as being on one of the world's major trade routes, has given her a wonderful geo-graphical advantage. 27% of world trade sails up the Red Sea and through the Suez Canal. Egypt has this year partially completed her upgrade to the Suez, cutting down transit time by eliminating one-way bottle-necks.

On the shores of the Red Sea, Saudi Arabia is building King Abdullah Port and City, which consists of various zones. Port Abdullah is a state-of-the-art container port. Nearby is a commercial zone, an accommodation



zone and a shopping zone. The Port is now in operation and the housing and other zones are in progress, to be completed over the next few years. With high-speed rail links and roads this will link with centres of population and other similar port/cities under construction or planned. The Saudi Landbridge project is a railway link from coast to coast, enabling rapid land transit of containers, instead of shipping them all the way round the coast.

Changed Arab position on Palestinians

We saw in Ch. 10 Israel's increasing co-operation with the Gulf States, so we will not deal with that aspect here. What has been very interesting to observe in recent years is how the Israeli-Palestinian "problem" has been side-lined. Many Arabs have little sympathy with the Palestinians and their incessant cry of being the under-dog. Many Palestinians are prospering where they are willing to work with the Israelis. As the year ended, Israel announced a considerable aid package to enhance cooperation in order to lift Palestinian living standards.

Although the Palestinian struggle is rated as the root cause of the troubles of the Middle East, it has become abundantly clear that this is far from the case. Arabs fighting Arabs in the past few years of the misnamed "Arab Spring", have caused far more deaths than in all the clashes involving Israel since 1948!

Under the headline [Extremists no longer welcome](#), *Israel Hayom* 28-Oct-15 stated:

The Arab world's **silence** during this recent wave of terrorism, led mostly by knife-wielding Palestinian teenagers, is **deafening**, and it represents a certain lack of support for the Palestinians.

The Arab nations seem willing to leave these radical elements to deal with the mess they have caused by themselves. This time, the wave of terrorism not only fails to represent the Arab struggle against Israel, it fails to represent even the Palestinians themselves.

The **Arab world's roaring silence is actually commendable**. In the past, the slightest of incidents in Judea and Samaria, let alone on the Temple Mount, would have been enough to see masses take to the streets. Now these streets are empty, even in places prone to unrest like Cairo or Amman.

Arab media has also marginalized the story, toning down the rhetoric, with the exception of the Qatar-based *Al Jazeera*, where incitement is a reflex.

Israel has been suffering a spate of stabbings in the past few months, her response has been strong and forceful. So far it has been confined to frequent, but isolated attacks by lone youths. The PLO leaders still educate their children to hate and attack the Jews. Martyrdom is glorified and families of 'martyrs' are financially rewarded.

Yemen

Iran has been heavily involved in the troubles in Yemen, seeking to have control over the strategic coastline at the bottom end of the Red Sea. Saudi Arabia and other Arab partners have successfully pushed back the rebels. Peace talks are due to be held early in 2016 and, according to *Debka*, Iran has signalled that she is withdrawing her support for the rebels in Yemen.

POPE FRANCIS AND THE NEW ROMAN EMPIRE

Since becoming Pope in March 2013, Francis has achieved 'great things' in the Roman Catholic Church. In a similar mould to Pope John Paul II, he is not afraid to exert the political power that the church was well known for in past ages. His masterful help with bringing the Cuba "crisis" to an end was remarkable, opening up the way to visit not only Cuba, but the US and the UN headquarters.

Political leaders seek to come and have a talk with this man 'from the other-side of the world'. His Jesuit training is put to good use. His charm and gentleness are the outward face of a steely determination to put the Roman Church back into power, fit for the 21st century and embracing the frog-like spirit of the French Revolution, which the Church had opposed for so long!

The letter that brought the Cuba "crisis" to an end.

The chapter title comes from an article in *Newsweek* 17-Sep-15. It relates to the Pope's intervention in August 2014, in the stalemated talks between Obama and Castro, to end half a century of hostility. Cardinal Alamino carried a personal letter addressed to the two leaders. He had read it to Castro a few days earlier, now in great secrecy, he met with Obama and read the letter to him. It offered the Pope's help in acting as a mediator to resolve the outstanding issues. Both parties agreed and Pope Francis presided over a secret meeting between top officials at a 5-hour meeting at the Vatican. The rest is history and Francis paid a visit to Cuba in September 2015 to mark the reconciliation between a communist and a capitalist country. He then travelled to Washington to great acclaim.

Pope's UN visit highlights resurgence of Vatican diplomacy

It was the 5th time that a Pope has addressed the UN. The previous time was by Benedict XVI in 2008. It was a masterful speech and well received. He covered much ground including an appeal to find a solution to the Syrian situation and the persecution of Christians in the Middle East.

Coaxing U.S.-Cuban reconciliation is just the start: the Pope is making the Holy See a **player in the most pressing global issues** in a **way unseen since** the early days of Pope John Paul II. From the outset of his papacy he has drawn attention to the Mediterranean migrant crisis, and in early September he called on Catholic dioceses, including parishes in the Vatican, to house refugee families. Francis **routinely** speaks out about the **persecution of Christians in Syria and Iraq** as he pushes for action to end the wars there. He praised the controversial nuclear deal between Iran, the U.S. and five other world powers. His 180-page encyclical on the environment has been called "radical" by one prominent environmentalist. And the State Department has asked the Vatican for help on relocating prisoners from the military prison at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, so that it can be closed, a top Obama priority, senior Administration officials tell *TIME*. Secretary of State John Kerry "early on saw **Francis** as a potentially **activist foreign policy Pope**," says one senior State official.

... given his success so far—and the scope of his ambitions—there's little doubt of this Pope's ability to **use the little things to advance big changes**. *Aljazeera* 24-Sep-15

Microstate and Superpower. The Vatican in International Power

This 30-page document by the *Konrad Ardenauer Foundation* Nov 2015 looks at the recent changes and increase in power in the Papacy. It is a micro state, with a population 100,000 times smaller than Germany's and an area that is over 800,000 times smaller, yet wields great political power around the globe! (Incidentally, the Roman Catholic Church is apparently Germany's 2nd biggest employer, with only the State itself employing more people!)

Since the election of Pope Francis in 2013, the **Holy See** has come to play an extremely prominent role in the arena of world politics. The reasons for this enhanced media visibility firstly have to do with the person, the agenda and the biography of this first non-European Pope. The charismatic leadership by the head of the Church is indeed of great importance for the international agenda setting of the Holy See—and thereby an important prerequisite for the effectiveness of its foreign policy. However, based on its special role on the stage of world politics, the Holy See also has **foreign policy resources** and **networks** available that should **not be underestimated**. The Holy See has, in fact, been involved in **central decision-making** and **events of world politics** for a long time, acting patiently behind the scenes, particularly since the middle of the 20th century.

Vatican City only has very limited financial resources, but enjoys enormous symbolic power at a religious, cultural and social level.

This power is based on the territorial, historical, theological and political link between Vatican City and the Catholic Church. Particularly in the second half of the 20th century, the Catholic Church has developed into a **true global player** due to the strong global population growth. With the world population having doubled since the 1970s, the proportion of Catholics has remained stable in percentage terms as the membership of the Catholic Church has grown at a disproportionately high rate particularly in the Global South, balancing out the continuous fall in numbers in the Western world.

... the Catholic Church with close to 1.2 billion members represents **the largest organisation in the world**—which adds to the importance of the Vatican's foreign policy.

Not so long ago, most people had written the Vatican off as a non-entity in the then 20th Century world. But the scriptures have spoken and faithful watchmen understood that the Babylonian tree was set to re-flourish at the time of the end, as we remarked on in Ch. 3. It gives those watchers no pleasure in seeing the revival of this system which their Master has described as *drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus* (Rev 17:6). It will be responsible for the greatest clash that the world has ever seen, a great time of trouble, as it opposes God's nation Israel and then Israel's newly-returned Messiah. Out of this time of *Jacob's trouble* will emerge God's glorious Kingdom, established in peace and righteousness.

And the winner of the Charlemagne prize this year—the Pope!

This very prestigious prize has been awarded annually since 1950 by the city fathers of Aachen to the person they consider has advanced European Unity. (In 2002 it was awarded to a ‘non-person’—the euro). It reflects the importance the city fathers perceive of the Pope’s role in the affairs of the EU. The prize recalls Charlemagne, the ruler of the Franks and founder of the Holy Roman Empire. Awarded on Ascension Day, with the deep symbolism attached to these things, perhaps they were celebrating Europe’s ascension to the new Holy Roman Empire political heavens.

The Pope declares an extraordinary Holy Jubilee Year

The prize is due to be presented to the Pope at a ceremony in Rome. Being a special Holy Year, this will be a great draw for visitors to the Vatican. Normally, Jubilee years are held every 25 years or so—this is the 69th since Pope Boniface started them to raise funds in AD 1300. The last one was held in 2000, so this is an extraordinary one. There is much symbolism involved, this one very much centres on Mary. Its basic aim is to encourage Roman Catholics to pay a pilgrimage to Rome or other cathedral cities if they can’t make it to the Vatican. Participants are guaranteed a series of indulgences—remission of time in purgatory—the scale depending how many activities they participate in. More than 50,000 attended the symbolic opening of a door in St Peters on Dec. 8th, which marks the start of a year of activities.

Vatican in talks over meeting of Pope and Russian Patriarch

There have been ongoing talks about an historic meeting between Pope and Russian Patriarch. The papacy has been eager for this for some years, the resistance has been from Moscow. Gradually a thaw is taking place and there have been several cordial meetings between the Pope and the officials responsible for such a meeting.

“The relations [between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church] have varied over the past 20-30 years, at times they were tense. However, it is a different period now—of benevolent attention to each other. The negotiations over such a meeting [between the Pope and the Patriarch] are underway, and it is quite possible that we will learn something specific in the near future.” He noted that the Russian Orthodox Church and the Vatican were discussing “several projects on cooperation in the field of culture, which would be of interest not only to church people.” *Tass.ru* 28-Oct-15

Conditions for restoration of unity between Catholics and Orthodox exist

There has for some time been quite close cooperation between Rome and the Greek Orthodox Church based in Constantinople. The Pope told Patriarch Bartholomew I:

“While not all differences between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches were brought to an end, there now existed the conditions necessary to journey towards re-establishing the ‘full communion of faith, fraternal accord and sacramental life which existed among them during the first thousand years of the life of the Church’ *AsiaNews* 30-Nov-15

2015 has been a year of steady movement towards the alignment of the nations revealed in Scripture at the Master’s return. Let us rejoice that we see these signs.

Chapter 16

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Exhortation: *Caught away!*

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with 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: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

Wherefore comfort one another with these words. 1 The. 4:16-18

What comfort there is in these words for the many who mourn the loss of a loved one. Without this hope we would be most miserable, as the Apostle Paul told the Corinthian believers. Christ is the first-fruits—there is an imminent harvest to be gathered. Our Master is at the door; he is about to knock. For the dead there is to be that trumpet call with the amazing re-creation from dust of the earth of bodies formed by angelic hands according to the blueprint stored in the mind of God and imparted with the memories that have likewise been stored, awaiting this day of re-creation. Knowing this work to be of a moment, who would try to explain away God’s initial creation as taking billions of years! Our knowledge of our unique DNA pattern and memory storage, enable us to very dimly comprehend the incredible Ways of God.

For the living, Paul says we shall be *caught up*. The Greek word is *harpazo*. My *Thayer’s* states: used of divine power transferring a person marvellously from one place to another, *to snatch* or *catch away*. We have the example of Philip in Acts 8:39, it is used in 2 Cor. 12:2; Rev. 12:5. It has sense of **force** as reflected in the use of the word in Mat. 11:12; John 6:15; 10:12. There won’t be choice. It is not an optional trip. This will be the most sobering journey we will ever make, as we stand before the angels who have overseen our lives, and ultimately before our Master in whose hands lies the critical decision of life or death.

As I said in the closing of the Preface, however much we know that this is to happen, it surely, almost inevitably, will catch us off guard. As the Master himself said, *for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not*. To watch somebody in your arms go from life to death in a few minutes is a sobering experience. It teaches the frailty of this life and the importance of people rather than possessions. Possessions are replaceable, life isn’t. It focuses our minds on the fact we need to be watching. Not watching the trivia of this world which passes and is no more. We must watch the Word of God. The grass that sprang up after the Flood is still with us today, in that it produced seed, which germinated and grew, replacing the plant that had produced it. The Word of God has been handed down, generation after generation, to spring up afresh in a new generation, keeping the knowledge of God alive throughout all ages. It is this Godly knowledge, culled from its pages that will cause us to be permitted to enter the Kingdom in the abounding Mercy of God, if we allow it to take strong root in our hearts and minds. For so many, including Sis Anthea, the day of opportunity has passed. For we who are alive, we still have opportunity for repentance from dead works. Ours has to be a living faith, putting God’s principles into practise in the things that we do, while we can. As Paul exhorted, Hebrews 6:10:

*For God is not unrighteous to forget your **work** and **labour of love**, which ye have **shewed toward his name**, in that ye have **ministered** to the **saints**, and do **minister***

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Don Pearce, *Milestones*, 76 High St, Hillmorton, Rugby, CV21 4EE, UK



Milestones 2015

Our main themes for 2015:

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- Israel building ties to her Arab neighbours
- Russia's growing military and naval power
- Russia builds firm foothold in Syria
- Britain ever more at odds with Europe
- How the migrant crisis is affecting the EU
- Pope Francis exerts his political skills



We see so many signs that our Master is at the door.

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