

Israel-Iran Nuclear Showdown: Is This The War of Gog and Magog?

□□The nuclear showdown between Israeli Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu** and Iranian President **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** could set in motion the fulfillment of prophecies in Ezekiel 38 and 39—the mysterious “war of Gog and Magog,” *New York Times* best-selling author Joel Rosenberg says.

These biblical predictions, the former political advisor to Netanyahu says, refer to an end-times attack on Israel by a coalition of nations, including Russia and Iran.□

In light of the growing ties between Iran and Russia and U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta’s remarks that Israel may strike Iran’s nuclear facilities this spring or summer, Rosenberg says the prophetic scenario described by the prophet Ezekiel more than 2,600 years ago now “very much looks like it is coming to pass.”□

“But I think we have to be careful not to overreach,” Rosenberg told the thousands of people who attended the recent conference—“Israel, the Church and the Middle East Crisis”—at Biola University in Southern California recently. “If these things play out, it will become obvious in the near future. In the meantime, let’s not call them conclusive, but let’s say they are curious. We’ve never seen anything like this before.”□

At the conference, noted Bible scholars Darrell L. Bock, the research professor of New Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, and Walter Kaiser, president emeritus and the distinguished professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, described Panetta’s prediction that Iran could have operational nuclear weapons within a year

as a “very sobering reality.”□

“I don’t know if this is the end or just the dress rehearsal for the end,” Bock said. “We have to be careful about suggesting more than we know.”□

The conference comes amid a growing possibility of **war between Israel and Iran**, challenges in the relationship, the “Arab Spring” spreading across North Africa and the Middle East and what Rosenberg describes as the rise of a “new czar of Russia,” Vladimir Putin.

□Putin, the first Russian leader in history to form close ties with Iran, was recently reelected as president of the Russian Federation, a nation that has been supplying armaments and nuclear expertise to Iran. Putin assumes the presidency of Russia on May 7.□

Given this confluence of events, military experts are assessing the potential fallout of an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear-enrichment sites. A classified American war simulation released in March found an Israeli air blitz would lead to a wider regional war, potentially pulling the U.S. into the conflict.□

Israeli officials, however, don’t believe a pre-emptive strike on Iranian nuclear facilities will result in an all-out war. Instead, they believe it could embolden Iranian citizens to overthrow Ahmadinejad—a leader who is driven by a Shia end-times theology that says the way to hasten the coming of the Islamic Messiah, the 12th Imam, is to destroy Israel and the U.S., Rosenberg says.□

“The question for the Israeli leadership is, ‘Have we tried everything short of war to stop Iran?’” says Rosenberg, author of the soon-to-be-released book, “Implosion: Can America Recover From its Economic & Spiritual Challenges in Time?” “The stakes are, if Iran gets its nuclear weapons, it could do in six minutes what it took Adolph Hitler six years to do and

that's to kill 6 million Jews."□

While the Obama administration hopes economic sanctions by the U.S. and the European Union will pressure Iran to resolve the crisis diplomatically, Rosenberg says Netanyahu's window of opportunity to strike is rapidly closing as Iran moves its nuclear facilities into hardened, underground bunkers.□

Netanyahu may want to attack Iran before Putin's inauguration on May 7, Rosenberg says, because the Russian president could seek a mutual defense agreement with Iran. During his campaign for reelection, Putin made pledges that would cost hundreds of billions of dollars, promising pay raises to police, firefighters, teachers, soldiers and retirees.□

The only way for Putin to make good on those promises is if the price of oil, which generates more than half of Russia's tax revenues, were to go up significantly, Rosenberg says. Because instability drives the price of oil, Rosenberg says there is an "economic dynamic to this calculation" and Putin could have a motive to "foment trouble in the Middle East."□

"(Putin) could tell the Israelis, 'If you launch an attack on Iran it will be regarded as an attack on the Russian Federation,' " Rosenberg says. "It would be hard imagining [Netanyahu] moving forward with a direct and credible threat of a Russian retaliation."□

These developments seem to coincide with what the prophet Ezekiel predicted more than 2,600 years ago, Rosenberg says. In **Ezekiel 38**, the prophet wrote that "Gog" –interpreted as a Russian dictator–would lead a coalition of nations in an attack on Israel, prompting God's supernatural intervention, Rosenberg says.□

"This will be a day of great judgment when God turns his **supernatural fury** against the enemies of Israel," Rosenberg says. "It will also be a day of great spiritual awakening. More Muslims and Jews are going to come to faith in Jesus as

the Messiah when this dramatic prophecy comes true.”

Bible scholars differ on whether this battle occurs before or at the end of the seven-year Tribulation period, a time when the Antichrist oversees a global government. Some believe the **“war of Gog and Magog”** occurs before the Tribulation with the Battle of Armageddon occurring at the end.

“A decade ago it would have been hard to tackle this question,” Kaiser says. “But look at the scenario in Israel now—the Arab nations, plus Persia, which changed its name to Iran, lined up against Israel. The Battle of Armageddon involves all the nations of the world, but the [war of Gog and Magog] is limited. That’s an important point to make.”

What is most remarkable, though, is that the battle described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 has never occurred in history. Furthermore, Russia and Iran have never had an alliance of the sort Ezekiel predicted 2,600 years ago, but “they do now,” Rosenberg says.

“We’re not living in normal times,” Rosenberg says. “The things that are happening now have never happened in all of human history, but they are happening now.”

Mitch Glaser, president of Chosen People Ministries, which sponsored the conference along with the Talbot School of Theology and Biola University, says Ezekiel 36 and 37 predicted the rebirth of Israel and the return of Jews to their homeland, events that are precursors to the “war of Gog and Magog.” The nation of Israel was created in 1948 and about 6 million Jews now live there.

“So now the stage is set,” Glaser says. “Israel is in the land and there is a lining up of powers against **Israel**. You’d have to be blind not to see the signs of the times.”

One decisive end-times sign involves **Jews accepting Jesus**. The number of Jews professing faith in Yeshua has soared

exponentially from 2,000 to 3,000 in the late 1960s to 250,000 to 300,000 today, Rosenberg says. Meanwhile, more than 1 million Muslims in Iraq alone have come to faith in Jesus since 1979, Rosenberg says.□

“More Muslims and Jews are coming to faith in Jesus now than ever in□all of human history,” Rosenberg says.□

While these signs should give believers a “greater sense of urgency” regarding the **Second Coming** and motivate them to share the gospel, Glaser cautions against the type of sensationalistic date-setting that has made many people skeptical about end-times predictions. Family Radio broadcaster **Harold Camping** recently garnered worldwide headlines after predicting Judgment Day on May 21, 2011—his second failed prediction. In March, Camping issued an apology, describing his calculation as a “sinful statement.”□

“It’s critical for us to see the end-times through the lens of scripture, but not be counted among those in the past who have been embarrassingly wrong with setting dates,” Glaser says. “These embarrassing mistakes must not keep a new generation of followers of Yeshua from knowing more about the end-times because Yeshua, Jesus Himself, told us to study the end-times. We don’t want to be ignorant of what God is doing in the last days.”□

The global economic crisis, out-of-control debt, record-breaking extreme weather and the increasing potential of war in the Middle East are all part of a divine “shaking” intended to awaken people spiritually, Rosenberg says.□

“We know it’s going to be bad in the last days—all kinds of shaking,” Rosenberg says. “But we also know that God uses the shaking as a way to prepare people’s hearts to hear the gospel. Ezekiel 38 and 39 will be one of the most dramatic shakings in all of human history, and I’m not speaking metaphorically. There is going to be an earthquake at the

epicenter in Israel that is going to affect the entire planet.”

Despite his belief that the world is now living in the “last nanoseconds” of the last days and it appears “we are moving dramatically toward the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38 and 39,” Rosenberg cautions that “what is true today may not be true next week.”

“God might kick the prophetic can up the road, in part so the church will have more time to obey Jesus’ command to share the gospel with Jews, Muslims and everyone else,” Rosenberg says.

When asked by his disciples for signs of his **Second Coming** and of the “end of the age,” Jesus said, in Matthew 24, that the end would not come until the “good news of the kingdom” is proclaimed throughout the world.

“Jesus said, ‘No one knows the day or hour,’ ” Rosenberg says. “I don’t know. Nobody knows. Harold Camping didn’t. So we just have to stick with what Jesus said. The point is not when. The point is are we ready?”

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