

Joel Rosenberg: Apocalyptic man

by *Bill Berkowitz*

Bestselling Christian author of apocalyptic novels/political potboilers and close friend to Israeli officials sets his sights on Iran

In a recent blog post datelined Jerusalem, Joel Rosenberg wrote: "The buzz here in the last few days is that Israel is seriously considering a preemptive strike against Iran's nuclear facilities and ballistic missile sites." Given Israel's less than sterling performance against Hezbollah this past summer, Rosenberg wasn't convinced that Israel "has the capacity -- or the will -- at the moment to neutralize the Iranian nuclear and ballistic missile threat."

Joel Rosenberg However, with "a new Hitler rising in Iran," it is up to President Bush, who met with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in Washington in mid-November, to deal with the Iranian threat: "If President Bush believes Iran needs to be neutralized (and I believe he does), and he is convinced that military action is the only way (I don't believe he is there right now), then the U.S. should take the lead."

After all, wrote Rosenberg "If anyone is going to stop Iran from threatening the world with nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them, it has to be soon, perhaps no later than the end of 2007. After all, 2008 is an American election year. 2009 will be the start of a new administration. By then it may be too late. The thermonuclear genie may be out of the bottle."

The Israeli/Hezbollah war led several cable television news networks to raise questions about whether the crisis in the Middle East was a signal that the "End Times" were approaching. Rosenberg, the bestselling Christian author of such apocalyptic/political thrillers as "The Copper Scroll," "The Ezekiel Option," and "The Last Jihad," was invited to appear on CNN and the Fox News Channel.

Earlier this fall, Rosenberg was in Albuquerque, New Mexico, speaking at two churches. His topic; "Are We Living In The Last Days?" "We examined current events in Russia, North Korea and the Middle East in the light of Bible prophecy," Rosenberg pointed out.

Rosenberg's visit to Albuquerque was the 22nd city on his book tour. However, his speaking engagements extend beyond church appearances and book signings. In a recent appearance with host Glenn Beck on his CNN Headline News program, Rosenberg pointed out that he had made several visits to "speak at a White House Bible study" and had conversations with "a number of congressional leaders and Homeland Security, Pentagon [officials] about my novels, which are based on Bible prophecy."

Rosenberg told Beck that "the question that's been most interesting among these various administration

and congressional officials is, 'Are you saying that the Bible talks about an alliance between Iran, Russia, and a group of Middle Eastern countries to attack Israel at some point?' And the answer is yes."

Rosenberg was an important but mostly behind-the-scenes figure in the conservative movement until his first novel "The Last Jihad" became a bestseller. A Jew who converted to Christianity more than 30 years ago, he had worked for former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Israeli politician Natan Sharansky, U.S. business magazine magnate Steve Forbes, and right-wing radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh. He is also a former Heritage Foundation staffer.

"The Last Jihad," completed before the 9/11 Trade Center and Pentagon attacks, propelled Rosenberg into the spotlight. The novel featured a hijacked jet making a kamikaze-like attack against the President of the United States, simultaneous terrorist strikes on the US, London, Paris and Saudi Arabia, an oil deal between Israel and the Palestinians that threatened to unleash a war with Iraq, and a possible preemptive nuclear strike. Helped along by endorsements from popular conservative talk show hosts Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and G. Gordon Liddy, the book hit the best-seller lists of the New York Times, USA Today, Amazon.com and Barnes&Noble.com.

Rosenberg's second book, "The Last Days," opens with the death of Yasser Arafat and a U.S. diplomatic convoy ambushed in Gaza. Wikipedia notes that "Two weeks before 'The Last Days' was published, a U.S. diplomatic convoy was ambushed in Gaza. Thirteen months later, Yasser Arafat died." "The Last Days" also spent time on the New York Times best-seller list, hit number five on the Denver Post list, and hit number eight on the Dallas Morning News list. According to Wikipedia, both books have been optioned by motion-picture producers.

In a late-October interview with the Washington Times, Rosenberg told reporter Chrissie Thompson that he didn't think that his novels "were going to predict the future. ... I was basing them on a series of Bible prophecies, but when [they] started to come true ... that has been striking for all of us, myself included."

Another of his novels, "The Ezekiel Option," is described by Rosenberg as "a political thriller about the threat of a Russian-Iranian alliance to destroy Israel based on the Biblical prophecies found in the Book of Ezekiel, chapters 38 and 39." These prophecies, according to Rosenberg, "describe what Bible scholars call the war of Gog and Magog. Russia and Iran form a military alliance with Lebanon, Syria and a group of other Middle East countries to destroy Israel in what Ezekiel described as the last days"

In recent months Rosenberg has suggested that Russia be added to the Bush administration's "axis of evil":

"Under [Vladimir] Putin's leadership," Rosenberg wrote, "Russia has also joined the 'axis of evil.' It is selling billions of dollars worth of missiles and high-tech weaponry to Iran, Syria, Algeria, and other radical Islamic and Arab regimes. It is building nuclear facilities for Iran, training Iranian nuclear scientists, and running

political interference for Iran at the UN to prevent the West from imposing sanctions despite the fact that Iran's leader has called for the United States and Israel to be wiped 'off the map.'"

Rosenberg describes his new non-fiction book "Epicenter: Why the Current Rumbblings in the Middle East Will Change Your Future" -- which hit the New York Times hardcover best seller list, logging in at #19 in mid-November 12 -- as "the nonfiction version of these [Book of Ezekiel] prophecies, explaining what ... the prophecies mean and what's really going on in the world that suggests that we may be closer to the fulfillment of those prophecies than most people realize."

Asked about the growing relationship between Iran and Russia, Rosenberg pointed out that "Russia is clearly building a military alliance with Iran today. In December of last year, Russia signed a \$1 billion arms deal with Iran. Russia is building Iran's nuclear facilities. Russia has trained over a thousand Iranian nuclear scientists, and Russia is running political interference for Iran at the United Nations to prevent the U.S. and Europe from slapping sanctions on Iran."

"Identifying Iran in Ezekiel 38 is" easy said Rosenberg. "The country mentioned is Persia, and until 1935, the official name of Iran was Persia. Where we get Russian from is that a dictator emerges in a land called Magog, according to Ezekiel 38:2. ... When you do the detective work ... you find out this is the people group that settled north of the Black Sea in what we now call Russia."

Recently, Rosenberg, and his wife Lynn, co-founded The Joshua Fund, which according to its website, "is partnering with evangelical ministries in the Middle East to provide desperately needed resources to Christians in the region to bless their neighbors in need in the name of Jesus. This is a tremendous opportunity to demonstrate the love of Christ to those who need it most."

According to Richard Bartholomew, the Fund's two "humanitarian aid" efforts are called the "Project to Bless Israel" and the "Project to Bless Lebanon."

"Lebanese refugees will get "Bags of Blessing," to be distributed by Campus Crusade for Christ and local evangelicals," Bartholomew reported. The "Bags" will, according to The Joshua Fund's materials, "include non-perishable food items such as beans, rice, pasta, canned meat, processed cheese, oil, and powdered milk. In addition, each Bag will contain basic supplies such as soap, candles, matches, and aspirin, and a Jesus film DVD in Arabic."

Bartholomew also pointed out that while the Lebanese refugees will receive the Jesus DVD, the Israelis "will be spared a similar Jesus DVD in Hebrew, for obvious political reasons."