



Have you ever seen these before? These smiling dolls are called "Matryoshka dolls" and are possibly the most famous Russian export seen around the world. But life doesn't bring a smile to many people in

Russia today. The industrialized cities of the western part have a lot of air pollution and contamination from toxic waste. Many people have lost hope after finding that freedom from communism wasn't as they expected, and so they turned to drugs and alcohol. Crime is very bad in most places, and suicide rates are among the highest in the world. As a result, many children are left on the doorstep of orphanages or abandoned to the street.

True story!

This small girl playing the violin is begging on a street in Russia. Thousands of children are abandoned and end up living on the street there, or are

lucky to live in an orphanage - in fact every year in Russia 120,000 new children are admitted to orphanages! Pastor Vitali of Russian Missions ministry grew up under Communist rule in Russia and accepted Christ as a teenager. As a student in the 1990s he was able to come to America and began a ministry to other Russians here. He soon realized how so many Russians need to hear the Gospel, and so he began to return to Russia to preach and help start Christian ministries. He writes: "Children's ministry has always been a burden on my heart.




There are so many orphans and street children in Russia. Together with our local missionaries, we organize children's camps and work in orphanages and youth prisons... We visit and provide help in cancer hospitals where so many children are fighting cancer as the result of the Chernobyl accident."

Pray for the children of Russia and learn more from Pastor Vitali's website - www.russianmissions.org 'Til next time,
Your friend, Shirley

Answer to Mr. Owl's question: The Prodigal Son.

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World Kids
Fun facts for kids! True stories!

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Do you know which is the **LARGEST** country in the world?

In fact it is almost TWICE the size of the country that is next-largest!! It has an area of over 6,592,000 square miles and it takes SEVEN DAYS to travel by train from Vladivostok in the east to the nation's capital in the west!! The country we will learn about this month is **RUSSIA!**

On a map of the world Russia is found to the north of Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the whole of Asia, yet the majority of its 141 million inhabitants live in the westernmost one-fifth of the land. Until about 16 years ago, Russia was better known as the U.S.S.R. and was even larger, including many of the surrounding countries today.



Its flag was red with the famous crossed hammer and sickle in gold, but today the Russian flag has just 3 horizontal stripes, in white, blue and red



Although the Gospel is said to have first been brought to parts of Russia by the Apostle Andrew, many warring tribes and nations such as the Turks and Mongols fought over the land. In 988, over 1,000 years ago, Prince Vladimir of Russia decided to find out all about Judaism, Islam and Christianity, and afterwards he decided that he AND his country would follow Jesus Christ. Through the years, everyone (rich and poor) worshipped God the same way and the church became known as the Russian Orthodox Church. Here is a picture of its famous cross. Many church buildings



were built to a very specific design and have what are called "onion domes". You may have seen these in the famous Red Square in Moscow, the capital. For centuries the Russian leaders, called "Czars", ruled and enjoyed the wealth of the country. Today Russia is still famous for its musicians, art and ballets, and it even has the highest number of Grandmaster Chess Champions in the world - 156!!



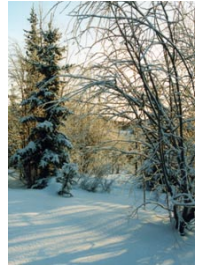
But through the centuries, the average Russian has had to live a very harsh, poor life. Most of the land is bitterly cold in winter as the freezing winds come down from the North Pole and sweep across the land where there are few mountains to stop them. The ground in much of the country either has "permafrost" which means that it remains frozen solid all year, or it is too dry for agriculture. Development of the land and even basic transportation across the huge expanses is extremely difficult.

Finally in 1917 a group called the "Bolsheviks", led by Lenin, drove out the Tsar and his rulers, and took control of all the government, farms and factories. They turned Russia into a communist state, known as the U.S.S.R. The people believed that everything would be shared equally among everyone - everything was owned by the government, and the leaders gave each person a certain amount of food each week, certain housing and clothes etc no matter how hard (or how little!) each one worked! It was a disaster, and anyone who disagreed with the government was sent to prison in bitterly cold Siberia, or killed. Of course the leaders had much better lives!



Lenin

All religion was banned and the churches closed, so many Christians formed "underground churches" and met secretly, often outdoors in the woods where it was so cold the guards didn't want to go. But the secret police often discovered them or their bibles, and thousands of Christians were imprisoned and tortured or killed.



In 1985, the Russian leader, Mikhail Gorbachev made some changes and in 1988 Christian leaders from around the world went to Russia to celebrate its 1,000 years of Christianity. Soon after that, in 1991 the Communist government fell bringing democracy and freedom of religion again. The U.S.S.R. broke apart into Russia and 14 independent republics. Since then many Christian groups have visited Russia, bringing bibles and other Christian books, and helping to build churches. Yet still many Russians do not believe the Bible and only 2% attend church at least once a week. After being taught for 70 years that there is no god (atheism), many Russians have become interested in all sorts of cults and religions. Many others just want to work and buy material goods so they can become like people in Europe and the West.

Russian Bible Promise

MAL 3:7 Со дней отцов ваших вы отступили от уставов Моих и не соблюдаете их; обратитесь ко Мне, и я обращусь к вам, говорит Господь Саваоф.

Look up this scripture in your English bible in Malachi 3:7 to see how these words could be what God is saying to the Russian people today.



Can you think of one of Jesus' parables that tells a story that illustrates this?