

EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

Part II

by Thomas Ice

And the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him."

—Ezekiel 38:1–2

"This was the final message in this series of six night oracles delivered by Ezekiel," notes Ralph Alexander. "A central concern throughout all these night messages had been the possession of the land of Israel." "This series of night oracles was given to encourage the exiles that ultimately God would remove these invaders and restore this land to Israel."¹ A wonderful message indeed to which those who love Israel still look forward to today!

This prophecy is divided into two major sections. In the first section Ezekiel reveals the invasion by Gog with his allies (38:1–16). The second section reveals to us God's judgment that will befall Gog and his associates (38:17—39:16). This great prophecy begins with Ezekiel noting that it was not his idea to deal with the matter of Gog's invasion of Israel instead it was God who initiated and communicated this prophecy through verbal revelation, "the word of the LORD came to me saying."

SON OF MAN

Ezekiel is called "son of man" throughout the book. "Son of man" is used 93 times in Ezekiel to refer to the prophet, with the first use found in 2:1. Why is Ezekiel so often addressed by God as "son of man" when he is about to receive revelation from the Lord? It appears that "son of man" underscores his humanity in relation to God. In other words, God is the One who is the Revealer while Ezekiel, as a human, is the recipient of the Divine message that he is to pass on to other human beings. Thus, Ezekiel is passing on to us the infallible prophecy of these two chapters, which will surely come to pass.

SET YOUR FACE TOWARD GOG

Ezekiel is told to set his face "toward" or "against" Gog. The Brown, Driver, and Briggs (BDB) Hebrew Lexicon says, the Hebrew word translated "toward" is a preposition that denotes "motion to or direction towards (whether physical or mental)."² BDB also tells us that when "the motion or direction implied appears from the context to be of a hostile character," then it has a negative connotation and would be translated "against." Ezekiel is told to turn his face in the direction of the nation Gog, because the Lord is against him. Later in the sentence the text says for Ezekiel to "prophesy against him," that is Gog. The sense of this passage is that God is initiating the attack by Gog against Israel and the Lord is against or opposed to Gog and his allies. But just who is Gog? The identification of Gog has been a greatly debated issue.

The Hebrew proper noun "Gog" occurs 12 times in the Hebrew Old Testament.³ All but one use occurs in Ezekiel 38 and 39 (Ezek. 8:2, 3, 14, 16, 18; 39:1 [2x], 11 [3x], 15). The only non-Ezekiel occurrence is in 1 Chronicles 5:4 and says, "The sons of Joel were Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his son." Other than demonstrating it was a real, proper name, the 1 Chronicles reference contributes nothing to our study of its use in Ezekiel and is not related to the Gog of Ezekiel's prophecy. Whoever he is, Gog appears

in this context to be a person, leader and ruler that God has told Ezekiel to prophesy against. Because of the frequent use of Gog in this passage, “we conclude, therefore, that Gog is the most important person or nation in this coalition,”⁴ declare Mark Hitchcock.

The passage says that Gog is from the land of Magog. Some have said that Gog is a reference to the Antichrist. Charles Feinberg is right when he says, “but for this there is not a shred of biblical or nonbiblical evidence.”⁵ Some have suggested that Gog is a name “arbitrarily derived from the name of the country, Magog, but this is not valid because Gog appears in 1 Chronicles 5:4.”⁶ “The name Gog means ‘high, supreme, a height, or a high mountain.’”⁷ The only references to the Gog of Ezekiel’s prophecy appear in the passage itself and there is virtually no information about Gog outside the Bible in history. However, when Gog leads his invasion of Israel he is said to come “from the remote parts of the north” (Ezek. 38:6). Louis Bauman tells us that “L. Sale-Harrison says in his booklet, *The Coming Great Northern Confederacy*: ‘It is interesting to note that the very word ‘Caucasus’ means ‘Gog’s Fort.’ ‘Gog’ and ‘Chasan’ (Fort) are two Oriental words from which it is derived.’”⁸ So there does appear to be a faint reference to Gog in the general area of Russia that Gog is likely to be from.

Who then is Gog? Bauman says, “Without doubt, Russia will furnish the man—not *the Antichrist*—who will head up that which is known to most Bible students as ‘the great northeastern confederacy’ of nations and lead it to its doom upon the hills of Israel’s land.”⁹ Hitchcock believes “the reason Gog is singled out eleven times by God in these two chapters is because God is the general over this coalition of nations in its great military campaign against Israel.”¹⁰ Hal Lindsey tells us, “Gog is the symbolic name of the nation’s leader and Magog is his land. He is also the prince of the ancient people who were called Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.”¹¹ Arnold Fruchtenbaum informs us: “Who Gog will be can only be determined at the time of the invasion, for ‘Gog’ is not a proper name but a title for the ruler of Magog, just as the terms ‘pharaoh,’ ‘kaiser,’ and ‘czar’ were titles for rulers and not proper names.”¹²

THE LAND OF MAGOG

Gog the leader of the invasion of the land of Israel is said to be “of the land of Magog.” The proper noun Magog is used four times in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.¹³ Magog is used twice in the passage we are investigating (38:2; 39:6) and twice in genealogies (Gen. 10:2; 1 Chron. 1:5). Genesis 10:2 says, “The sons of Japheth were Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras.” 1 Chronicles 1:5 is basically a repeat of the genealogical information from Genesis 10:2. The fact that Magog is used in the table of nations (Genesis 10)¹⁴ provides a basis for tracing the movement of one of the earliest post-flood descendants of Noah.

It appears that Ezekiel is using the names of peoples, primarily from the table of nations, and where they lived at the time of the giving of this prophecy in the sixth century B.C. Therefore, if we are able to find out where these people and places were in the sixth century B.C. then we will be able to trace figure out who would be their modern antecedents today. I believe we will be able to accomplish this task and be able to know who will be involved in this battle if it were to come to pass in our own day.

It is probably fair to say that most scholars and experts would trace Magog’s descendants to the ancient people that we know as the Scythians. Chuck Missler notes that a wide collection of ancient historians “identified Magog with the Scythians and southern Russia in the 7th century B.C.”¹⁵ These ancients include: Hesiod, Josephus, Philo, and Herodotus.¹⁶ Josephus lived in the first century A.D. and said, “Magog

founded the Magogians, thus named after him but who by the Greeks are called Scythians.”¹⁷ Bauman tells us that Magog and his descendants must have immigrated north after the Flood and that “the Magogites were divided into two distinct races, one Japhetic, or European, and the other Turanian, or Asiatic.”¹⁸

Who are the Scythians? Edwin Yamauchi tells us that the Scythians were divided into two groups, a narrow and broad grouping. “In the narrow sense, the Scythians were the tribes who lived in the area which Herodotus designated as Scythia (i.e., the territory north of the Black Sea),” notes Yamauchi. “In the broad sense the word Scythian can designate some of the many other tribes in the vast steppes of Russia, stretching from the Ukraine in the west to the region of Siberia in the east.”¹⁹

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ Ralph Alexander, *Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), p. 118.

² Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

³ Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 6.4.

⁴ Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 16.

⁵ Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 220.

⁶ Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 220.

⁷ Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, p. 17

⁸ Louis S. Bauman, *Russian Events in the Light of Bible Prophecy* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1942), p. 23.

⁹ Bauman, *Russian Events*, p. 26.

¹⁰ Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, p. 17

¹¹ Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 63.

¹² Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, [1982] 2003), p. 106.

¹³ Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 6.4.

¹⁴ The table of nations is a term used for the records of the descendants Noah and his three sons: Ham, Shem and Japheth. Every human being on planet earth is a descendant of Noah and his three sons. If we could trace our genealogies far enough back we would find that we all descend from Noah through either Ham, Shem or Japheth.

¹⁵ Chuck Missler, *The Magog Invasion* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front, 1995), p. 29.

¹⁶ Missler, *Magog Invasion*, pp. 29–31.

¹⁷ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, vol. 1, vi, i as cited in Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, p. 19.

¹⁸ Bauman, *Russian Events*, p. 23.

¹⁹ Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Foes from the Northern Frontier* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), p. 62.