

EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

Part V

by Thomas Ice

“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 38:2

As we have seen previously, the Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew took *Rosh* as a proper noun and identified them with the people of Southern Russian and the Ukraine. Such a translation indicates that the Greek-speaking Jews in North Africa believed that *Rosh* was a proper noun and referred to a known people. After providing an impressive amount of data to support the notion that the Rosh people refer to modern day Russians, Clyde Billington declares:

Therefore, it is almost certain that the ancient people whom the Greeks called Tauroi/Tursenoi were identical to the people known as “Tiras” in the Bible. These same Tiras people of Genesis 10:2 were also called in other languages by a variety of names based upon the name Tiras. For example, note the names: Taruisha [Hittite], Turus/Teresh [Egyptian], Tauroi/Tursenoi [Greek], and Tauri/Etruscan [Latin].¹

Second, Billington tells us, “From a variety of sources it is known that a people named the Ros or Rus lived in the same area near the Black Sea where the Tauroi people lived.”² Billington also tells us that “early Byzantine Christian writers identified the Rosh people of Ezekiel 38–39 with an early group of people of southern Russia whom they called the “Ros.”³ We further learn that “the Byzantine Greeks used the LXX spelling [Ros] of the name because they unquestionably identified the Ros/Rus/Russian people of southern Russia with the Rosh people mentioned in Ezekiel 38–39.”⁴

Third, “it is well-known that the first Russian state was founded by a people known as the Varangian Rus.”⁵ Many current scholars like Edwin Yamauchi support the notion that the name Rus, from which the modern name for Russia is derived, is a Finnish word and refers to Swedish invaders from the North, not from the Rosh people in the South. He says that the name Rus did not come to the region until the Middle Ages when it was brought by the Vikings.⁶ However, while Yamauchi is a respected scholar, his dogmatic conclusion stands in direct opposition to the substantial historical evidence presented by the Hebrew scholar Gesenius, James Price, and Clyde Billington.

Billington provides six objections to Yamauchi’s claim of a Northern origin of Rus instead of a Southern one. First, the Byzantine use of the word Rus for those who became the Russians pre-dates by hundreds of years the later Northern claim. Second, Byzantine sources never speak of these people as having immigrated from the North to the South. They “were long time inhabitants of the Black Sea—Russia—Ukraine—Crimea area, and none of the Byzantine sources states that the original homeland of the Ros was Scandinavia.”⁷ Third, since various forms of the Rosh people are found in use all the way back to the second century B.C., it is most unlikely that the Finns invented the name Rus. Fourth, “there is no logical reason why the Ros people should have adopted the foreign Finnish name of “Ruotsi” after migrating to southern Russia.”⁸ Fifth, “all modern scholars agree that the Varangians never called

themselves (and they were never called by others) 'Ros' while they still lived in Scandinavia near the Finns."⁹ Finally, Byzantine and Western records indicate that there were people in Southern Russia who were already calling themselves by the name of "Rus" many years before the Northern invasion.¹⁰

It is clear when one sifts through the evidence that the Varangians who migrated from Scandinavia into Southern Russia were called by the name of "Rus" when they moved into that area which had already been known by that name for many years. Billington summarizes: "As was argued above, the Varangian Rus took their name from the native people named the Ros who had from ancient times lived in the area to the north of the Black Sea. In other words there were two Ros peoples: the original Sarmatian Ros people and the Varangian Rus people."¹¹

It should be clear by now that *Rosh* does indeed refer to the modern day Russian people. Both grammatical and historical evidence have been provided. This is why I agree with the overall conclusions of Billington, who says:

1. Ezekiel 38–39 does mention a people called the "Rosh" who will be an allies of Meshech, Tubal, and Gog in the Last Days.
2. There were Rosh peoples who lived to the north of Israel in the Caucasus Mountains and to the north of the Black and Caspian Seas.
3. Some of the Rosh people who lived to the north of Israel came in time to be called "Russians."
4. The name Russian is derived from the name Ros/Rosh which is found in Ezekiel 38–39.
5. And, in conclusion, it is clear that Russian peoples will be involved along with Meshech, Tubal, and Gog in an invasion of Israel in the Last Days.¹²

WHO IS MESHECH?

I now move on to the much easier task of identifying to whom Meshech refers. Meshech appears 10 times in the Hebrew Old Testament,¹³ including its first usage in the Table of Nations (Gen. 10:2). In Genesis 10 Meshech is listed as a son of Japheth. The genealogical descent from Genesis 10 is repeated twice in 1 Chronicles (1:5, 17). Other than references in Psalm 120:5 and Isaiah 66:19, the other occurrences of Meshech are all found in Ezekiel (27:13; 32:26; 38:2, 3; 39:1). The three references in Ezekiel 38 and 39 all group "Rosh, Meshech and Tubal" together, as does Isaiah 66:19 but in a different order. Mark Hitchcock tells us:

All we know about Meshech from the Old Testament is that Meshech and his partners Javan and Tubal traded with the ancient city of Tyre, exporting slaves and vessels of bronze in exchange for Tyre's merchandise. That's all the Bible tells us about ancient Meshech. However, ancient history has a great deal to say about the location and people of ancient Meshech.¹⁴

Some Bible teachers in the past have taught that Meshech is a reference to Moscow and thus refers to Russia. This is the view of *The Scofield Reference Bible*, Harry Rimmer¹⁵ and Hal Lindsey.¹⁶ Rimmer says of Meshech: "his descendants came to be called 'Mosche,' from which derived the old term 'Muscovites.' While this later word is and has been applied to all Russians who come from Moscow and its vicinity."¹⁷ The identification of Meshech with Moscow is merely based upon a similarity of sound. There is not real historical basis to support such a view, therefore, it must be rejected.

Allen Ross, based upon historical and biblical information in his dissertation on the table of nations says:

Tubal and Mesek are always found together in the Bible. They represent the northern military states that were exporting slaves and copper (Ezekiel 27:13, 38:2, 39:1, 32:26 and Isaiah 66:19). Herodotus placed their dwelling on the north shore of the Black Sea (III, 94). Josephus identified them as the Cappadocians. . . . Mesek must be located in the Moschian mountains near Armenia. Their movement was from eastern Asia Minor north to the Black Sea.¹⁸

The area southeast of the Black Sea is modern day Turkey. "At every point in the history" of Meshech, notes Hitchcock "they occupied territory that is presently in the modern nation of Turkey."¹⁹ Such a conclusion is not a controversial one since virtually all scholars agree with this view.

WHO IS TUBAL?

"Tubal" appears eight times in the Hebrew Bible²⁰ (Gen. 10:2; 1 Chron. 1:5; Isa. 66:19; Ezek. 27:13; 32:26; 38:2, 3; 39:1). Tubal is identified as the fifth son of Japheth and the brother of Meshech in the table of nations (Gen. 10:2). As noted above by Ross, Tubal is always grouped together with Meshech in the Bible and Ezekiel 38 is no exception.

Some prophecy teachers have taught that Tubal is the derivative that became the modern Russian city Tobolsk. This view was popularized by *The Scofield Reference Bible* and a number of other teachers. However, as was the case with Meshech, such a view is developed from similarity of the sound of Tubal and Tobolsk. This view lacks a solid historical basis. The historical record, as was the case with Meshech, is that Tubal and his descendants immigrated to the area southeast of the Black Sea in what is modern day Turkey. Meshech and Tubal clearly provide the population base for the country we now call Turkey.

Today Turkey is considered a secular country. However, Turkey has a long history as a Muslim dominated country that for hundreds of years headed up the Muslim empire. Turkey is just a step away from returning to its Islamic political heritage, which would provide a basis for alienating with the other Muslim dominated territories that will one day invade Israel. Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ Clyde E. Billington, Jr., "The Rosh People in History and Prophecy (Part Three)," *Michigan Theological Journal* 4:1 (Spring 1993), pp. 42-43.

² Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 44.

³ Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 48.

⁴ Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 50.

⁵ Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 51.

⁶ Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Foes from the Northern Frontier* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), p. 20.

⁷ Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 52.

- ⁸ Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 53.
- ⁹ Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 53.
- ¹⁰ Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," pp. 52–53.
- ¹¹ Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 57.
- ¹² Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 62.
- ¹³ Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 6.9.2.
- ¹⁴ Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 56.
- ¹⁵ Harry Rimmer, *The Coming War and the Rise of Russia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940), pp. 55–56.
- ¹⁶ Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).
- ¹⁷ Rimmer, *The Coming War*, pp. 55–56.
- ¹⁸ Allen P. Ross, "The Table of Nations in Genesis" (ThD dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), pp. 204–05.
- ¹⁹ Mark Hitchcock, *Iran The Coming Crisis: Radical Islam, Oil, And The Nuclear Threat* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2006), p. 184.
- ²⁰ Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 6.9.2.