

EZEKIEL 38 AND 39
Part VI
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, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. And I will turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords;’”

—Ezekiel 38:2–4

Now that the participants have been identified in verse 2, I now will look at what the Word of the Lord says about them. We have already seen in the first part of the verse that Ezekiel is told to set his face toward the direction of the coalition nations. Such a statement implies that they are a real, historical group of peoples. We learn at the end of verse 2 that Ezekiel is to “prophesy against him.” The “him” refers back to Gog, the leader of the invasion. The Hebrew word for “prophesy” is the usual word and in this context carries the notion that Ezekiel will be telling future history about Gog and the coalition that he will head. The Hebrew preposition “against” tells us that this is not a positive prophecy benefiting to Gog and his associates. Instead, the prophecy is against Gog because God is opposed to him, as we shall see as the passage unfolds.

GOD AGAINST GOG

The Lord God tells Ezekiel to announce that He (God) is against Gog in verse 3. The preposition “against” in verse 3 is different than the one used in verse 2. Here in verse 3 “against” has the idea of motion, thus, the action of the prophecy by God is against Gog. The two prepositions are very similar and it would appear that the two are used to emphasize the obvious fact that God is against Gog. As we will learn later in the passage, Gog may think that he is getting together the coalition to attack Israel, but it is God who ultimately is the cause of this great event (see verses 4, 8). God’s disposition being set against Gog in verses 2 and 3 paves the way nicely for His clear declaration in verse 4.

HOOKS INTO YOUR JAWS

The first phrase in verse 4 says, “I will turn you about.” The Hebrew word for “turn” is *sub*. Its basic meaning is “to move in an opposite direction from that toward which one previously moved. . . . turn around, turn.”¹ In theological contexts it is the classic word in the Old Testament for “repent,” as used so often by Jeremiah. “The verb, with over 1,050 occurrences, ranks twelfth in frequency among words in the OT.”² The sense in which this word is used so often in the Old Testament has the notion of repentance, as in Israel repenting and turning from their sin to the Lord. This is the same way in which repentance is used by preachers like John the Baptist in the New Testament. In fact, today in Orthodox Judaism when a non-observant Jew begins to practice their religion, this is called “doing *subah*,” or repenting. However, in the context of Ezekiel 38, this use of an intensive form of *sub* (the polel stem) in relation to Gog does not refer to religious repentance, but rather to a change in ones plans. “Here

and in ch. xxxix. 2," notes C. F. Keil, "it means to lead or bring away from his previous attitude, *i.e.* to mislead or seduce, in the sense of enticing to a dangerous enterprise."³ What more dangerous enterprise could there ever be than warring against God or His people—Israel?

Since the Lord wants to move Gog in the direction of coming down to attack Israel, the verb *natan* is used to explain the means that God will employ. The Lord will "place" or "put" hooks into the jaws of Gog. Keil tells us, "Gog is represented as an unmanageable beast, which is compelled to follow its leader (cf. Isa. xxxvii. 29); and the thought is thereby expressed, that Gog is compelled to obey the power of God against his will."⁴ Lawson Younger explains the meaning and use of the Hebrew word for "hook" as follows:

While the literal meaning of *hah* is "thorn," in the OT it is used metaphorically for a hook. In the majority of occurrences, *hah* is employed in military contexts for a hook put through the nose or cheek of captives: of Sennacherib, in whose nose God will put a hook (2 Kgs 19:28; Isa. 37:29); of Jehoahaz taken to Egypt by hook (Ezek 19:4); of Zedekiah taken to Babylon by hook (19:9); of Pharaoh, in whose jaw God will put a hook (29:4; and of Gog, in whose jaw God will also put hooks (28:4).⁵

Just as a whole host of Israel's enemies down through history have not wanted to do what God has asked them to do, so will Gog, like Pharaoh be made to follow His will, even though their intentions are 180 degrees in the opposite direction, which demonstrates the use of the hook imagery by God. "Like a ring in the nose of a captive or a great hook in the jaws of a crocodile, God will pull Gog and his allies out for this invasion when he is ready for them," notes Mark Hitchcock. "God will do God's bidding and will act according to God's timetable."⁶ Arnold Fruchtenbaum summarizes this section by reminding us:

It is God Who is in control; it is He who is bringing the invasion about. Thus, while studying this passage, one should note the sovereignty of God in this invasion. This will be the means by which God will punish Russia for her sins. The key sin is her long history of anti-Semitism, a problem that persists in Russia to this day.⁷

STAGE SETTING IN RUSSIA AND IRAN

How are some of the issues from the first few verses of Ezekiel 38 setting the stage today for future fulfillment? While other nations in the Gog coalition have been in the news at one time or another, right now Russia and Iran are making a lot of noise on the geo-political scene. Also, for those who are not watching Turkey, they are on the verge of being taken over by radical wing of Muslims in their Parliament. If they succeed, they will return Turkey to Muslim rule, which will result in their dismissal of democracy.

Mart Zuckerman, editor of *U. S. News & World Report* has said, "Russian President Vladimir Putin, in an interview several years ago, criticized America's decision to go to war against Iraq and told me, "The real threat is Iran." He was right. But Russia has become part of the problem, not the solution."⁸ It is no secret that Russia has played a role of enabler to Iran, which has risen to the top of the list of rogue states that threaten to bring great destabilization to the current world order. "And Russia has made the

threat more real. It sold the nuclear power plant at Bushehr to Iran and contracted to sell even more to bring cash into its nuclear industry. As one American diplomat put it, this business is a 'giant hook in Russia's jaw.'⁹ What? Could you repeat that last statement? The American diplomat said, "this business is a 'giant hook in Russia's jaw.'" That's right, the diplomat used a phrase right out of Bible prophecy to describe Russia's current role with Iran.

Some detractors of our view of Bible prophecy have said that with the fall of the Soviet Empire a Russian led invasion seems very unlikely from a geo-political standpoint. It has always been the case that this prophecy speaks of a Russian led, not a Soviet led, attack against Israel. Ever since the fall of the Soviet Empire Russia has continued to maintain close relations with most of the Islamic nations, especially those in the Middle East. It would not be surprising from a geo-political perspective to see Russia join with Islamic states like Iran in a surprise attack against Israel.

For over fifteen years I have speculated that the "hook in the jaw" of Gog that God could use to bring a reluctant Russia down upon the land of Israel could be some thing like the following scenario that I articulated to Hal Lindsey on a National television show¹⁰ in 1991 on the day the first Gulf War ended: I could see the Muslims approaching the Russians and telling them that America has set a precedent for an outside power coming into the Middle East to right a perceived wrong. (America has done it again in recent years by going into Afghanistan and Iraq.) On that basis, Russia should help her Muslim friends by leading them in an overwhelming invasion of Israel in order to solve the Middle East Conflict in favor of the Islamic nations. Will this be the "hook in the Jaw" of Gog? Only time will tell. But something is up in the Middle East and Russia appears to have her fingerprints all over things. We know that the Bible predicts just such an alignment and invasion to take place "in the latter years" (Ezek. 38:8).

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, & Heinz-Josef Fabry, editors, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. XIV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 464.

² Botterweck, Ringgren, & Fabry, *TDOT*, vol. XIV, p. 472.

³ C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 161.

⁴ Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, p. 161.

⁵ Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. editor, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 5 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), vol. 2, p. 44.

⁶ Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 104.

⁷ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, [1982] 2003), p. 109.

⁸ Mortimer B. Zuckerman, "Moscow's Mad Gamble," *U. S. News & World Report*, Internet Edition (Jan. 30, 2006), p. 1.

⁹ Zuckerman, "Moscow's Mad Gamble," p. 1.

¹⁰ On "The Praise the Lord" show on Trinity Broadcasting Network.