

Doctrine of Russia

The Russian Non-connection of Ezekiel 38 - 39

- **MAGOG.** A people and country listed among the sons of Japheth (Genesis 10:2). They are thought to have lived at the N extremity of the biblical world. Josephus identifies them with the Scythians.
- **MESHECH.** A people mentioned in the Table of Nations (Genesis 10:2) as descendants of Japheth. Assyrian records mention Mushki as a people in the mountains on the N borders of Assyria. Herodotus places the Moschi SE of the Black Sea.
- **TUBAL.** The son of Japheth who, with his brothers, Javan and Meshech, traded in slaves and vessels. The tribe which descended from Japheth settled near Meshech.
- **PERSIA.** Has reference to a land bordered by Media on the N, the Persian Gulf on the S, Elam on the W, and Carmania on the E. It followed Babylon as the second world empire. During the reign of Cyrus the Great, Persia defeated Babylon in 539 BC. Following the conquest the Jews in the land were allowed to return home to Palestine (Ezra 1:1-3).

Susa (Shushan) was the place of the royal palace (Nehemiah 1:1; Esther 1:2). Cambyses II (530-522 BC), the son of Cyrus reigned after his father. He committed suicide and the Persian Empire fell into civil war. Lesser kings of Persia include Ahasuerus (Xerxes 486-465 BC), who is mentioned in Esther 2:16, 21 and King Artaxerxes. Nehemiah was his cup-bearer (Neh. 2:1-8).

- **ETHIOPIA.** Ethiopia is the normal reference to that which is called in the Hebrew tongue Cush, which was located in E Africa. It was known to the Jews (Isaiah 8:1; 45:14; Zephaniah 3:10). In Genesis 2:13 in reference to the Garden of Eden, Cush is mentioned as an Asiatic place. But in all other places the word refers to those Arabians of an African country.
- **LIBYA.** Libya is the name first applied by the Greeks to all Africa W of Egypt. Later the term was restricted to the area between Egypt and the Roman province of Africa. Under Rome, Libya was divided into two parts: Libya Inferior, or Marmarica, and Libya Superior, or Cyrenaica.
- **GOMER.** A son of Japheth whose descendants settled in Asia Minor S of the Black Sea.
- **TOGARMAH.** The term refers to a N country (Ezek. 38:6) where the descendants of Japheth lived (Genesis 10:3).
- **SHEBA.** Refers to the land in SW Arabia, or in Africa near the Straits of Babel-mandeb. The people were merchants. When the Queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she traveled to Jerusalem to see for herself and to test Solomon with difficult riddles (1 Kings 10:1-13; 2 Chronicles 9:1-12).

- DEDAN. These descendants of Ham formed an Arabian tribe which located W of the Persian Gulf.
- DEDAN. This descendant of Shem formed an Arabian tribe which located E of the N sector of the Arabian Gulf (Red Sea).
- TARSHISH. Tarshish is a Phoenician word meaning "smelting plant" or "refinery." One Tarshish was Tartessus in S Spain, near Gibraltar. Another was in Cilicia, the later Tarsus.
- VALLEY OF HAMMON-GOG. A valley E of the Dead Sea. Literally, the word means, "the multitude of Gog."
- HAMONAH is the figurative place where the multitudes of God are to be buried (Ezek. 39:16).
- BASHAN. Bashan is the trans-Jordan territory extending N from Gilead to Mt. Hermon. Before the Israelites conquered the area it was ruled over by Og (Numbers 21:33; Deuteronomy 3:1; Joshua 12:5; 13:11). The half-tribe of Manasseh occupied the territory (Joshua 13:30; 17:1, 5; 21:6; 22:7; 1 Chronicles 5:23), and later still the tribe of Gad (1 Chronicles 5:11, 16). It was a fertile land and became famous for its rich pastures (Deuteronomy 32:14; Ezek. 39:18; Micah 7:14).

The Prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39: A Prelude

There are three parts to this study. First, a summary of the vision of chapters 38-39 in its historical time frame. Second, a presentation of the historical fulfillment of this event. Third, an alternative to the futuristic view of a Russian connection.

The Setting of Ezekiel 38-39

Sometime between the years 592-570 BC the prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the future of Israel. He foresaw the holy city being destroyed. He foresaw the Temple of Solomon plundered. It all happened in 586 BC. Then Ezekiel foresaw the restoration of Israel based upon the faithfulness of God (Lev. 26:40-45; Deuteronomy 30:3) from the nations of the earth (Ezek. 6:6-9). Israel would be re-gathered from the Babylonian exile. And yet, in the restoration, Israel would still have enemies. Some of these enemies would be known, and some unknown. One such enemy would be Gog.

The derivation of the word "Gog" is unknown. It may be a reference to a particular ruler of the people who lived in Magog. Josephus has identified Magog as the land of the Scythians, the region N and NE of the Black Sea and E of the Aral Sea.

It is at this point that the temptation for some is to go to a modern day map, find as many of the ancient biblical places as possible, transpose modern day countries for the ancient places, and then proceed to explain the Bible with modernistic countries in mind, and assign a future fulfillment of the prophetically portions of the passage.

For example, one futuristic author who has a widely used reference Bible identifies the geographical places in Ezekiel 38-39 in the following manner.

Magog, the region N and NE of the Black Sea and E of the Aral Sea is thought to be Russia. Meshech and Tubal are identified as Turkey.

Persia is the modern Iran, and Ethiopia is equated with Northern Sudan. Libby and Gomer are associated with the E part of Turkey and the Ukraine. The house of Togarmah is said to be the part of Turkey near the Syrian border. Sheba and Dedan consist of the Arab people. Tarshish is declared to be located in the S part of Spain near Gibraltar. The Valley of Hamon-Gog refers to a valley E of the Dead Sea.

Instead of thinking in terms of ancient places and locations, instead of finding meaning to the people to whom Ezekiel ministered to, instead of finding a historical fulfillment, God's people are told to view these verses as speaking to modern day Iran, Turkey, Syria and Spain, and to look for a future battle with Russia. It really is a creative way to interpret the Bible and it does make for some interesting concepts, but it is not right to wrongly divide the Word of Truth. We submit that God knows how to spell, and if modern day Iran, Turkey, Syria, Spain and Russia were meant God would have easily identified them by their name.

Geographical places are not the only thing transposed by those determined to find some future battles in ancient prophecies. The very weapons of warfare Ezekiel saw are also modernized and given to Gog for his invasion of Israel. When the Word of God is interpreted in context, and in the historical time period in which the prophecy was given, it is obvious that Ezekiel foresaw a battle to take place in the land of Israel.

Observe the distinctive features of the now ancient battle.

- All of the invading soldiers who made up the armies of this passage were to be found riding on horses (38:15). According to Ezekiel 27:14 the house of Togormah, which is included in the invasion, was in possession of horses, and traded them in Tyre.
- The time of this invasion is described as a time when Israel was dwelling in peace (38:11), and in un-walled villages (Leviticus 25:29, 31 cf. Deuteronomy 3:5).
- The purpose of the invasion against Israel was to possess the resources of the land, including the cattle (38:11-13).
- The weapons of warfare are ancient weapons (38:4, 5; 39:9).
- The ancient weapons would be used as firewood (39:9, 10).
- The battle would take place when people used wood for fuel (39:9, 10).

Summary Ezekiel 38-39

If the prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39 is still futuristic, then several things must happen.

First, huge armies of the world will have to go back to depending upon horses. In Ezekiel's vision every soldier is riding a horse.

Second, Israel will have to be at rest and dwelling in safety. Also, cities in other areas will have to have walls built around them again for protection in order for Israel to be compared to them and so be called a "*land of unwalled villages*."

Third, major nations must return to using ancient and primitive weapons of warfare made of wood, such as bows, arrows, and spears.

The Historical Background of Ezekiel 38-39

In the year 597 BC, Ezekiel, whose name means "God strengthens," was taken with other hostages by Nebuchadnezzar to Babylon. There he settled in his own house in a village near Nippur, along the river Chebar, which was one of the royal canals of the king's. It was located SE of the city of Babylon. The village was known as Tel-abib meaning "mound of ears of grain." Its exact location is unknown today. While in exile Ezekiel prophesied for at least twenty-two years (1:2 cf. 29:17-21).

The message of Ezekiel to the people in exile was that of hope after judgment. This son of a priestly family (1:3) kept before the people the promises of God. Chapters 1-24, written before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC, anticipated the outpouring of divine judgment upon the city, and the Temple, while chapters 38-48 contained prophecies of the restoration of Israel.

The question arises as to whether or not the prophecies of Ezekiel find historical fulfillment. Particular present interest is focused upon chapters 38-39 as being still futuristic. Many people have been taught to understand these chapters as referring to Russia. The basis for this is threefold.

Three Arguments for Believing Russia is Found in Ezekiel 38-39

First, there is a presuppositional understanding or prior belief in a futuristic understanding of these passages before they are even studied. A specific mindset is brought into the interpretation of these verses. Proper biblical exegesis demands a reading "out from" the text and not a reading "into" the text.

Second, Russia now occupies that part of the region referred to in the passages.

Third, the similarity of words. For example, there is a belief that the word "*ro'sh*" (Heb. chief) is but another way of saying "Russia."

A Simple Rebuttal: Is Russia Really in Ezekiel 38-39?

The reality is that the Hebrew word *ro'sh* is a very common word and appears in the Old Testament over 600 times. It is very doubtful that the term could mean Russia only in Ezekiel. Once it is assumed that Gog is the head or leader of Russia, the assumption can next be made that Meshech means "Moscow!" It does not even matter that Moscow was only first mentioned as such in ancient documents in AD 1147, when Moscow was still a small village.

Tubal is next said to mean, "Tobolsk", but this is based only on a similarity in sound, and nothing more. Tobolsk was founded in AD 1587. Gomer is said to mean "Germany!" This entire attempt to find modern day places, in ancient prophecies, to fit into a popular prophetic scheme, is unfortunate.

Perhaps a good starting point to understanding Ezekiel 38-39 is to remember that the prophecy is only part of a much larger vision which predicts the restoration of Israel under the government of the Messiah. Ezekiel draws a detailed picture of the new form of the kingdom of God. He also sees in prophecy Gog and Magog and so foretells an attack on the part of the heathen world upon the restored kingdom of God.