

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

"Who Are Those Guys?"

38:1-6

We've come to the most quoted passage, the most referenced passage, in the Book of Ezekiel. Chapters thirty-eight and thirty-nine tell of a coming northern confederacy of nations around the Black and Caspian seas who with Persia and North Africa will invade the promised land after Israel's restoration to it in the last days.

Reading through the passage you immediately ask yourself two questions:

1. Who are these guys?
2. When do they invade?

It should be no surprise that there is a great deal of controversy about the timing of their invasion. All the way from those who say this has already happened... to those who believe it happens just prior to the Tribulation... to those who believe it happens during the Tribulation... to those who believe it happens at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom... to those who believe it happens at the end of the Millennial Kingdom.

We'll deal with the timing of this invasion of Israel in a subsequent study.

Tonight we want to see who they are, where they really come from.

Ezekiel 38:1 Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 38:2 "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him,

Ezekiel 38:3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.

Ezekiel 38:4 I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords.

Ezekiel 38:5 Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet;

Ezekiel 38:6 Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops - many people are with you.

These two chapters, thirty-eight and thirty-nine, are a single prophecy. We'll see that chapter thirty-nine is a restatement of chapter thirty-eight. It's one message.

They are the final prophecy in a series of six that Ezekiel spoke on the night before a messenger arrived to announce to the exiles in Babylon that Jerusalem had fallen to King Nebuchadnezzar and the Temple had been destroyed.

As we read through this prophecy we'll get caught-up in its details. Don't forget it was given to encourage a group of exiles that God had a future and a hope for them and their nation.

Prophecy is intended to encourage God's people. When discussing the proper exercise of the gift of prophecy in the gatherings of the church, the apostle Paul said, "But he who prophesies speaks edification and exhortation and comfort to men" (First Corinthians 14:3). One author summarized this by saying, "the purpose of prophecy is to build up by edification, to encourage through exhortation, and to console through comfort."

Let me make a general statement. It is much more common for a person to 'go negative' when teaching the Bible than to build up, encourage, and console. It's easy to prey upon your feelings that you don't quite measure up to God's standards, to make you feel bad.

Our goal is to build up, encourage, and comfort by revealing Jesus Christ in each passage. Sure, you will be challenged, exhorted. But it ought to be the challenge and exhortation to remain in first love with Jesus and go on being motivated by love rather than guilt or pressure or anything else of that nature.

Just as we begin our study of who these guys are, I want to give credit where credit is due. In my research I've relied heavily on Thomas Ice from the Pre-trib Research Center. He's got a multi-part series on these chapters that is fully referenced and extremely scholarly.¹ You can find them at www.pre-trib.org.

So who is "Gog, of the land of Magog, the Prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal...?"

Here are the conclusions of a few godly scholars:

- Mark Hitchcock - "The reason Gog is singled out eleven times by God in these two chapters is because Gog is the general over this coalition of nations in its great military campaign against Israel."
- Hal Lindsey - "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."
- Arnold Fruchtenbaum - "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."

We conclude that in this passage at least, "Gog" is the title of a person who is the leader of this last days confederacy.

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" (38:6). Then a list of other names occurs and we expect them to be in the north.

¹ <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/ezekiel-38-39-part-1>

The first is “Magog” Genesis 10:2 says, "The sons of Japheth were Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras."

Ezekiel seems to be using the names of post-flood peoples and where they lived at the time of the giving of this prophecy. His hearers would have known who these people were and where they had settled after the flood of Noah.

Ancient historians, like Philo and Herodotus, identified “Magog” with the Scythians and southern Russia. The first century Jewish historian Josephus said, "Magog founded the Magogians, thus named after him but who by the Greeks are called Scythians."

The homeland of the ancient Scythians is inhabited today by the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and the Ukraine. Those are the people we expect Gog to lead.

“Rosh” is the proper name of a geographical area. In the sixth century BC, the time Ezekiel wrote his prophecy, several bands of the Rosh people lived in an area to the north of the Black Sea.

This gets a little technical (at least to me!). The Septuagint, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, translates “Rosh” as the proper name “Ros.” This is significant since the Septuagint was translated only three centuries after Ezekiel was written (obviously much closer to the original than any modern translation). The mistranslation of “Rosh” in many modern translations as an adjective can be traced to the Latin Vulgate of Jerome, which did not appear until around 400AD.

The first Russian state was founded by a people known as the Varangian Rus. Rosh is Rus and thus we are definitely talking about modern Russia.

Who are “Meshech and Tubal”? Sloppy prophecy buffs try to tell you that they are the Russian cities of Moscow and Tobolsk. Not true; that’s based only on English pronunciation, not reasearch. Turns out there’s not too much mystery here. Herodotus placed “Mesech” and “Tubal” as people dwelling on the north shore of the Black Sea. Josephus identified them as

the Cappadocians, saying, “Mesek must be located in the Moschian mountains near Armenia.”

This area southeast of the Black Sea is modern day Turkey. Meshech and Tubal are areas of modern Turkey.

“Persia” refers to the Persian people who make up a majority of the modern country of Iran. In 1935 the Iranian government requested those countries which it had diplomatic relations with, to call Persia “Iran,” which is the name of the country in Persian.

Some of your Bibles give the next nation as “Ethiopia,” but that turns out to be inaccurate. It is not a reference to modern Ethiopia. Many English translations have transliterated “Ethiopia” from the Hebrew into the English word “Cush.” One Hebrew lexicon says that “Cush” refers to “the lands of the Nile in southern Egypt, meaning Nubia and Northern Sudan, the country bordering the southern Red Sea.” Another tells us that “Cush” “refers to the region immediately south and east of Egypt, including modern Nubia, the Sudan, and the Ethiopia of classical writers.” Thus, the Bible clearly locates “Cush” just south of Egypt in what is the modern nation of Sudan.

“Libya” is not in dispute among scholars. It refers to the area in North Africa we call Libya today.

Which leaves us with “Gomer” and “the house of Togarmah.” Josephus identified the people of Galatia with Gomer. He says that “the people the Greeks called the Galatians were the Gomerites.” Today these “Gomerites” live in the west-central part of Turkey.

Mark Hitchcock writes, “Most Bible scholars and scholars of ancient history relate biblical Togarmah to the ancient Hittite city of Tegarma, an important city in eastern Cappadocia [which is modern Turkey].”

“Gomer” and “the house of Togarmah” are additional references to modern Turkey.

So here is who we've identified:

- Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and the Ukraine
- Iran
- Lybia
- The Sudan
- Turkey

These are the geographical regions and the people Ezekiel saw who would be joining together against Israel in the last days when she was again dwelling in her ancient homeland.

Israel is again dwelling in her ancient homeland. Thus we might expect these nations to be gravitating towards one another. ***They are!***

Russia and Iran are fast allies. Russia has been a supplier of many of the elements Iran needs in order to develop a nuclear bomb. Russia agreed in 1995 to build the Bushehr nuclear plant in Iran on the site of a project begun in the 1970s by German company Siemens. Russia said on August 13, 2010, it will begin loading nuclear fuel into the reactor on August 21, an irreversible step marking the start-up of the Bushehr plant after nearly 40 years of delays.

I shouldn't have to tell you that Iran is a major player in the Middle East tensions. It is clear that Iran aspires to control the entire Middle East so that they can spread their view of Islam in order to reunite the Muslim world under a single authority, an Iranian rule. We have all heard their President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad say on multiple occasions that he aspires to wipe Israel off of the map.

Sudan is the largest nation in territory on the African continent and has a population of 26 million. Iran and Sudan have become the closest of allies during the last twenty years. They have entered into trade agreements, militaries alliances, and Iran also operates terrorist training bases in Sudan. Sudan also is the place that protected Osama bin Laden from 1991 to 1996 until he went to Afghanistan.

Ever since the rise of Colonel Mu'ammarr al-Gadhafi to power in 1969 the nation of Libya has been a constant source of trouble and terrorism for both the West and Israel.

Ah, but what about Turkey? Isn't Turkey a western ally, seeking to be admitted into the European Union?

Not lately! Spurned by the West, the last few years has seen an Islamic majority emerge in Turkey's Parliament and an Islamic Prime Minister is now in place. Turkey is beginning to see itself as a leader in the Islamic world.

There are escalating tensions between Turkey and Israel. I did a prophecy update not long ago detailing the new hard-line against Israel. Back in July Turkey threatened to cut-off diplomatic ties with Israel over its raid on what they called an international aid flotilla. A BBC article said,

Turkey - which until recently was Israel's most important Muslim ally - withdrew its ambassador and demanded that the Israelis issue an apology, agree to a United Nations inquiry and compensate the victims' families.

The nations are aligning just as Ezekiel said they would. We are seeing it; it is happening right before our very eyes, on our watch, so to speak.

We're not Israel, but we ought to receive this prophecy as an encouragement. History is under control. God has a future and a hope for you and I just as much as He does for His elect nation.

Keep looking up!