

ISSUE

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BULLETIN OF
THE OLSEN
PARK CHURCH
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Faithful Sayings

February 10,
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Services

Sunday: 9:00 AM

10:00 AM

11:00 AM

Wednesday: 7:00 PM

Elders:

Pat Ledbetter
Brady McAlister
Jeff Nunn

Deacons:

Steve Dixon
Ryan Ferguson
Ben Hight
Blake McAlister
Walker McAnear
Ryan Matney
Sam Nunn
Lance Purcell
Justin Smiley
Kevin Wise
Trevor Yontz

Evangelist:

Kyle Pope



The Prophecy against Gog and Magog

By Kyle Pope

Premillennialists have long argued that Ezekiel's reference to **"Gog, the prince of Rosh"** (38:3) foretells a future Russian invasion of Israel. Like the prophecies against other nations in the book, the Lord gives Ezekiel prophetic condemnation to Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38:1-39:29), but it is important for us to recognize how this text relates to historical events and how it came to be used in the New Testament and Jewish literature. The warning addresses, **"Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal,"** (Ezek. 38:2, NKJV). Speaking to Gog, it foretells:

...you will come from your place out of the far north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army. You will come up against My people Israel like a cloud, to cover the land. It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me, when I am hallowed in you, O Gog, before their eyes (Ezek. 38:15-16).

We first must ask whom the Lord is addressing? Magog, Meshech, and Tubal are all sons of Japheth listed in Genesis 10:2. Josephus claimed, "Magog founded those that from him were named Magogites, but who are by the Greeks called Scythians" (*Antiquities of the Jews* 1.6). This identification is still widely accepted among scholars. Rosh is handled in different ways in various translations because the Hebrew word *rosh* (רֹשׁ) means "head" or "chief." So while some render this **"prince of Rosh"** (ASV, NASB, NKJV, YLT, GLT) others translate it **"chief prince of Meshech"** (KJV, RSV, NIV, ESV, HCSB). Either way there is no basis for equating it with Russia. Nevertheless, this continues to be taught. Edwin Yamauchi, who has written extensively on the subject, bemoaning the fact that this identification, which he calls "untenable," persists, writes:

It is a reflection on evangelical scholarship when some of its spokesmen continue to adhere to the groundless identification of *rôš* as Russia, and the association of Meshech with Moscow and of Tubal with Tobolsk, when we have

had cuneiform texts and discussions of them that provided the true clarification of these names since the end of the 19th century (“Meshech, Tubal, and Company: A Review Article,” 243, 244).

It is unclear exactly when this prophecy was given to Ezekiel. The last time indicator in the book was mentioned when word came to the prophet of Jerusalem’s fall (Ezek. 33:21). That would put this around 589 BC. Some forty years earlier, history records that Scythians had swept into Palestine intent on marching into Egypt. In his *Histories*, Herodotus records that in pursuit of the Cimmerians, the Scythians had moved into Asia Minor taking control away from the Medes for twenty-eight years (4.1), becoming “masters of all Asia” (1.104). Around 630 BC they swept through Palestine towards Egypt as far as Ashkelon, stopped only by gifts sent to them from the Pharaoh. During this invasion they looted and plundered as they went (1.105).

Earlier in Ezekiel these peoples were mentioned in the prophecy against Tyre. Tubal and Meshech, together with Javan, another son of Japheth (Gen. 10:2), are said to have traded with Tyre, bartering **“human lives and vessels of bronze for your merchandise”** (Ezek. 27:13). In the prophecy to Pharaoh, as he was told of those he would see in Sheol, he is told, **“There are Meshech and Tubal and all their multitudes,**

with all their graves around it, all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword, though they caused their terror in the land of the living” (Ezek. 32:26). This **“terror in the land of the living”** undoubtedly hearkens back to the invasion recorded by Herodotus.

“The Latter Years”

Ezekiel’s prophecy of an invasion by Gog does not refer to this incident, but when was it to occur? The prophet is told, **“After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely”** (Ezek. 38:8). We should remember, the book of Ezekiel was revealed at a time when the Israelites were scattered to many nations and the land was **“desolate.”** The term **“latter”** is translated from the Hebrew word *‘acharith* (אַחֲרִית) defined to mean, “after part, end; (a) end, issue, event; (b) latter time (prophetic for future time); (c) posterity; (d) last, hindermost” (BDB). The KJV translates it “end” thirty-one times, “latter” twelve times, “last” seven times, and “posterity,” “reward,” “hindermost,” “uttermost parts,” “at the length,” “remnant,” or “residue” in the other instances of its sixty-one uses in the Old Testament.

We might assume that the use of this word automatically points to the end of time, but we must recognize that often the specific application of a word’s meaning is influenced (if not determined) by its context. Perhaps the best way to conceptualize the meaning of *‘acharith* is to take it in the sense of *after-times*—always taking into consideration what is being considered as preceding it and approaching an end. For example, the return of the Babylonian exiles will be said to happen **“in the latter (‘acharith) days”** (Jer. 49:39). The same word is used of the return of Moabite captives (Je. 48:47). This was not the end of time, but later than when Jeremiah wrote, and after the captivity. It can refer simply to the outcome of something. Isaiah wrote, **“Let them bring forth and show us what will happen; let them show the former things, what they were, that we may consider them, and know the latter end (‘acharith—“outcome” NASB) of them; or declare to us things to come”** (Isa. 41:22). It will be used of the last portion of nations under Babylon’s control (Jer. 50:12), of someone’s **“posterity”**—i.e. those who come *after* them (Amos 4:2), and of the last portion of people slain in battle (Ezek. 23:25; Amos 9:1). While it can point to the ultimate *latter time* (e.g. **“Declaring the end (‘acharith) from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done”** Isa. 46:10), its conceptual sense is just *the things that come after*.

When this invasion is said to occur, the Lord uses eschatological language, declaring, **“there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel”** (38:19). The fish, birds, and **“all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who**

are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground” (38:20). The slain multitudes of Gog are said to fill a valley called “**Hamon Gog**” (39:11), and it will take seven months for the Israelites to bury all of them (39:12), and their bodies will also become a feast for “**every sort of bird and to every beast of the field**” (39:17-22). We should note, however, that similar wording was used before this of Pharaoh. Ezekiel records:

Thus says the Lord GOD: “I will therefore spread My net over you with a company of many people, and they will draw you up in My net. Then I will leave you on the land; I will cast you out on the open fields, and cause to settle on you all the birds of the heavens. And with you I will fill the beasts of the whole earth. I will lay your flesh on the mountains, and fill the valleys with your carcass. I will also water the land with the flow of your blood, even to the mountains; and the riverbeds will be full of you. When I put out your light, I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon shall not give her light. All the bright lights of the heavens I will make dark over you, and bring darkness upon your land,” Says the Lord GOD (32:3-8).

In this passage, as in the prophecy against Gog and Magog, the Lord uses the language of judgment. His enemies will not succeed, but will be called to account for their sin. Whether it is Egypt or Gog, none will escape. While the literal end will come one day, the Lord frequently uses judgment language that foreshadows it even in describing acts of judgment that do not literally involve these types of cosmic events.

Gog and Magog in Jewish Thought

While it is now generally accepted that the prophecy against Gog and Magog was motivated by the frightening march of the Scythians into Palestine in 630 BC,¹ it is interesting to see how the predictive allusions to a future invasion came to be used in Jewish literature. While “Gog and Magog” are frequently used in reference to opponents of the Messiah in the latter days, it comes to stand as a general metaphor for opponents of God rather than a literal and specific reference to a resurgence of the Scythians in the last days. This becomes clear in the fact that it is no longer referred as “**Gog, of the land of Magog**” (38:2), but simply “**Gog and Magog.**”

¹ See Yamauchi, Edwin M. “The Scythians: invading hordes from the Russian steppes.” *Biblical Archaeologist* 46.2 (Spring 1983): 90-99.

We see this in a document from the Dead Sea Scrolls, where we find “Magog” used as a generic term for enemies of the Messiah. 4Q161 (4QpIsa^a), a Peshier (or interpretation) of the book of Isaiah, commenting on Isaiah 11:1-5, and the phrase “**a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse**” (NASB) reads:

...shoot] of David which will sprout in the fi[nal day s]since with the breath of his lips he will execute] his [ene]my and God will support him with [the spirit of c]ourage [... thro]ne of glory, h[oly] crown and multi-colour[ed] vestments [...] in his hand. He will rule over all the pe[ople]s and Magog [...] his sword will judge [al]l the peoples (Frgs. 8-19 [Column III] lines 18-21).

Just before this, in commenting on Isaiah 10:34-35, it explains, “«And Lebanon, with its gran[deur], [will fall]». They are the commanders of the] Kittim...” (ibid, lines 7-8). Kittim is the term used repeatedly in the scrolls to refer to Rome and its armies (cf. Dan. 11:30). This likely suggests that “Magog” was not referring specifically to Scythians, but to opponents of Israel generally.

This is echoed in the Babylonian Talmud. Although compiled after the New Testament, it preserves many rabbinical teachings before and concurrent with it. At least three tractsates speak of the “war of Gog and Magog” in the same way. Commenting on the meaning of Psalm 115:1, one claims, “Rabbi Johanan... said:

[Psa. 115:1] 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us' refers to the servitude to [foreign] powers. Others state, Rabbi Johanan said: [Psa. 115:1] 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us' refers to the war of Gog and Magog" (*Pesachim* 118a). In two tractates, the messianic declarations of Psalm 2 are said to apply to the Gog-Magog war. One claims, "...when the battle of Gog-Magog will come about they will be asked, 'For what purpose have you come?' and they will reply: [Psa. 2:2] 'Against God and His Messiah' as it is said, [Psa. 2:1] Why are the nations in an uproar, and why do the peoples mutter in vain..." (*Abodah Zarah* 3b). The second declares:

Rabbi Johanan further said in the name of Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai: A bad son in a man's house is worse than the war of Gog and Magog. For it is said: [Psa. 3:1] A Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son, and it is written after that: Lord, how many are mine adversaries become! Many are they that rise up against me. But in regard to the war of Gog and Magog it is written: [Psa. 2:1] Why are the nations in an uproar? And why do the peoples mutter in vain...(*Berachoth* 7b).

These texts do speak of the "war of Gog and Magog" as a great es-

chatological conflict, but in very general terms. These are any opponents of the Messiah who will not succeed.

It is likely that John's use of "Gog and Magog" in Revelation reflects this same idea. Describing Satan's brief release at the end of his 1000 years of bondage, John writes:

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. (Rev. 20:7-9).

This is not predicting a literal Scythian (or Russian) invasion of Israel, nor was Ezekiel. It is describing God's judgment upon any who exalt themselves against God, and His anointed Christ. This foretells the spiritual victory that will come to God's people, not a fleshly, physical, and material battle. This assurance of victory is offered to comfort faithful servants of God regardless of whatever hardships they face. Dan King, in his commentary on Revelation writes:

...In the Rabbinical writings Gog and Magog had... come to be identified with the future enemies of the Messiah. Likewise, it seems that John also uses these symbols to picture the last fierce enemies of God and Christ, and of their people, the Church. According to Ezekiel, God uses sword (38:21), fire (39:6), and burning sulfur (38:22) to execute judgment against Gog and Magog. John also employs these same instruments of divine judgment in his vision to describe their downfall...(324).

Works Cited

- King, Daniel H., Sr. *I Saw the Heaven Opened*. Athens, AL: Truth Publications, Inc., 2018.
- Yamauchi, Edwin M. "Meshech, Tubal, and Company: A Review Article." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 19.3 (Sum 1976): 239-247.
- . "The Scythians: invading hordes from the Russian steppes." *Biblical Archaeologist* 46.2 (Spring 1983): 90-99.

