

The Church of the Servant King

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Prophecy Series

(Proph17D_Ezek38&39_Gog&Magog)

These chapters (38 & 39) represent the sixth and last message of Ezekiel that he gave the night before refugees from Jerusalem reached the exiles and gave them the message that Jerusalem had fallen (see Ezek 33.21-22). The two chapters consist of seven separate messages that begin with the phrase “thus says the Lord God.”

- Ezekiel 38.3 – Introduction of the invading people groups
- Ezekiel 38.10 – Introduction of Gog’s plan to attack unsuspecting Israel
- Ezekiel 38.14 – Gog’s invasion is part of God’s sovereign plan to disclose Himself to the nations
- Ezekiel 38.17 – God’s tactics for the destruction of Gog – phenomenon of nature
- Ezekiel 39.1 – God declares the destruction and details of burial
- Ezekiel 39.17 – Gog’s forces – food for animals
- Ezekiel 39.25 – Analogies to the exile generations of Israel and Judah

The prophecy contained in these two chapters involves “Gog” of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. In this lesson, we will examine who this character is or will be and we will attempt to sort through the perplexing and contrasting maze of references that seems to almost defy any attempt to pinpoint the timing and setting of the events described.

Some of the questions that arise from a reading of these two chapters include the following.

- Is Gog a ruler since he is described as a “prince?”
- Where is Rosh, Meshech and Tubal?
- Is the re-gathering and restoration (38.8) that Ezekiel mentions in this passage and that is to occur in the “latter days” and “latter years” (38.16 cf. 38.8) associated with the Tribulation period, the 2nd Advent or the end of the Millennium?
- How do we reconcile references to Israel dwelling safely in the Land (38.11, 12, 14) with the invasion of Gog and his coalition of forces from the North (38.6, 9) if such invasion occurs in the Tribulation or in association with the Battle of Armageddon? Israel doesn’t dwell safely in the Land until after the 2nd Advent of Christ in the Millennium.
- It takes seven years (39.9) for the Israelites to burn the weapons of the invaders. If the destruction of Gog occurs during the Tribulation, then will the clean up continue into the beginning of the Millennium? Or, if this battle with Gog described in Ezekiel is the same as the battle of Gog and Magog that occurs at the end of the Millennium, then why would a clean up be needed since the new earth will be replacing the present earth?
- It takes seven months (39.12) for the Israelites to bury the dead. Would burial even be necessary if this Gog is the same as the Gog who is associated with the revolt at the end of the Millennium?

Theologians have debated the timing of the events described in these chapters due to these very questions. I think that it will be very important to keep in mind an observation that we’ve made as we’ve progressed chronologically through the prophecies of these Old Testament prophets. We’ve seen a recurring pattern that has been exhibited by the prophets we’ve studied to date whereby separate and distant prophetic events are melded together into one prophetic narrative using poetic imagery and references. It is as if these prophets were looking at a distant horizon and observing two peaks as if they were conjoined and part of the same mountain when in reality they are two separate mountains separated by a great distance. Sometimes those two peaks represent the 1st and 2nd Advent of Christ and sometimes they represent the 2nd Advent and the end of human history – events separated by a number of years, but from the prophet’s distant perspective, they seemed to be concurrent.

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Where is “Rosh” and Who are These People Groups?

“O Gog, the prince of Rosh” – The Septuagint (LXX), which was written just a little more than three centuries later than Ezekiel, translated this phrase – “ruler [𐤂𐤓𐤕 𐤓𐤓𐤕 𐤓𐤓𐤕] of Rosh.”¹ The proper name “Rosh” only occurs in Ezekiel 38.2-3 and 39.1 along with Meshech and Tubal – all of whom are mentioned to be under the rule of Gog. In our passage, Gog is twice mentioned to be from the “uttermost parts of the North” (38.15 & 39.2). In the “Hebrew cosmography this would include a wedge of territory extending up from a point somewhere south of Israel to the western shores of the Black Sea and the eastern coast of the Caspian.”² This is true regardless of whether one considers the possibility that Ezekiel was prophesying from the vantage point of the Exile in Babylon or from the vantage point of Jerusalem. The perspective would not materially change the general area against which he was prophesying.

There is a difference of opinion regarding the translation of the Hebrew word *rō’s* (“Rosh”). Some translations render “Rosh” as a proper noun and some translations render it as an adjective (“O Gog, the chief prince” or “head prince”). The evidence seems to favor the adjective rendering, i.e. “chief” or “head” prince. “Rosh” never appears as a nation in any other biblical list of place names, yet all of the other names in our passage (i.e. Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Persia, Ethiopia, Libya) do appear in numerous passages (cf. Gen 10.1-7; 1 Chron. 1.5-7; Ezek 27.13-24; 32.26).³

While the origin of the name “Rosh” cannot be definitively established, there is much evidence that seems to establish a connection between the “Rosh” and modern-day Russia. Three primary reasons exist: 1) Some of the countries named by Ezekiel were located in what is now Russia; 2) The armies are said to come “from the far north” (Ezek 38.6, 15; 39.2) and relate to regions now under the domination of modern day Russia; 3) Ezekiel spoke of a coalition of several nations, many of whom are either under the influence of Russia or have great prospects of being under the influence of Russia, e.g. Iran (“Persia”); Sudan and northern Ethiopia (“Cush”), Libya (“Put”), and Turkey (“Meshech,” “Tubal,” “Gomer,” and Beth Togarmah”).⁴

¹ The meaning of the Hebrew word for “Rosh” is “head” or “chief.” This would result in a translation of “Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince (or ruler) of Meshech and Tubal.” See footnotes in Earl Radmacher, gen ed, *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 1396. Nevertheless, even if translated in this manner, the fact remains that the peoples of Meshech and Tubal are also thought to have been associated with the same general region as will be described in association with “Rosh.”

² Jon Ruthven, “Ezekiel’s Rosh and Russia: A Connection?” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 125:500 (October, 1968), 325.

³ See Charles H. Dyer, “Ezekiel” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1983), 1299-1300 for helpful commentary on this subject. Note the date on this commentary, i.e. 1983 – prior to the so-called “collapse” of the U.S.S.R. Many have discounted the arguments put forth by Dyer and others that attempt to establish a connection between “Rosh” and a future Russian on the basis that the Soviet Union is no longer. However, I would argue that the Soviet Union never totally collapsed. The power behind the former empire is just in a period of underground dormancy. This is why I distrust President Putin. If we are even close to the Rapture and the Tribulation, he has all the makings of being the type of ruler to execute such a campaign as described here in Ezekiel 38 & 39. If we are not close to the Rapture, he strikes me as a close parallel to what the King of the North will be like.

⁴ Ibid.

If “Rosh” was in fact a power (verses an adjective), it is most probable that “Rosh was one of the many Sarmatian or Iranian tribes which almost surrounded the Caspian sea; was located near the Caucasus Mountains perhaps as early as the tenth century B.C.(although likely somewhat later); was mentioned in Assyrian and Babylonian records (ca. 700-600 B.C.); and was in the general migration of the Sarmatians westward which reached its fullest extent ca. 200 B.C.”⁵ [The Sarmatians were a group of tribes that had gained complete control of the Crimean area (now southern Russia) by 200 B.C. and are linked to tribes from Iran who may have penetrated that region by as early as 900 B.C. – especially the region between the Black and Caspian Sea. They are mentioned by Herodotus in Book Four of his *Histories* in reference to military engagements with Cyrus of Persia and the Scythians (ca. 540 B.C).]

Rosh is also mentioned in the context of other primary elements of the invading force – Gomer and Togarmah – who also come from the “uttermost parts of the North.” Other forces or peoples are also mentioned – Persia, Cush or Ethiopia, and Put or Lybia (38.5).

So, there seems to be two distinct groups mentioned in regard to this invasion – 1) a scattered collection of people – usually identified with Lybia, Ethiopia, and Persia (a region extending from modern N. Africa to Iraq/Iran) and 2) a larger group from the far north. The alliance comes from all directions – Persia (east); Ethiopia (south); Libya (west); and Gomer (north). Gomer (38.5) was most likely a reference to the Cimmerians – a people from modern-day southern Russia. Togarmah (38.5) was a reference to a people further north – near the Black Sea.⁶ A summary of these peoples mentioned is as follows:

- Magog – near the Black and Caspian Seas
- Rosh (if a proper noun and not an adjective) – near the Black and Caspian Seas
- Meshech and Tubal – near Magog
- Persia – east of Israel (modern-day Iran and Iraq)
- Ethiopia – south of Israel (Northern Africa)
- Libya – west of Israel
- Gomer & Togarmah – southern Russia near the Black Sea

What is the Timing of These Events?

There seems to be conflicting indications in this passage regarding the timing of these events. Note the following phrases and descriptions found in these two chapters:

- “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” (38.8)
- “They were brought out of the nations” (38.8)
- “All of them [Israel] dwell safely” (38.8)
- “I [Gog] will go up against a land of unwallled villages...a peaceful people, who dwell safely...without walls, and having neither bars nor gates” (38.11)
- “Against the waste places that are again inhabited and against a people gathered from the nations” (38.12)
- “On that day when My people Israel dwell safely” (38.14)
- “It will be in the latter days that I will bring you against My land” (38.16)
- “A great earthquake in the land of Israel” (38.19)
- “I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire and brimstone.” (38.22)
- “They [Israel] will make fires with them [weaponry of Gog’s forces] for seven years” (39.9)
- “For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them” (39.12)

⁵ Ruthven, “Ezekiel’s Rosh and Russia: A Connection?” 332.

⁶ Radmacher, *The Nelson Study Bible*, 1396.

- “When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them out of their enemies’ lands” (39.27)
- “For I shall have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel” (39.29)

We know the timing of certain events associated with the end of the Tribulation, the 2nd Advent, the beginning of the Millennium and the battle of Gog & Magog at the end of human history. For instance, consider the following:

- The first half of the Tribulation will be a period of relative peace and prosperity [**similar to the dwelling in the land safely and peaceably in Ezekiel 38.8, 11?**] as the Antichrist and the False Prophet of Israel consolidate their power (Dan 9.27a)
- During the 2nd half of the Tribulation when the 6th Seal of judgment is opened, there will be worldwide disturbances and fear of divine wrath [**similar to that which is associated with Gog’s destruction in Ezekiel 38.18-23, e.g. earthquakes**]. See Rev 6.12-17. Timing – 2nd half of the Tribulation.⁷
- Jerusalem is overrun by Gentile powers [**including Gog’s forces?**] for three and one half months (Lu 21.24 cf. Rev 11.2). Timing – 2nd half of the Tribulation.
- Armies from the East and North [**including Gog’s forces?**] converge upon Palestine (Dan 11.44 cf. Rev 16.12). Timing – 2nd half of the Tribulation.
- Signs [**including the earthquakes of Ezekiel 38.19?**] appear in the earth and sky (Isa 13.10; Joel 2.10, 30-31; 3.15; Matt 24.29). Timing – just prior to the 2nd Advent and toward the end of the Tribulation.
- Jews flee Jerusalem aided by topographical changes [**caused by the earthquakes of Ezekiel 38.19?**] (Zech 14.5). Timing – just prior to the 2nd Advent and toward the end of the Tribulation.
- Final regathering of Israel [**same as Ezekiel 38.8, 12; 39.27?**] (Isa 11.11-12; Jer 30.3; Ezek 36.24; 37.1-14; Amos 9.14-15; Micah 4.6-7; Matt 24.31). Timing – associated with the 2nd Advent.
- National deliverance of Israel from the Antichrist (Dan 12.1b; Zech 12.10; 13.1; Rom 11.26-27). Timing – 2nd Advent.
- Israel is exalted above Gentile nations [**dwells safely and prosperously in the Land as in Ezekiel 38.12?**] (Isa 14.1-2; 49.22-23; 60.14-17; 61.5-9). Timing – Millennium.
- Satan released from the abyss to deceive the nations (Rev 20.7-8) and global armies [**including the forces of Gog in Ezekiel 38 & 39?**] besiege Jerusalem and are destroyed (Rev 20.8-9). Satan cast into the Lake of Fire (Rev 20.10). Timing – end of the Millennium and human history and beginning of eternity.

One can easily see from the above analysis how different views have arisen regarding the timing of the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39. There are primarily three different positions espoused by premillennialists depicted in the table below.

Position	Pros	Cons
End of Christ’s Millennial Reign – Battle of Gog & Magog (Rev 20.7-9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Some support from certain phrases in Ezekiel 38 & 39, e.g. the attack occurs while Israel is dwelling safely and prosperously in the Land ➤ The forces of Gog in Ezekiel 38 & 39 could be among the global armies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The results of Ezekiel’s battle do not coincide with the events that follow the Gog & Magog revolt in Revelation 20. Why bury the dead for seven months after the battle (Ezek 39.12-13) when the next prophetic event is the

⁷ Some dispensationalists place the timing of the Seal judgments earlier in the Tribulation period. This is due in part to the fact that the seventh seal judgment is tantamount to the beginning of the trumpet judgments.

	<p>that besiege Jerusalem and are destroyed at the end of the Millennium.</p>	<p>resurrection of the unsaved dead (Rev 20.11-13)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Why would people remain on the earth after the battle to burn the weapons of war for seven years (Ezek 39.9-10) instead of entering immediately into eternity (Rev 21.1-4)? ➤ The effect of the two battles relative to Israel is different. In Ezekiel, the battle is the catalyst God uses to draw Israel to Himself (cf. Ezek 39.7, 22-29) and to end her captivity. The battle in Revelation 20 occurs after Israel has been faithful to God and enjoyed His blessings for 1000 years.
Beginning of the Millennium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The timing of some of the phrases in Ezekiel 38 & 39 could coincide with events surrounding the 2nd Advent and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom (e.g. the phenomena of nature, the regathering of Israel) ➤ At the beginning of the Millennium, all weapons of war will be destroyed (Micah 4.1-4) which corresponds to Ezekiel's description that 7 years are required to burn the implements of war used by Gog's forces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Israel will not have been dwelling peaceably and prosperously in the Land just prior to the 2nd Advent as indicated by Ezekiel
Sometime during the Tribulation period	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The fact that the attack comes when Israel is at peace (Ezek 38.8, 11) coincides with the period of relative peace and prosperity that is present during the 1st half of the Tribulation when Israel's covenant with the Antichrist is in effect (Dan 9.27a) ➤ After the covenant with the Antichrist is broken in the middle of the Tribulation, the nation will suffer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ If the forces of Gog in Ezekiel include the present-day Soviet Union or Russia, can they be so utterly destroyed per Ezekiel's description, yet somehow, at a later point, allow Russia to be part of the forces that attack the Antichrist in Jerusalem just before the defeat of all the worldly forces at the 2nd Advent of Christ? (This would require two invasions of Israel by

	<p>tremendous persecution (Dan 9.27b; Matt 24.15-22)</p> <p>➤ This could provide the time needed to bury the dead (Ezek 39.12-13) and to burn the weapons of war (Ezek 39.9-10)</p>	<p>powers from the North during the Tribulation).⁸</p>
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So the evidence seems to indicate that the invasion from the confederation led by Gog will occur sometime during the Tribulation period. God allows this invasion to occur in accordance with His sovereign plan and purpose in order to: 1) deal with that portion of Israel that was arrogant and living in relative peace and prosperity (38.12 cf. 39.23-24, 26); 2) magnify and glorify His name among the nations by preserving and blessing the believing remnant of Israel (38.16, 23; 39.7 cf. 39.29). Ezekiel words his prophecy regarding these future events in such a way that even one of his own contemporary hearers could not miss the relevance to their generation (see 39.23-29).

⁸ Two separate invasions could be possible, especially since the invasion described by Ezekiel is against Israel whereas the invasion described by Daniel (Dan 11.40a) is against the Antichrist who has established his headquarters at Jerusalem.