



BETHEL
PRESBYTERIAN

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 17 Issue 2

January 14, 2018

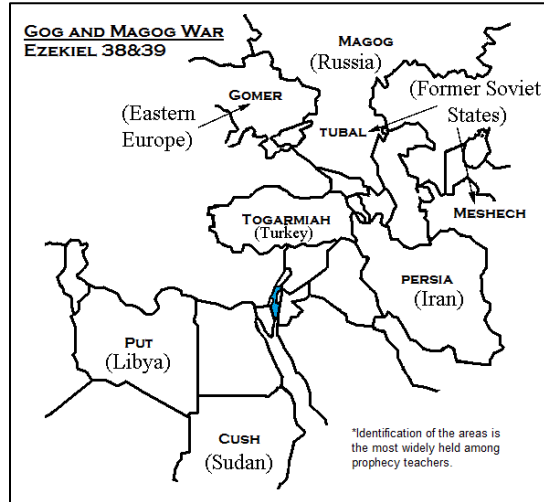
A Pilgrim Mind

Sadly, today there is a lot of smoke/dust which surrounds Ezekiel 38-39. Either we are familiar with the controversy and so shy away from the text. Or we misunderstand the text to teach of a worldwide attack on the nation of Israel. How sad! This section of Ezekiel was written to be read and so to comfort the child of God living in this state of sin and misery. I hope this sermon will clear away some of the smoke/dust.

Many of us have attended or heard of an End Times Prophecy Conference. There many are introduced to "Gog and Magog" and their *supposed* role at the end of this world in gathering together an alliance of evil nations which will oppose God and Israel. Magog is said to be Russia and Gog, the Russian leader. In fact, I have included in your notes a map

representative of one approach in understanding Ezekiel 38-39.

But there is a major problem in the approach pictured here. Though it prides itself in taking the Bible literally, it most certainly does NOT take the names and places of Ezekiel literally. Consider, the text does NOT say that Russian is going to attack God's people, BUT Magog!



It is NOT Libya that factors into the prophecy BUT Put! Now an adherent to this approach might say, "Ah but these are the modern-day nations inhabiting these ancient territories."

Family of God, that is NOT taking the passage literally! Magog is the nation that is said to be against God's people in Ezekiel. In Bible times it housed a specific people with a distinct culture. It is this that was said to attack Israel. In fact, to suggest that Magog is anything other than the Magog of Ezekiel's day is to take the passage before us figuratively!¹

Now if we are going to take the passage before us figuratively (as well we ought as it is apocalyptic literature), why the arrogance in contending that any other reading besides a "National Interpretation" of this passage plays fast and loose with the text? It is preposterous!

Our call with regard to any passage in the Bible is to "allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, the less clear in light of the more clear." And when we apply this hermeneutic to Ezekiel 38-39, rather than endeavoring to be prophetic and so host conferences on the end times and speculate as to the military proceedings that will occur in the last days (as if that is why God gave us Ezekiel 38-39), we are able to respond as Ezekiel exhorted the people of God in the text before us! In this context, I remind you of the words of Graeme Goldsworthy on the purpose of the book of Revelation,

The problem of Christian existence is that we easily allow the tribulation which we experience within the suffering church to obscure the glory that is already ours by faith in Christ. This is the problem that the Book of Revelation sets out to rectify [and likewise Ezekiel 38-39]. If only that object and aim of the book were kept in mind we could be spared a lot of speculative interpretation. John's first concern is not to minister to arm-chair prophets in some far-off age, but to the battlers of his own age who struggle to reconcile the fact of their suffering with the fact of Christ's victory over sin, Satan, and death. (Goldsworthy, 1911, p. 267)

Such is the intent of the chapters at which we are looking! They were written to

1. Encourage the people of God now in exile to love the Lord and so serve Him with all their might.
2. Enable pilgrims of grace to process and so understand the trials and difficulties of this

life.

3. Frame the believer's thinking that we might live in this state of sin and misery with balance and composure.

I want to introduce you to this passage in the hope that much of the confusion that surrounds these chapters might be cleared away. And then lastly, I want to address the message that Ezekiel intended for the people of God! With that, let's begin looking at the background and some of the peculiarities of Ezekiel 38-39.

Based on the wording, introduction, and the ending of this pericope, it is clear that Ezekiel 38-39 consists of a single message from God. In other words, what is before us is a distinct unit,

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Panel A: The Defeat of Gog (38:2c-23)<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Frame 1: The Conscription of Gog (38:2c-9)b. Frame 2: The Motives of Gog (38:10-13)c. Frame 3: The Advance of Gog (38:14-16)d. Frame 4: The Judgment of Gog (38:17-22)e. Interpretive Conclusion (38:23)2. Panel B: The Disposal of Gog (39:1-29)<ol style="list-style-type: none">a. Frame 1: The Slaughter of Gog (39:1-8)b. Frame 2: The Spoiling of Gog (39:9-10)c. Frame 3: The Burial of Gog (39:11-16)d. Frame 4: The Devouring of Gog (39:17-20)e. Interpretive Conclusion (The Final Word) (39:21-29) | |
|--|--|

separate from Ezekiel 33-37 and Ezekiel 40-48. You will have deduced from our opening reading that this pericope describes

1. The invasion of the land of Israel by Gog and his hordes, as well as
2. God's utter annihilation of these forces.

Now for the sake of understanding, Ezekiel/God utilized a literary tool known as

"Literary Halving." In the ancient world, a document might be written on two tablets and then secured together with a couple of rings (be they leather or metallic). In our case, Panel A is Ezekiel 38:2-23 (consisting of 365 words) and Panel B is Ezekiel 39:1-29 (consisting of 357 words). Consider the outline provided by D. I. Block in his commentary on Ezekiel.² The point in *Literary Halving* was to provide both by its content and its assembling- its visible form, THE definitive word on a particular subject. In this case, the response God's people ought to give to Gog!

This raises the question, "What is Gog"? (And no, it is NOT a Klingon drink).

First off note that scholars are clueless as to the semantical meaning of "Gog" and "Magog". However, most believe that Magog most likely translates as "*the land [Ma-] of Gog*". Based on Ezekiel 38:16, we know that Gog is NOT a particular nation as it is used in contrast to all "nations." Speaking of Gog and Magog,³ Ezekiel recorded this:

Ezekiel 38:16:, God said, "And you will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. It will come about in the last days that I shall bring you against My land, in order that the nations [not 'other' nations, but 'the nations' implying all of them] may know Me when I shall be sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog."

From this it is clear that Gog and Magog do NOT constitute a nation; if they did again the text would have read, "the other nations"! In fact, it is stated here that God's intended purpose with

Gog and Magog was to manifest His glory through them to the nations! That means the map I gave you at the top of your outline is trash.

From this section we also learn that Gog is used in reference to a person.

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

Here Gog is viewed a person, in fact, "a prince" against whom God declared His intention to go to battle (cf. also 38:14-15).

O.K. so Gog is a person, right? Well, not so fast! Consider the divine commentary on Ezekiel 38 found in Revelation 20.

Revelation 20:7-8, "And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth [And what are these nations?], Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore."

There is no question that "Gog and Magog" are much more than a person or their land. Clearly the identity of Gog transcends nations and borders to encompass the entire globe, "...the four corners of the earth." I feel like we are trying to nail Jell-O to the wall here. So, what is Gog?

To answer that, *finally* look with me at the broader context, Ezekiel 28:25-26.⁴ It turns out that Ezekiel 38-39 is an elaboration of this passage. In fact, scholars consider this an example of Resumptive Exposition in which God takes up again that which was addressed earlier in a prophetic discourse this describes the stated judgment of God against Tyre.

Ezekiel 28:25-26, "Thus says the Lord God, 'When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and shall manifest My holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant Jacob. And they will live in it securely; and they will build houses, plant vineyards, and live securely, when I execute judgments upon ALL WHO SCORN THEM ROUND ABOUT THEM. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God.'"

This passage revolves around two themes:

1. the revelation of God's glory to the nations and
2. The revelation of God's covenant loyalty to His people which invites their loyalty in turn.

Now without question that is the focus and theme of Ezekiel 38-39. In these two chapters, we read no less than seven times that it is God's intent for the "nations to know the Lord"- specifically His name, holiness, greatness, and glory (cf. Ezekiel 38:16, 23; 39:6, 7, 22, 23, 28).

Nowhere in the Book of Ezekiel is there a denser concentration of this theme than here.

As to the covenant loyalty of God and the devotion of His people, notice the climax.

Ezekiel 39:22, 25-26, “And the house of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God from that day onward... Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Now I shall restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I shall be jealous for My holy name. And they shall forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their *own* land with no one to make them afraid.’”

From this we conclude that Ezekiel 28 parallels our passage, which is wonderful. For while Gog is NOT clearly defined in Ezekiel 38-39 (at least not identified with the specificity and detail which makes it concrete in our minds), it is in Ezekiel 28:26. Notice the text.

Ezekiel 28:26, “And they [God’s people] will live in [the land] securely; and they will build houses, plant vineyards, and live securely, when I execute judgments upon all who scorn them round about them [that, family of God, is Gog!!]. Then they will know that I am the Lord their God.”

Accordingly, Gog is defined as nothing less than the combined passion of the fallen world which opposes God, His people, His worship, and His glory. J. B. Taylor wrote this:

...the origin of the name is less significant than what it symbolizes, namely the personified head of the forces of evil which are intent on destroying the people of God. (Taylor, 1981, p. 238)

Speaking of Gog and Magog, Leon Morris wrote in his commentary on Revelation these words:

In apocalyptic writings, for example, they often symbolize the forces of evil. For John the combination is another way of referring to the hosts of the wicked. He has in mind the last great attack of evil on the things of God. (Morris, 2009, p. 227)⁵

From this we conclude that Gog is a system, and so a world view which “scorns God and His people.” It is the fallen world which transcends nations and people-groups and so constitutes that which throughout Redemptive History has been hostile to God and His people. In fact, notice what Ezekiel said in chapter 38, speaking of Gog:

Ezekiel 38:17, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days through My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for *many* years that I would bring you against them?’”

You must understand, Gog has been the topic and focus of much of God’s revelation throughout Redemptive History!⁶ Saint Augustine observed the distinction found in Scripture

between the City of God and the City of man. Gog is the personification of the City of Man.

Don't ever forget that the Fall occurred when Adam rebelled against God's authority and so NOT ONLY was expelled from the Garden of Eden, BUT became thoroughly and totally corrupt! And yet, it wasn't only him; at this time all mankind became enemies of God. Speaking of the fallen world, Paul wrote of man:

Romans 1:21-23, "For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures."

As such, the world in which we live NOT ONLY is fleeing from God BUT is hostile toward God.

Romans 8:5-8, "For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace, because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

That is what is meant in Scripture by Gog and Magog! It is the fallen, depraved, and corrupt world that is in rebellion against God. It is the fallen mind and so the worldview which today transcends borders, cultures, gender, and social class.⁷ Accordingly, notice what Christ came to do; Paul writes:

Galatians 1:3-4, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us out of this present evil age..."

That is Gog! Christ came to deliver from Gog! Accordingly, we are exhorted:

Romans 12:1-2a, "I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." - the word for "world" here is *αἰών* (*aiōn*) translated as "age."

MacArthur's uses Trenches definition of this term and it is an apt definition of "Gog".

World translates *aiōn*, which is better rendered 'age,' referring to the present sinful age, the world system now dominated by Satan, 'the god of this world (*aiōn*)' (2 Cor. 4:4). World here represents the sum of the demonic-human philosophy of life. It corresponds to the German *zeitgeist* (the spirit of the age) and has been well described

as ‘that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations, at any time current in the world, which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitute a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale’ (G. C. Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973], pp. 217–18). (MacArthur, *Romans 9-16 MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, 1994, p. 150)

Now this does NOT mean that Gog cannot be viewed as a person, for clearly the title is used this way (again cf. Ezekiel 38:3). Yet when it does reference a person(s), we conclude that that person encapsulates the fallen mind of the sinner in rebellion against Christ. In other words, Gog is the mind, passion, and work of the Antichrist! Turn with me to Revelation 19 -22.

There is no question that Ezekiel served as the foundation and so the basis for much of the teaching found in Revelation 19-22. As we’ll see, the temple described in Ezekiel 40-48 is expanded upon in Revelation 21-22. And so, it is with Gog and Magog. John used the teaching of Ezekiel 38-39 in his portrayal of the eschatological conflict of Revelation 19–20. The scene of the birds gathered for the great supper of God in Revelation 19:17–21 without question was taken from Ezekiel 39:17–20.

In this regard, consider this:

Revelation 19:17-21, “And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, ‘Come, assemble for the great supper of God; in order that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great’ [again, this is the wording of Ezekiel 39:17-20]. And I saw THE BEAST and the kings of the earth and their armies, assembled to make war against Him who sat upon the horse, and against His army [referencing the attack of Gog against Christ and His angels, this parallels Ezekiel 38:16 which describes Gog’s attack on God’s people. It has always been the case that in attacking God’s people you are attacking God (cf. Acts 9:4)]. And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.”

In the prophecy of Revelation 19, John fills in several details missing from Ezekiel.

1. The person through whom the invitation to the birds is extended is explicitly referred to as an authorized messenger of God- an “angel” (Revelation 19:17).
2. The Agent through whom God wins the victory over the beast rides a horse and is accompanied by a great army. He is described in Revelation 19:11–16 as the Messiah

such that we understand that His armies are heavenly hosts, not earthly! So truly the war referenced here is not against flesh and blood (Ephesians 6:12)!

3. John also adds a clue concerning the way the beast (Gog) achieved domination over this worldwide alliance of forces arrayed against God. He had been accompanied by a false prophet who had charmed the other nations.

Family of God understand, not every preacher is in the business of proclaiming the will of God! In this regard we understand the mark of the beast (Revelation 13:16-17). It is NOT a literal mark or a chip which is inserted under the skin. Rather as 666 is the number of “man” times three, the mark therefore speaks of one’s commitment to and support of the fallen world of man described as Gog!⁸ In other words, the mark of the beast is born by all who endorse, support, and profligate the teaching of this age!

Accordingly, I can’t exhort you strongly enough, be careful what you endorse and/or support. In the words of Paul:

Romans 14:22b, “Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves.”

To this, God added further commentary in Revelation 20:

Revelation 20:7-10, “And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.”

This description opens with a chronological note. We are talking here about the final battle that Gog/our fallen world will wage against God and His people. Such is the ultimate focus of Ezekiel 38-39.

This passage also provides clarifying information as to the battle between Gog and God’s People! Here the mastermind behind Gog is referred to specifically as ὁ Σατανᾶς, “the Adversary,” Satan. Accordingly, Yahweh’s turning Gog around, putting hooks in his jaws, and bringing him out from the remotest parts of the north (Ezekiel 38:4–6) is explained in Revelation 20 as the release of the Satan from his prison. Whereas Ezekiel avoided any reference to Jerusalem/Zion, John adds clarity as he describes Gog as surrounding “the beloved city” where the saints have sought refuge.

Do you understand that this is nothing less than the body of Christ and so the people of God?

In the end, the agent of the deceit of the nations, who is now identified as the devil (ὁ

διάβολος), is conquered, captured and thrown into the lake of fire where he will suffer for eternity along with all who followed him. From all of this I hope you see how important Ezekiel 38-39 is to the health of your walk. What at first appears to be a message to the Jewish exiles to bolster their sagging hopes, in reality is a message of hope to all exiles in Christ!

And so we understand that Ezekiel 38-39 was written to all pilgrim people struggling in a world hostile to Christ and His Kingdom. As such, it was given to encourage them:

- To “play the man”!
- To “fight the good fight of faith,” and so...
- To “take hold of the eternal life to which they have been called”!

Now what specifically is the message? We will see this as we continue our study. However, let me close with this encouragement! No matter how dark or treacherous your road may be today or may become tomorrow, from this passage we know where it leads!

- It leads to the conquest of Christ over Satan, his servants, this world, its misery, and sin!
- At that time there will be a Judgment through which you will pass unscathed on account of Christ. Yet the rest of the world along with Satan and his servants will be cast into the Lake of Fire where they will suffer together forever!
- Then will come the destruction of this world, its renewal, and the glorious descent of Christ and His people to take up their abode in the paradise of God.
- At this time, the Marriage Feast of the Lamb will be enjoyed which will include the Last Cup of Passover and so the fulfillment of the promise Christ made so long ago- that He would not “drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when He drinks it new with us in His Father’s kingdom” (Matthew 26:29)!

That family of God is what lies at the end of the life of everyone in Christ! With your eye fixed on that prize today, let us NOT “grow weary in doing well” (Galatians 6:9), BUT let us together “press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God” (Philippians 3:14)!

References

- Block, D. I. (1998). *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48 (New International Commentary on the Old Testament)*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Goldsworthy, G. (1911). *The Gospel in Revelation*. Atic Pr.
- MacArthur, D. J. (1991). *Romans 1-8 MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.
- MacArthur, D. J. (1994). *Romans 9-16 MacArthur New Testament Commentary*. Chicago: Moody Publishers.
- Morris, L. (2009). *Revelation Tndal New Testament Commentaries*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic.
- Simon Kistemaker, W. H. (2001). *Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Baker

Academic.

Taylor, J. B. (1981). *Ezekiel (The Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series)*. Chicago: IVP Academic.

End Note(s)

¹ It would be like me pointing to a man entering a bank and saying, "Sometime in the next ten years, that man, named Bob, is going to rob the bank." Then when the bank was robbed by a man whose name we cannot pronounce (because he is a foreigner), I make the claim that my prophecy came true. You rightly would say disagree with me and say that my prediction was wrong. A poor response would be to say that the bank robber stood in the same place as Bob which means my prophecy was correct.

² (Block, 1998, pp. 431-432)

³ This is metonymy. When in the Old Testament it says that Nebuchadnezzar conquered God's people, we understand this to mean the Babylonians. And so it is here. Though the text is speaking of Gog, nevertheless it clearly is referencing Magog as well!

⁴ Recall that Ezekiel 28:25-26 is the center of the section on God's judgment to the nations. There are 97 verses prior to this passage and 97 verses after. Accordingly, the Hebrew is telling us that this is the focus of Ezekiel's/God's treatment of the nations. Accordingly, it makes perfect sense that Ezekiel/God would want to expand upon this section which is what is done in Ezekiel 38-39!

⁵ In the words of Hendriksen, "The names do not refer to particular nations, for neither Gog nor Magog can be identified with any degree of certainty. They are symbolic terms that allude to extensive forces assembled from 'the four corners of the earth,' not from one or two nations." (Simon Kistemaker, 2001, p. 542)

⁶ Just not by name, cf. also Ezekiel 39:8.

⁷ Think of that from which we have been delivered. Ephesians 2:1-3 says, "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. [More than anything, that is Gog!] Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." That is the essence of Gog!

⁸ William Hendriksen wrote, "Let us notice that the word mark appears a number of times in Revelation. John mentions it in 14:9, 'If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives the mark on his forehead and his hand' (see also 19:20; 20:4). And in 14:11 he writes of 'anyone who receives the mark of his name.' Therefore, having the mark of the beast leads to acts of worship and the bearing of his name. It designates a person as a devotee and true follower of the beast. It indicates a person who is hostile to God, his Word, and his people; he or she bears the mark of the Antichrist on the right hand or forehead. ¶ Next, the symbol of the *right hand* means friendship and fellowship (Galatians 2:9); it is a sign of working together in a common cause, namely, to oppose God. The mark on the *forehead* implies that these people are influenced by the same philosophy and thought patterns. In their anti-Christian thinking, they glorify the beast and his achievements and attempt to destroy the work of Christ on earth." (Simon Kistemaker, 2001, p. 393)