

## ***Supplemental sermon notes for “Gog” message, September 17, 2023***

***Ezekiel 38-39***

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### **When will this happen?**

If you've read the Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins book “Left Behind”, you may remember that this prophecy in Ezekiel 38-39 occurs toward the beginning of that book, before their description of “The Rapture”. LaHaye and Jenkins are from the “dispensational” viewpoint of prophecy, which teaches that Jesus will remove the Church from the earth prior to the arrival of the Antichrist. They place Ezekiel 38-39 right at the beginning of the Antichrist's ascension to power. I have stated often before that I do not share their interpretation of the “Rapture of the Church.” I believe that the Rapture occurs with the Second Coming of Christ, not seven years before Christ's return. As such, I believe the Church will remain on the earth during the Antichrist's reign, and will experience severe persecution. However, the Church will also witness to unbelievers and see a spiritual harvest because of their faithfulness. This view that the Rapture and the Second Coming are the same event was the prevailing view of Christians in the first several centuries of Church history. Dispensationalism, at least in its current form, did not come into prominence until the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Some interpret Ezekiel 38-39 as occurring immediately prior to Christ's return, tying it in with Revelation's prophecy about the Battle of Armageddon. But there is an important distinction between those two battles. In Ezekiel's battle, a few nations invade national Israel for the purpose of plunder and conquest, and unwittingly find themselves fighting against God. In the Battle of Armageddon, ALL of the nations of the earth, who are on the side of the Antichrist, fight against Jesus Christ Himself and His angelic army.

The mostly likely scenario is that this event happens halfway through the Antichrist's “seven year agreement” with the nations. Revelation 12 describes the Jewish people, pictured as a woman, fleeing into the desert to be protected by God for 3 ½ years. This likely refers to God protecting His people after their conversion to Christ after the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38-39 and Zechariah 12-13. Whether the 3 ½ years is to be taken as literal or figurative is open to debate, but I believe it generally points to God shielding His saved children from the wrath of the Antichrist. It is possible that when the Antichrist declares himself to be god (the Abomination of Desolation), the rulers described in Ezekiel 38-39 renounce their treaty with him and decide to take the land of Israel for themselves. Their subsequent destruction at the hand of God removes their power and authority from the earth, and allows the Antichrist to further consolidate power with Magog, Persia, et all, out of the way, preparing for the ultimate showdown between the Antichrist's forces and the Heavenly forces of Jesus Christ.

### **Who will invade Israel?**

Identifying the geographical locations of most of these names is a tricky business. For most of the “nation” names, Ezekiel does not use the names of kingdoms or locations from his time, but uses names found in the “Table of Nations” in Genesis 10. This includes Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, Togarmah, Cush, Put, Sheba, and Dedan. The only exception is Persia, which clearly referred to the area of modern Iran, and in his day was the kingdom which would rise to overthrow the Babylonians. Some suggest that Ezekiel's use of ancient names signifies that he refers to no real kingdoms, but rather that he symbolizes the attack of Israel by armies on all sides. But I believe the more likely explanation is that he uses these ancient names so as to not confuse the reader into thinking the attack will be from kingdoms that existed in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. This will happen “in future years”.

Magog is clearly the ringleader of this operation. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus equates “Magog” with the nation known as the Scythians, which lived north and east of the Black Sea, the southern end of modern Russia, as well as Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Many modern prophecy scholars equate Magog with Russia and the area around Moscow. Though this likely refers to the geographical area encompassing “Magog”, we must remember that we cannot say with certainty that the modern state of Russia is meant. Should this be fulfilled in the coming decades, that is the most likely scenario, but it is possible this could be fulfilled long after the state of Russia has collapsed and been replaced by another government.

Meshech is suggested to refer to Moscow by some, and claimed to be an ancient name for the city. But Biblical scholars believe the Meshech of Scripture settled in the eastern part modern Turkey. Tubal, likewise, settled in this area, perhaps in modern Georgia. The consonantal structure of the name “Tubal” is similar to Georgia’s capital “Tbilisi”, though it cannot be proven the two are related. Some suggest “Tubal” refers to a province in southern Russia. Gomer and Beth Togarmah (House of Togarmah) refer to western Turkey.

Cush is a name used often in the Old Testament and is thought to refer to an area south of the deserts of Egypt. Cush is often mentioned in the same sentence as Egypt, implying a geographical closeness. It likely encompassed modern Ethiopia, Eritrea, and possibly Sudan. Put usually refers to an area west of the ancient empire of Egypt, likely modern Libya and lands westward.

Taken together, the situation described is a desperate one for future Israel. She will be invaded suddenly by armies from the north, the east, and the south. To the west is the Mediterranean, which offers no protection.

### **Why do they invade?**

Ezekiel 38:10-12 says, “On that day thoughts will come into your mind and you will devise an evil scheme. You will say, ‘I will invade a land of unwalled villages; I will attack a peaceful and unsuspecting people- all of them living without walls and without gates and bars. I will plunder and loot and turn my hand against the resettled ruins and the people gathered from the nations, rich in livestock and goods, living at the center of the land [or “navel of the earth”]’. Israel’s attackers will come primarily to steal the wealth of the Israelites and to destroy the lives of those who have come back to Israel from all over the world. This is an act of hatred toward the Jewish people. The phrase “navel of the earth” also implies that there may also be a strategic basis for the invasion. Whoever controls the area of Palestine controls the crossroads of trade from Africa to Asia to Europe. God has chosen for history to revolve around one of the most strategically important pieces of real estate on earth.

This will be Gog’s reason for invading, but God makes clear there is another reason these armies invade. God says “I will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws, and bring you out...” (Ez. 38:4) God’s purpose is to destroy Gog and his armies in order to bring about His divine purpose in history. Though Gog believes the invasion is his idea, it is really God who forces his hand and drags him along like a fish on a hook. It is an action not of free will but God’s will. This event will bring about the salvation of the Jewish people. Gog believes he will wipe out the Jews, but God will redeem them through Gog’s destruction.

### **The Bystanders**

Perhaps the most disturbing part about this future prophecy is the role of those I call “The Bystanders”. Three nations are mentioned as saying to Gog, “Have you come to plunder? Have you gathered your hordes to loot, to carry off silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods and to seize much plunder?” (Ez. 38:13) Sheba, Dedan, and Tarshish are mentioned as nations who question Gog’s motives, but apparently do nothing to intercede and prevent Jerusalem’s destruction. This is despite Sheba and Tarshish being mentioned as doing business with Israel in the distant past, and of course the Queen of Sheba’s dramatic visit to King Solomon.

Sheba and Dedan most likely refer to kingdoms on the Arabian peninsula. Today this area is the birthplace of Islam, though the rulers of Saudi Arabia (Dedan) have focused far more on economic wealth than religious piety. This may be fitting, for Sheba questions the economic purpose of Magog's invasion without raising the immorality of attacking an innocent and unprepared people.

Tarshish is the difficult nation to identify here. The name Tarshish is used often in Scripture, though it is nearly impossible to identify it with any city or nation in particular. We recall that when Jonah ran from God, he was headed for Tarshish. This and other passages have caused scholars to assume Tarshish refers to a city or colony in the Phoenician Empire, perhaps on the coast of modern Spain. The Phoenician Empire was a confederacy of merchant traders along the entire coast of the Mediterranean Sea. They built a network of cities exchanging goods from different parts of the world, and became extremely wealthy. Joppa, an important Jewish port on the Mediterranean Sea, was the city where Jonah boarded his ship. Spain seems like a good place to run in Jonah's day if you're trying to get as far as you can from Nineveh by sea. Thus, Spain would be a good location for Tarshish.

But the problem gets more complicated when Tarshish is mentioned in 2 Chronicles. 2 Chronicles 9:21 says that Solomon sent ships to Tarshish every three years and that these ships returned with gold, silver and ivory, apes and baboons [or peacocks]. (The NIV doesn't include the name Tarshish, but the Hebrew says "ships that could go to Tarshish.") It's hard to imagine Solomon getting apes or ivory from Spain. 2 Chronicles 20:36 creates a bigger problem. It says that King Jehoshaphat had a fleet of ships at Ezion Geber that "could go to Tarshish". Ezion Geber was a Jewish port on the Gulf of Aqaba on the northern end of the Red Sea. It is inconceivable that a ship from Ezion Geber would sail to the coast of Spain, which would require going around the entirety of Africa from Egypt and Somalia, down the eastern coast and around Cape Horn, then north to Morocco, before emerging in the western Mediterranean Sea. Mediterranean ports were available to Jehoshaphat if he wanted to go to the Iberian peninsula, ports such as Joppa, Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos. In context, 2 Chronicles 20:36-37 likely refers to ports to the far east of Judah, perhaps in India.

As I study the instances of the use of the name "Tarshish", I have come to the conclusion that the term refers not to a specific city or nation, but rather is a general term for merchant economies located far from Jerusalem. In most cases, it referred to Phoenician destinations, because these distant seaports were easily accessible to the Jewish traders. Were this to be fulfilled in the coming decades, Tarshish would refer, in my opinion, to the Western economic system. The emphasis within the Biblical text is on trade, and the wealth received from it, not on a specific point on a map. This likely would include America, though we certainly can't say this for sure, as the Biblical writers had no concept of land west of Europe.

This creates a potential problem. IF the Western economic system is implied by Tarshish, this would mean that at the point of Magog's invasion, those who have historically supported Israel abandon her. God made clear to Abraham that He would bless those who bless His people, and curse those who curse them. Let us pray that in the face of invasion, our country would protect the Jewish state.

### **Gog's defeat, God's victory**

We cannot overstate the importance of the fact that when Gog and his allies invade Israel, the Jewish people are hopeless to stop it. God has arranged for the people of Israel to experience some incredible victories in the past, despite being outnumbered. This is not the situation here! The people of Israel are powerless against this invasion. Either in the leadup to the attack they have been disarmed, their weapons systems fail in the face of the attack, or they are so outnumbered that their military assets don't stand a chance against the sudden onslaught. ONLY God's miraculous intervention prevents catastrophe.

God says in Ez. 38:18-19 that Gog's attack will bring God's "hot anger" and "fiery wrath". Many people and nations have enslaved and murdered the Jewish people throughout history. Here, God vents His wrath against

Gog and his hordes, perhaps a response to all of the injustice Abraham's descendants have suffered over the centuries. Gog's invasion is God's last straw. Several terms are used to describe God's wrath, including an earthquake, torrential rain, hail, and sulfur. Whether these are meant to be literal, or figurative of God's judgment on Gog as seen in his defeat, we can't be sure, but it is entirely possible an actual earthquake will occur, and that meteorological and geological disasters will fall upon Gog, his armies, and the nations they are from. I believe it is also conceivable that the "burning sulfur" could refer to nuclear war, which could come as a result of global political fallout from the failed invasion. Torrential rain and hailstorms have been known to occur during nuclear blasts as a result of the rapid compression of the atmosphere. But we certainly should not be dogmatic about this. By whatever means, Gog, his armies, and his nations will be destroyed.

God's greatness will be shown to the world through the miraculous deliverance of Jerusalem. Keep in mind, that doesn't imply that the world as a whole will repent of its sin and acknowledge Jesus as Savior, only that the evidence for His Lordship will be unmistakable. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9) To the hardhearted, God's action serves only to harden them further. But those who are open to God's message will respond favorably!

### **What will come of this?**

Salvation! Zechariah 12:10-14 makes clear that as a direct response to God's intervention, the Jewish people will be broken as "a spirit of grace and supplication" comes over them. "The one they have pierced" clearly refers to Jesus, whose side was pierced by a Roman soldier during His crucifixion, after the people of Jerusalem had rejected Him as Messiah. Thus, in the very city where Christ was betrayed and killed, resulting in God's judgment against the city, Christ will later be exalted after the salvation of the city. The references to the various clans of Judah simply mean that the repentance will be complete and will encompass Israel's leadership.

In Romans 9-11, Paul laments that the Jewish people as a whole had rejected Christ, but promises that after the full number of Gentiles has been saved, that salvation would come once again to the Jews as they were "grafted back in" to the tree of Abraham. One day the Jews will embrace Jesus Christ as their Messiah, and the prophecies of Ezekiel 38-39 and Zechariah 12-13 describe what will immediately precede this great revival.

Based on other Scripture, we can surmise that after the recognition of Jesus as Messiah by the Jewish people, God will open up a way for those Jews still living "among the nations" to come back home, though this may not happen until after Christ's return. Before Christ's return, the Antichrist will attempt to destroy both these new Messianic Jews and Gentile Christians. But we have assurances that at least a portion of the Jews will be protected by God during this time.

It is not by accident that Ezekiel 38-39 falls immediately after the Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones (Ch. 37) and before the Vision of the New Temple (Ch. 40-48). In Ezekiel 37, God promises to bring His dead nation back to life. This refers not simply to their regathering to geographical Israel, but their spiritual revival as well. Chapters 38-39 describe how this revival will come about in prophecy. And the remainder of Ezekiel's book describes a new Jewish temple in exquisite archaeological detail, symbolizing the perfection of worship and a permanently restored relationship with the God who calls all people everywhere to become a part of a "holy temple", in which "God lives by his Spirit." (Ephesians 2:21-22) Thus Ezekiel, whose ministry began describing the people's abandonment of God, the foretelling the destruction of Jerusalem and the desecration of God's temple, ends with a description of the restoration of those things, in this order: the Promise of restoration (ch. 37), the Protection and Purification of the people (38-39), and the Perfection of worship (40-48).