

The Rise of Russia Part 1

A study of the Ezekiel 38-39 conflict

Text: Ezekiel 38:1-23

Introduction: The rise of Russia as a dominant world power has caused much alarm of recent years, especially with their increasing readiness to use brutal military force to achieve their strategic ambitions. Recent conflicts include Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the support of Russian backed separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine since 2014 and most recently, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine which is ongoing. As sad, devastating and wicked as these activities are, the Bible predicts a much larger Russian led invasion of Israel in the end times and this is what is described in Ezekiel 38-39. Before we get into the exposition of the text itself, it is important to establish a basic framework for the study of these passages of Scripture. Consider...

1. The Context of these chapters within the Book of Ezekiel.
 - This section of Ezekiel deals with future prophecies yet to be revealed (refer Herald of Hope chart).
 - The previous chapter (37) deals with the re-gathering of Israel to the land which is revealed in Ezekiel's famous valley of dry bones prophecy. We see Israel regathered first without spiritual life. That is the stage where we are at right now. Israel is back in the land but she has not yet been regenerated nationally which will occur in the future (Romans 11:25-26).
2. The Context of these chapters within Bible prophecy. Where does this battle fit within the timeline and framework of Bible prophecy? There are several clues within Ezekiel 38 that help us to pinpoint the timing of this battle:
 - It occurs in the last days/end times – “the latter years” (Vs. 8); “the latter days” (Vs. 16). The word translated as ‘latter’ literally means ‘end’ or “end times” (Sorenson).
 - It occurs when Israel is back in the land (Vs. 8). “The invasion takes place after Israel's regathering. This is of tremendous importance because it is only in our generation that the people of Israel have gone back to their ancient land. Israel was scattered from A.D. 70 and only recognized as a nation again in May, 1948 shortly after the second world war. Ezekiel's prophecy obviously could not have been fulfilled prior to 1945, for the nation of Israel was not regathered to their ancient land.”¹
 - It occurs when the desolate places are inhabited and Israel has riches (Vs. 12-13).

¹ J Walvoord, *The King of the North* Article 27/8/2007, <https://walvoord.com/book/export/html/301> - Viewed 17/3/22, p. 4.

- It occurs when Israel feels safe and is disarmed (Vs. 8, 11, 14).
 - Israel certainly does not feel this way now nor is she disarmed. Israel is a tiny nation and yet it has one of the best militaries in the world and is a nuclear power.
 - Israel won't feel this way in the second half of the tribulation as she will be fleeing the persecution of the Antichrist.
 - Israel will feel this way in the Millennium but one of the features of the Millennium is that there is no war (See Is. 2:4).
 - Israel will have this false sense of safety and security with the signing of the peace treaty with Antichrist for seven years. For the first 3 ½ years she will feel safe until Antichrist breaks his deal at the half way point, revealing his true colors and turning on Israel in Satanic rage.
 - We would therefore suggest that this battle occurs in the first half of the tribulation period, possibly close to the midpoint.
 - It occurs in connection with Israel's conversion (Ez. 39:22). This doesn't appear to be in the second half of the tribulation as there we have a godly Jewish remnant protected by God in the wilderness from Antichrist.
 - Summary: It appears that Gog and Magog's attack of Israel will occur during the first half of the Antichrist's reign when he forms a peace pact with Israel and she is disarmed.
3. With that background in mind, let's study this end times battle in Ezekiel chapter 38 in five segments. The outline will be as follows:
- The Invaders in this Battle (Vs. 1-6)
 - The Invasion of this Battle (Vs. 7-9)
 - The Intention in this Battle (Vs. 10-13)
 - The Interrogation about this Battle (Vs. 14-17)
 - The Intervention in this Battle (Vs. 18-23)

I. THE INVADERS IN THIS BATTLE (VS. 1-6)

A. The Principal Invader (Vs. 1-4)

1. Gog's Identity (Vs. 1-2)

There are a number of arguments in favor of the interpretation that Russia is in view:

a. The Linguistic Argument

- i. 'Gog' = the word is a proper noun, singular and masculine. He is described as the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. (Stevely) It is possibly a title like 'Pharaoh' so saying "Gog and Magog" would be similar to saying "Pharaoh and Egypt". Wilhelm Gesenius (1786-1842) said in his Hebrew-English lexicon that Gog is "undoubtedly the Russians."²

² Cited by David Cloud, *Way of Life Commentary Series: Ezekiel*, p. 244.

- ii. “the land of Magog” = Magog was the second son of Japheth (Gen. 10:1-2), one of the three sons of Noah. According to Louis Bauman in his book *Russian Events in the Light of Bible Prophecy*, “his descendants seem to have inhabited exclusively the region of the Caucasus and of northern Armenia.”³ Jerome stated that the Jews of his day held that Magog was a general designation for the numerous Scythian tribes. Josephus identified the name with the Scythians.⁴ Interestingly the Apostle Paul refers to the Scythians in Colossians 3:11. According to a reputable interlinear, the Scythians were inhabitants of Scythia or modern-day Russia. John Walvoord writes, “Magog is best identified with the Scythians, a people descended from Magog. The ancient historian Josephus makes the identification and we have no reason to question it. The Scythians apparently lived immediately to the north of what was later to be the land of Israel, then some of them emigrated north, going all the way to the Arctic Circle. In other words, their posterity was scattered precisely over the geographical area that today is called Russia.”⁵
- iii. “chief prince” = the word ‘chief’ comes from the Hebrew word ‘rosh’. He (Wilhelm Gesenius) declared that ‘Rosh’ was a designation for the tribes then north of the Taurus mountains, dwelling in the neighborhood of the Volga, and he held that in this name and tribe we have the first trace in history of the ‘Russ,’ or Russian nation.⁶
- iv. “Meshech and Tubal” = “Gesenius also identified ‘Meshech’ as Moscow, the capital of modern Russia in Europe. ‘Tubal’ he identified as Tobolsk, the earliest province of Asiatic Russia to be colonized, and, also, the name of the city wherein Peter the Great built the old fortress after the patten of the Kremlin at Moscow. Moscow bespeaks Russia in Europe, and Tobolsk bespeaks Russia in Asia.”⁷
- v. David Sorenson summarizes, “The clues presented indicate that Magog, Meshech, and Tubal were areas to the north in the region of the Caspian and Black Seas. In modern geography, they would represent southern

³ Ibid.

⁴ C Feinberg, *The prophecy of Ezekiel*, p. 220.

⁵ J Walvoord, *The King of the North Article 27/8/2007*, p. 3.

⁶ Cloud, p. 244.

⁷ Ibid.

Russia or the southern republics of the old Soviet Union. Some have gone so far as to suggest that Meshech was the ancient predecessor of Moscow. There is also evidence that Tubal is the ancient name for the more modern city of Tobolsk (once known as Stalingrad).⁸

b. The Geographic Argument

- i. The prophecy identifies the geographical origin of this aggressor against Israel – “the north parts” (38:15; 39:2). The phrase has the idea of “the uttermost north” according to grammar experts. So this attack will come from the far north of Israel.
- ii. Dr. Renald Showers writes, “The Hebrew word translated ‘parts’ means “extreme or uttermost parts”. Since Ezekiel was a Hebrew prophet, he would refer to geographical locations from the vantage point of his homeland. Thus, his statement in 38:15 indicates that when Gog leads the six-nation attack against Israel, he will come from his location in the extreme or uttermost parts directly north of Israel. Russia is the nation situated in the extreme or uttermost parts directly north of Israel.”⁹
- iii. David Cloud writes, “Regardless of the meaning of the name of *Gog* and *Magog*, Ezekiel tells us exactly where this enemy of Israel lives – to the north of Israel. And Ezekiel doesn’t merely say “north.” He says Gog’s place is in “the north parts” which has the idea of “the uttermost north”. A quick reference to a modern map reveals only one great power to the extreme north of Israel and that is Russia.”¹⁰
- iv. Dr. John Walvoord writes, “If one takes any map of the world and draws a line north of the land of Israel, he will inevitably come to the nation Russia. As soon as the line is drawn to the far north beyond Asia Minor and the Black Sea it is in Russia and continues to be in Russia for many hundreds of miles all the way to the Arctic Circle. Russia today spreads east and west some 6,000 miles, and one cannot escape Russia if he goes north of the Holy Land.”¹¹

2. Gog’s Enemy (Vs. 3-4a)

- a. This prophecy is addressed directly to Gog through Ezekiel. Notice the word ‘against’ is repeated in these verses:

⁸ D Sorenson, *Understanding the Bible Commentary*, p. 724.

⁹ R Showers, <https://israelmyglory.org/article/gog-and-magog/> - Viewed 19/3/22.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 245.

¹¹ J Walvoord, *The King of the North Article 27/8/2007*, p. 2.

- i. “set thy face against Gog” (Vs. 2)
 - ii. “prophecy against him” (Vs. 2)
 - iii. “I am against thee, O Gog” (Vs. 3)
 - iv. If God is against you, you have zero chance of winning! God is going to deal justly and severely with Gog and his allies in this end times battle.
- b. God’s sovereignty in these events is emphasized in verse 4 where God says he will draw Gog and Magog to this conflict. This truth is repeated in verse 16 – “and I will bring thee against my land”. See also 39:1-3.
3. Gog’s Army (Vs. 4b)
- a. The size of Gog’s army also points to Russia. It has fearsome number of troops and formidable weaponry. It is ranked as the world’s fifth largest army based on number of an active personnel of over 1 million with 2 million reserves. It spends over 65 billion annually in its military budget.
 - b. The Weaponry is described in verse 4, 5b. The huge cache of weapons is further highlighted in 39:9-10 where it is revealed they will be burning the weapons for 7 years after the conflict. This means this will continue even into the start of the Millennium!
 - c. The Soldiery is described in verse 6, 9, 15. The massive numbers of soldiers is again highlighted in 39:11-16 which describes the huge aftermath of the battle and the fact it will take 7 months to bury the slain.

B. The Participant Invaders (Vs. 5-6)

Russia will not be alone in this invasion of Israel but will be joined by a coalition of other nations also antagonistic to Israel. It is of interest to note that the majority of these are radical, Islamic nations. Russia has had a long history of supporting and arming Israel’s enemies (e.g., six day and Yom Kippur wars). Even now, Russia is being isolated more and more from the West and consequently will be thrown even more into the arms of these antisemitic powers. There are five nations listed specifically in this coalition:¹²

1. **Persia** is the ancient forerunner of modern Iran (the name was changed in 1935), which is a friend of Russia and an enemy of Israel.
2. **Ethiopia** is in northern Africa and also has close ties with Russia. Some also suggest that the location of ancient Cush (Ethiopia) is where Sudan is located today.¹³

¹² Summaries from David Cloud’s commentary on Ezekiel.

¹³ This is the view of Dr. Renald Showers, <https://israelmyglory.org/article/gog-and-magog/>.

3. **Libya** is in Northern Africa and is another Islamic country allied with Russia.
4. **Gomer** refers to Germany and neighboring people. It is of interest that East Germany was allied with Russia until recently. There is still significant antisemitism in East Germany. Dr. Renald Showers suggests the descendants of Gomer “were known as the Cimmerians who originally lived north of the Caucasus Mountains in the southern part of what is modern Russia. In Ezekiel’s time they had settled in what is now central Turkey.”¹⁴
5. **Togarmah** refers to the former southern republics of the Soviet Union and to Turkey. Togarmah was the son of Gomer, son of Japheth (Gen. 10:3) and settled in Armenia (Young). Turkey has become increasingly anti-Israel since 2010 and undergone a big shift politically away from democracy and the west towards radical Islam and authoritarian rule under President Erdogan.
6. **Other** unnamed nations/peoples are also swept up in this coalition as indicated by the words “and many people with thee” (Vs. 6).

II. THE INVASION OF THIS BATTLE (VS. 7-9)

Further details of the coming invasion are given prophetically in these verses:

A. The Leadership of the Invasion (Vs. 7)

1. Russia will play a leading and coordinating role in this invasion as indicated by the words “and be thou a guard unto them”. Interestingly “there has never been a direct attack by Russia or its ancient predecessors against Israel in recorded history. Therefore, the prophecy at hand must be yet future.”¹⁵
2. The Islamic world is often divided internally but this coalition will be united under the leadership of Russia in a common hatred for Israel and a lust after the potential of material gain (Vs. 12).
3. Russia has had a long history of antisemitism stemming back to ancient times and continuing to this very day. For example:¹⁶
 - a. Czar Ivan IV (1530-1584) forced Jews to convert to Russian Orthodoxy.
 - b. Catherine II (r. 1762-1796) forbade Jews to live in the Russian interior.
 - c. In the late 1800s and early 1900s, the Czars stirred up pogroms (state-sponsored violence) against the Jews by spreading lies about them. There were three major waves of pogroms between 1881 and 1921 in which thousands of Jews were killed and an

¹⁴ R Showers, <https://israelmyglory.org/article/gog-and-magog/> - Viewed 19/3/22.

¹⁵ D Sorenson, p. 725.

¹⁶ D Cloud, p. 248-249.

incalculable amount of property was destroyed. The death toll has been estimated at 70,000 to 250,000 (“Pogrom,” *New World Encyclopedia*). The czarist secret police published anti-Semitic pamphlets, such as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which blamed the Jews for all the country’s ills (“Pogroms,” *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*).

- d. In 1984, the U.S. ambassador dealing with human rights under the Helsinki Accords said, “Berlin was once the world capital of anti-Semitism; I am afraid that today it is Moscow.”¹⁷
- e. Russia has been arming Israel’s enemies since the early 1950s. For example:¹⁸
 - i. Russia armed Egypt for her War of Attrition against Israel in the 1950s. Israeli fighters were even engaged directly by fighters piloted by Russians. When Israel entered the Sinai Peninsula in 1956 to force Egypt to allow free movement for its ships, Russia threatened her with annihilation (Moshe Dayan, *Diary of the Sinai Campaign*, 1966, p. 185).
 - ii. Russia armed the Arabs with billions of dollars of war material in preparation for the Six-Day War of 1967.
 - iii. “Russia armed Syria and Egypt for the 1973 Yom Kippur War with some of its most advanced weapons systems and provided Soviet technicians to help operate the equipment (Jerry Asher, *Dual for the Golan*). By the early 1970s, 15,000 Soviet military experts were shaping the Egyptian armed forces into a modern army. Russia supplied Israel’s enemies with fighter jets, tanks, artillery, anti-aircraft missile batteries, and portable anti-tank weapons. Russia airlifted 15,000 tons of armaments to Syria and Egypt during the war.”

B. The Location of the Invasion (Vs. 8)

There is no doubt as to the location of this battle as the verse. The land of Israel is described in several ways:

1. The land brought back from the sword. This certainly describes the modern state of Israel and its rebirth among the nations in 1948.
2. The land where Israel has re-gathered from many people. Modern Israel certainly has been gathered out of many people (nations).
3. The mountains of Israel are specifically mentioned. “Through the intervening centuries from the time of Christ until the twentieth century, the mountains of Israel certainly laid waste. They were sparsely populated, arid, and semi-desert. Not until the Zionist

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 249.

¹⁸ Ibid.

movement and return of Jews in the twentieth century has the land been replanted with trees, groomed, drained of swamps and made productive. It certainly has been “brought forth out of the nations” as Jews the world around have returned from the diaspora to rebuild the modern State of Israel.”¹⁹

C. The Likeness of the Invasion (Vs. 9)

The invasion is likened to two weather features:

1. The suddenness of a storm. The invaders will come swiftly upon the land of Israel.
2. The covering of a cloud. This is another indicator as to the overwhelming numbers involved. They cover the land like a cloud.
3. Feinberg writes, “Just when least expected and without the slightest warning, the enemy will swoop down on the returned exiles, as an unheralded storm. The land will be covered and smothered by the vast multitude of Gog’s followers, just as a cloud blankets a land below it. Gog will see to it that he has plenty of allies and enough mercenaries to carry through his satanic scheme.”²⁰

To be continued...

Conclusion:

1. Are you saved? Time is running out for this world. The rapture is getting closer with each passing day and the time to repent and receive Christ is now.
2. Are you living for Christ or wasting the precious moments we have left to do something for Christ? If this isn’t a time in history to get serious with the Lord, then what is?!!

¹⁹ Sorenson, p 727.

²⁰ Feinberg, p. 222.

