

Your QUESTIONS About Prophecy ANSWERED Part 9

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WHAT WILL IT TAKE FOR THE TEMPLE TO BE REBUILT?

PART 2

In order for the Temple to be rebuilt, the people of Israel have to be back in the Land. In our last issue we looked at two interesting prophecies found in Ezekiel 36 and 37. First, we saw that God is going to bring the people of Israel back to their land for "His name's sake." The Jewish people are going to return not because of any great spiritual revival but because God needs to reclaim His good reputation. Then Ezekiel was given an image of a valley filled with parched bones coming to life to illustrate that this re-gathering of the people will be as improbable as a decayed corpse coming to life. We saw how this all has happened with the forming of the state of Israel in 1948. As one prominent Bible teacher has stated, the founding of the State of Israel is the "super sign" of the last days.

In our study on the location of the Temple on the Temple Mount, we discussed Islam's claim of the site and how Jewish people are not allowed to worship there. Even today the ownership of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount is a flash point for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For almost sixty years the Jewish people have been in sovereign control of their nation, yet they do not have control of their most holy site. In this issue we are going to look at a prophesied event that may solve the dispute over the Temple Mount.

Ezekiel 38 and 39 describe what is going to happen after the people return to the mountains of Israel (Ezk. 37:22). This re-gathered people will be attacked by a group of nations surrounding them.

Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh [chief], Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops-many people are with you. Prepare yourself and be ready, you and all your companies that are gathered about you; and be a guard for them. 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. You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you'. Thus says the Lord GOD: 'On that day it shall come to pass that thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan: You will say, 'I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates' - to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land.'" (Ezekiel 38:1-12)

Some theologians interpret this passage symbolically as a picture of Satan doing battle with the church in the last days. Others believe in a literal invasion by the nations listed coming against a restored Israel in the last days. Which interpretation is valid?

The title "Gog of Magog" has a very interesting interpretation by some Jewish commentators. Rabbi Isaac

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Luria (1534-1572) taught that “Gog of Magog” had a numeric value of 70. (There are no numerals in Hebrew to express numbers. Numbers are represented using the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, with each letter representing a number corresponding to its place in the alphabet. Thus, every Hebrew word has a numeric value. This has resulted in an added tool called gematria to help rabbis interpret the scriptures.) Seventy in rabbinic teaching means the nations of the world. (Gen. 10) Thus many Jewish teachers today believe this group of nations is representative of all nations and that all nations will come against Israel in the last days after which the Messiah will come. Some Jewish teachers say that the word “prince” is referring to an elected official and could refer to the world’s only super-power, the United States, which has an elected government. Some have even gone so far as to use gematria to prove that President Bush is Gog.

Dr. David L. Cooper, a great student of scripture in the last century, began all of his writing with the Golden Rule of Interpretation: “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.” We are going to study this passage using the above rule of interpretation.

Prior to World War II many Bible teachers struggled with a literal interpretation of this passage for several reasons. Israel didn’t exist and the possibility of the Jewish people returning to their homeland and establishing a sovereign nation seemed extremely remote. Second, the nations listed as coming against Israel were either insignificant or not geographically close enough to Palestine to make an invasion possible. Finally, why would these

nations attack a nation that didn’t and wasn’t going to exist? It seemed the prophecy was a figurative picture of the future spiritual battle found in Revelation 20.

However, World War II dramatically changed the world. Interpreting this passage literally and comparing it to today’s geo-political environment reveals an interesting, as well as a contemporary picture.

The Name Gog

First let us look at the name Gog. The name is used only two other times outside of Ezekiel’s usage of the name. In 1 Chron. 5:4, a descendent of Rueben is called Gog. The other usage is found in Rev. 20:8 when Satan is loosed after 1000 years and he goes out to deceive the nations of the world also called “Gog and Magog.” While the details of this Revelation event are different, the mention of Gog and Magog may imply that the outcome will be the same as the Ezekiel account. In other words, Satan will meet the same fate in his attack against the Lord as Gog encountered when he went against the mountains of Israel. To summarize, Gog in the passage we are studying

seems to refer to an unknown future leader and the term may even be a title.

The Nations Involved

Magog is listed as a descendent of Japheth, one of the sons of Noah (Genesis 10 and 1 Chron. 1). Tradition has Magog and his descendents settling in the area north of the Black and Caspian Seas. Today, this area would include Southern Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Rosh is not a name but a title meaning “chief” thus “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.” Meshech and Tubal are also sons of Japheth who settled in Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey.

Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are easy to identify. Persia is modern-day Iran. Ethiopia (Hebrew—Cush) includes the modern countries of Sudan and modern Ethiopia while Libya (Hebrew—Put) includes Libya of today plus much of North Africa excluding Egypt. Gomer, another son of Japheth, traditionally refers to the countries of Eastern Europe while the son of Gomer, Togamah, settled in Northern Asia Minor.



Roy Schwarcz teaching members of a Light To Israel tour overlooking the Jezreel Valley, the site of the future Battle of Armagedden.

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Interestingly, two nations or empires are not mentioned in this list – Egypt and Babylon — the two major enemies of the Jewish people in Ezekiel’s day. The Babylonian Empire would include the modern countries of Iraq, Syria and part of Jordan.

The Nation Invaded

The description of the land this alliance of nations will invade is also very interesting. It is called the “*mountains of Israel*,” an expression Ezekiel uses fourteen other times always referring to the land of the Jews. The people in the land will be “*brought back from the sword*” meaning coming back after a time of judgment. The population of this nation will be “*gathered from many people*” and “*they were brought out of the nations.*” They will return to a land “*which had long been desolate.*” The re-gathered people will “*have acquired livestock and goods.*” This description of Israel given over 500 years before Christ beautifully fits the modern state of Israel.

The Time of the Invasion

The time of this invasion is given as “*after many days*” and “*in the latter years.*” The first expression can range from a relatively short period of days to an extended period of centuries as in Hosea 3. The “*latter years*” means the time of the end or the last of years. Thus we are looking at an invasion of Israel at the end of this age which will have the purpose of being a testimony of God to Israel and the nations.

To summarize, Ezekiel is told to prophesy that a group of nations led

by a prince with the name or title of Gog is going to invade the restored land of Israel in the latter days. While Gog will think that he is invading Israel to take plunder, it will be God who will be motivating him (*hooks into your jaws*). As we read further (38:18-22) we see that God will intervene to protect Israel which results in the invading forces being destroyed. The purpose of this God-planned invasion is two-fold. First, it will be a testimony to the nations that God is still in charge of His creation (38:23). Second, the invasion will make God known among His people, Israel (39:7).

Could this prophesied invasion happen today? What could be the political consequences of such a failed invasion?

By taking an up-to-date map of the Middle East and interposing the territories of the countries listed by Ezekiel, we can see that all these countries today are Muslim or have large Muslim populations. The leader of one of these nations (Iran) has even called for the destruction of Israel. The nations not listed are Egypt and Babylon. Today, both Egypt and Jordan (part of the Babylonian Empire) recognize Israel and have treaties with her. Right now the Iraqi government is so involved in securing peace within her borders that she could not be part of an invasion. That leaves the third part of the Babylonia Empire—Syria. As of this writing, Syria is amassing troops on her border with Israel and there is much talk about a war with Israel. Yet, the leaders of the two sides say they want to move toward peace talks

and a settlement of the dispute over the Golan Heights.

If the invasion and the prophesied outcome were to happen in the near future, the entire political picture in the Middle East would change. A vacuum of leadership would be created allowing a dynamic leader (possibly the Antichrist) to come on the scene to fill the void. More important to our discussion here, many of the key Muslim nations which are forbidding the rebuilding of the Temple under threat of war will be destroyed which will open the door for the Temple to be rebuilt. According to Daniel 9:27, a prince is going to come and make a seven-year covenant with Israel. The context of that verse implies the covenant or treaty will include the allowance to begin the sacrificial worship which Israel will be forced to discontinue after three and a half years. Now we can see the numeric value of 70 for Gog of Magog may also refer to the event that introduces the 70th week of Daniel.

In a past article, we discussed what I call “*Prophetic Providence*”—God working through history to fulfill prophecy. In other words, as the details of a prophesied event start to come together, we can be reasonably sure the fulfillment of that prophecy will soon take place. The details of this prophecy in Ezekiel seem to be coming together. Again, we are reminded we worship an awesome God!

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