

The Identity of the Northern Invaders

Ezekiel 38:1-13

"The first six verses of this chapter identify the nations that are involved (the following information about the entities involved comes from Thomas Ice's Ezekiel 38 part 1, Pre-Trib research article). In verses 7 - 13, God tells Gog and the nations aligned with her to prepare themselves for what is coming. The intent of Gog is the destruction of Israel and the capture of the wealth she has. The intent of God is to destroy those nations that come against His people, Israel. The timing of this invasion is clear - *"in the latter days."*

38:1-3 And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, We are again told that Ezekiel is hearing *"the word of the LORD."* Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal:

**Six entities must be identified - Gog, Magog, chief, prince, Meshech, and Tubal.
Two are rulers and four are geographical locations.**

RULERS

- 1. Gog** The Hebrew proper noun "Gog" occurs 12 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. All but one use occurs in Ezekiel 38 and 39 (Ezek. 8:2, 3, 14, 16, 18; 39:1 [2x], 11 [3x], 15). The only non-Ezekiel occurrence is in 1 Chronicles 5:4 and says, *"The sons of Joel were Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his son."*

Who then is Gog? Bauman says, "Without doubt, Russia will furnish the man—*not the Antichrist*—who will head up that which is known to most Bible students as 'the great northeastern confederacy' of nations and lead it to its doom upon the hills of Israel's land." Hitchcock believes "the reason Gog is singled out eleven times by God in these two chapters is because Gog is the general over this coalition of nations in its great military campaign against Israel." Hal Lindsey tells us, "Gog is the symbolic name of the nation's leader and Magog is his land. He is also the prince of the ancient people who were called Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal." Arnold Fruchtenbaum informs us: "Who Gog will be can only be determined at the time of the invasion, for 'Gog' is not a proper name but a title for the rule of Magog, just as the terms 'pharaoh,' 'kaiser,' and 'czar' were titles for rulers and not proper names."

- 2. Prince** (naw-see') properly, an exalted one, i.e., a king or sheik; captain, chief, governor, prince, ruler

Geographical locations

chief prince (naw-see' rosh)

"The identification of *Rosh* is one of the most controversial and debated issues in the entire Gog and Magog prophecy, even though it should not be. I believe when one looks at the evidence it is overwhelming that this is a reference to the modern Russians. However, we need to first look at the evidence for such a conclusion."

A central issue in whether *rosh* refers to Russia is whether *rosh* is to be understood as a proper noun (the Russia view) or should it be taken as an adjective (the non-Russia view) and be translated in English as "chief." This is a watershed issue for anyone who wants to properly understand this passage. The problem is that the word *rosh* in Ezekiel can be translated as either a proper noun or an adjective. Many translations take *rosh* as an adjective and translate it as the word "chief."

The weight of the evidence of five arguments favors taking *rosh* as a proper name.

- (1) First, the eminent **Hebrew scholars C. F. Keil and Wilhelm Gesenius** both hold that the better translation of Rosh in Ezekiel 38:2-3 and 39:1 is as a proper noun referring to a specific geographical location. Gesenius, who died in 1842 and is considered by modern Hebrew scholars as one of the greatest scholars of the Hebrew language, unquestionably believed that Rosh in Ezekiel was a proper noun identifying Russia. He

says that *rosh* in Ezekiel 38:2,3; 39:1 is a, “pr. n. of a northern nation, mentioned with Meshech and Tubal; undoubtedly the *Russians*, who are mentioned by the Byzantine writers of the tenth century, under the name *the Ros*, dwelling to the north of Taurus . . . as dwelling on the river Rha (*Volga*).”

- (2) Second, **the Septuagint**, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, translates *Rosh* as the proper name *Ros*. This is especially significant since the *Septuagint* was translated only three centuries after Ezekiel was written. The mistranslation of *Rosh* in many modern translations as an adjective can be traced to the Latin Vulgate of Jerome, which did not appear until around A.D. 400. James Price, who has a Ph.D. in Hebrew from Dropsie, which is the leading Jewish academic University in America says, “The origin of the translation “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal” is traced to the Latin Vulgate.
- (3) Third, many **Bible dictionaries** and encyclopedias, in their articles on *Rosh*, support taking it as a proper name in Ezekiel 38. Some examples: *New Bible Dictionary*, *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, and *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.
- (4) Fourth, *Rosh* is mentioned the first time in Ezekiel 38:2 and then repeated in Ezekiel 38:3 and 39:1. If *Rosh* were simply a title, it would probably have been dropped in these two places because in Hebrew when titles are repeated, they are generally abbreviated.
- (5) Fifth, the most impressive evidence in favor of taking *Rosh* as a proper name is simply that this translation is the most accurate. **G. A. Cooke**, a Hebrew scholar, translates Ezekiel 38:2, “**the chief of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal.**” He calls this “**the most natural way of rendering the Hebrew.**”

James Price concludes the following:

“It has been demonstrated that *Rosh* was a well-known place in antiquity as evidenced by numerous and varied references in the ancient literature. It has also been demonstrated that an adjective intervening between a construct noun and its *nomen rectum* is highly improbable, there being no unambiguous example of such in the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that regarding *Rosh* as a name is in harmony with normal Hebrew grammar and syntax. It is concluded that *Rosh* cannot be an adjective in Ezekiel 38–39, but must be a name. Therefore, the only appropriate translation of the phrase in Ezekiel 38:2, 3, and 39:1 is “prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.”

Clyde Billington has written a series of three scholarly articles in a theological journal presenting extensive historical, geographical, and toponymic evidence for why *Rosh* should be and is traced to the Russian people of today. Billington concludes this section of his historical studies as follows: “Therefore, there is irrefutable historical evidence for the existence of a people named *Rosh/Rashu* in the 9th-7th century BC. Assyrian sources. These same Assyrian sources also mention Meshech and Tubal, whose names appear in conjunction with the name *Rosh* in Ezekiel 38–39. Clearly the Assyrians knew of the *Rosh* people, and so also did the prophet Ezekiel. It should be noted that Ezekiel wrote the Book of Ezekiel only about a 100 years later than extant Assyrian texts which mention the *Rosh*, Meshech, and Tubal peoples.”

It should be clear by now that *Rosh* does indeed refer to the modern-day Russian people. Both grammatical and historical evidence have been provided. Billington concludes by saying:

- **Ezekiel 38–39 does mention a people called the “Rosh” who will be allies of Meshech, Tubal, and Gog in the Last Days.**
- **There were *Rosh* peoples who lived to the north of Israel in the Caucasus Mountains and to the north of the Black and Caspian Seas.**
- **Some of the *Rosh* people who lived to the north of Israel came in time to be called “Russians.”**
- **The name Russian is derived from the name *Ros/Rosh*, which is found in Ezekiel 38–39.**
- **In conclusion, it is clear that the Russian peoples will be involved along with Meshech, Tubal, and Gog in an invasion of Israel in the Last Days.**

3 Magog

It is probably fair to say that most scholars and experts would trace Magog's descendants to the ancient people that we know as the Scythians. Chuck Missler notes that a wide collection of ancient historians "identified Magog with the Scythians and southern Russia in the 7th century B.C." These ancients include: Hesiod, Josephus, Philo, and Herodotus. Josephus lived in the first century A.D. and said, "Magog founded the Magogians, thus named after him, but who by the Greeks are called Scythians." Bauman tells us that Magog and his descendants must have immigrated north after the Flood and that "the Magogites were divided into two distinct races, one Japhetic, or European, and the other Turanian, or Asiatic."

Who are the Scythians? Edwin Yamauchi tells us that the Scythians were divided into two groups, a narrow and broad grouping. "In the narrow sense, the Scythians were the tribes who lived in the area which Herodotus designated as Scythia (i.e., the territory north of the Black Sea)," notes Yamauchi. "In the broad sense the word Scythian can designate some of the many other tribes in the vast steppes of Russia, stretching from the Ukraine in the west to the region of Siberia in the east."

4. Meshach and Tubal

Allen Ross, based upon historical and biblical information in his dissertation on the table of nations, says: "Tubal and Mesek are always found together in the Bible. They represent the northern military states that were exporting slaves and copper (Ezekiel 27:13, 38:2, 39:1, 32:26 and Isaiah 66:19). Herodotus placed their dwelling on the north shore of the Black Sea (III, 94). Josephus identified them as the Cappadocians....Mesek must be located in the Moschian mountains near Armenia. Their movement was from Eastern Asia Minor north to the Black Sea. The area southeast of the Black Sea is modern day Turkey." "At every point in the history" of Meshech, notes Hitchcock "they occupied territory that is presently in the modern nation of Turkey." Such a conclusion is not a controversial one since virtually all scholars agree with this view.

"Tubal" appears eight times in the Hebrew Bible (Gen. 10:2; 1 Chron. 1:5; Isa. 66:19; Ezek. 27:13; 32:26; 38:2, 3; 39:1). Tubal is identified as the fifth son of Japheth and the brother of Meshech in the table of nations (Gen. 10:2). As noted above by Ross, Tubal is always grouped together with Meshech in the Bible and Ezekiel 38 is no exception... The historical record, as was the case with Meshech, is that Tubal and his descendants immigrated to the area southeast of the Black Sea in what is modern-day Turkey.

Meshech and Tubal clearly provide the population base for the country we now call Turkey.

Russia = Rosh and Magog 39:2 "north parts" מִן־רֹשׁ מָגוֹג north far or uttermost north ⁱⁱ

Turkey = Meshech and Tubal

38:4 "And I will turn thee back, and put **hooks into thy jaws**, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords."

God will bring to pass the coming military conflict as He will "*put hooks into thy jaws*." He is bringing together end-time events to fulfill His purpose for Israel, the nations, and the world. Much speculation has surrounded the "hook" that God uses to draw these nations into Israel. Verses 12 and 13 tell us what brings them into Israel (bold added).

38:12 **To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land.**

38:13 **Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold,**

to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?

Is the spoil the natural minerals of the Dead Sea, and the natural gas fields off the Mediterranean that Israel is currently harvesting.

Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet:

5. Persia

“The name Persia, which was written all over the pages of ancient history, was changed to Iran in foreign usage in March 1935,” notes Mark Hitchcock.

6. Ethiopia

“Many English translations have transliterated it from the Hebrew into the English word “Cush.” *Cush* occurs 29 times in the Hebrew Bible. Genesis 2:13 refers to an antediluvian land named Cush. Three times in the table of nations it refers to Cush who is a descendant of Ham. Most of the other uses occur in Isaiah and Ezekiel (13 times) and refer to the same region mentioned in Ezekiel 28:5. One Hebrew lexicon says that Cush refers to “the lands of the Nile in southern Egypt, meaning Nubia and Northern Sudan, the country bordering the southern Red Sea.” Another tells us that Cush “refers to the region immediately south and east of Egypt, including modern Nubia, the Sudan, and the Ethiopia of classical writers.”ⁱⁱⁱ Thus, the Bible clearly locates Cush just south of Egypt in what is the modern nation of Sudan.

7. Libya

Put is another transliteration from the Hebrew and occurs only seven times in the Old Testament. Twice it is used in a genealogy that says that Put is a descendant of Ham (Gen. 10:6; 1 Chron. 1:8). The other five times it is used in the Prophets to refer to Put as a nation, usually in a military context as we have in Ezekiel 38. A Hebrew lexicon says, “probably not the same as Put but Libya.” “From the ancient *Babylon Chronicle* it appears that Putu was the ‘distant’ land to the west of Egypt, which would be modern day Libya.”¹¹ “In the invasion,” notes Randall Price, “these countries will be joined by other nations (38:5) that represent the other three directions of the compass: Persia (modern Iran) from the east, Cush (northern Sudan) from the south, and Put (modern Libya) from the west.”

“Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee.”

8. Gomer

The transliterated name *Gomer* occurs five times in the Hebrew Old Testament, not counting those that refer to the wayward wife of Hosea. Every use except the one in Ezekiel occurs in a genealogy (Gen. 10:2, 3; 1 Chron. 1:5, 6). Gomer is said to be a son of Japheth in the table of nations (Gen. 10:2; 1 Chron. 1:5). The issue is where do the modern-day descendants of Gomer now reside? “His descendants are usually identified as the Cimmerians, who moved onto the stage of history from the area north of the Black Sea in the eighth century B.C” Jon Ruthven’s map places Gomer and his descendants as having settled in the area north of the Black and Caspian Seas. However, the descendants of Gomer were pushed out of that area and into “the area of Cappadocia, which today is in central and north-central Turkey. Josephus identified the people of Galatia with Gomer. He says that the people the Greeks called the Galatians were the Gomerites.” Today these “Gomerites” live in the west-central part of Turkey. Therefore, the descendants of Gomer, along with some other peoples we have yet to consider, indicate that modern Turkey will be part of those who invade the land of Israel.

9. Togarmah

“But while scholars have differed slightly on the exact location of ancient Togarmah,” concludes Hitchcock, “it is always associated with a city or district within the boundaries of the modern nation of Turkey.”

“Doesn’t this statement mean that Togarmah must come from the former Soviet Union since Russia is the farthest geographical point north of Israel,” asks Hitchcock? He says in his answer: “The answer to this question is no. Forcing a geographical location upon Togarmah that is totally inconsistent with the clear witness of ancient history would be grossly twisting the evidence. Moreover, modern Turkey fits the description given because it is clearly to the far north parts of the Promised Land.”

Having now completed a study of the list of nations that will join the **Russian** (*Rosh and Magog*) led attack against Israel, we see that four of those names refer to descendants that make up the modern nation of **Turkey** (*Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, and Beth-togarmah*) and will include **Iran** (*Persia*), **Sudan** (*Ethiopia*), and **Libya** (*Libya*).

38:7-9 “Be thou prepared, and prepare for thyself, thou, and all thy company that are assembled unto thee, and be thou a guard unto them. After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many people, against the mountains of Israel, which have been always waste: but it is brought forth out of the nations, and they shall dwell safely all of them. Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee.”

38:8 “After many days,” “in the latter years,” and “gathered out of many people” place this prophecy in the Tribulation period. It can’t be referring to Babylon but the time the Jewish people return to the land from many nations and become a nation again.

Israel dwelling “safely” can also mean “securely.” Xjb - beh'takh “a place of refuge; abstract, safety, both the fact (security) and the feeling (trust); often (adverb with or without preposition) safely:--assurance, boldly, (without) care(- less), confidence, hope, safe(-ly, -ty), secure, surely.” But, there is no reason that this verse can’t also be applied to the first half of the Tribulation period when, not only is Israel militarily powerful, but the Antichrist has guaranteed their security and safety during the 7-year peace treaty.

38:9 The imagery of “storm” and “cloud” speaks of the overwhelming numbers of invaders coming.

38:10-13 “Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought: And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, To take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land. Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?

38:10 “At the same time they are preparing for the invasion, there are thoughts that come into their mind. The thoughts, most likely, come from the sinful nature of the leaders, not from God - “*thou shall think an evil thought.*”

38:11-12 “midst of the land” “Thus says the LORD God: This is Jerusalem; I have set it in the midst of the nations and the countries that are round about her.” Ezekiel 5:5

“As the navel is set in the centre of the human body, so is the land of Israel the navel of the world...situated in the centre of the world, and Jerusalem in the centre of the land of Israel, and

the sanctuary in the centre of Jerusalem, and the holy place in the centre of the sanctuary, and the ark in the centre of the holy place, and the foundation stone before the holy place, because from it the world was founded.”^{iv}

The desire of the nations coming against Israel is two-fold:

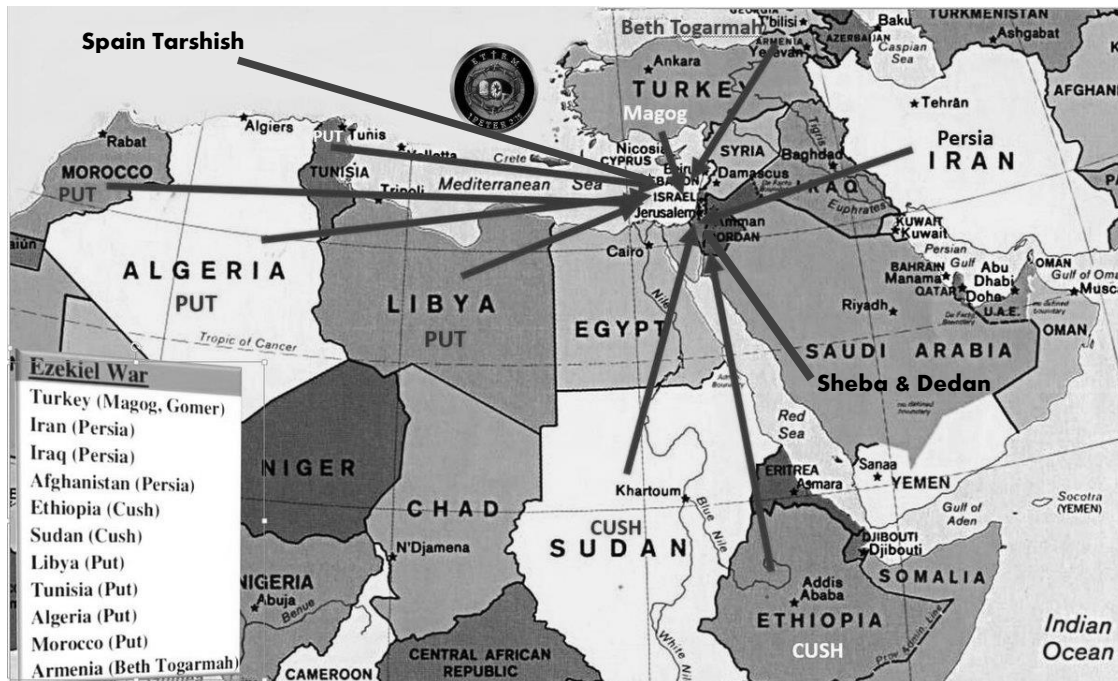
1. **To take a spoil** - capture the wealth and resources of the nation
“silver and gold...cattle and goods”
2. **To destroy the people** (anti-Semitism)
“upon the people that are gathered out of the nations”

The continuing desire of Satan is to destroy the people of God, so he can defeat God. (by destroying His land and people)
This aligns with the Red Dragon seeking to devour the woman/Israel (Matthew 24:16-22; Rev. 12:4-6).
The nations of the world will sit by bewildered, at least initially, as Gog and her allies prepare to come against Israel.

10. “Sheba and Dedan”

“Sheba and Dedan are not difficult to identify. They are located in the **modern country of Saudi Arabia**.”^v
“the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof” “Tarshish is ancient Tartessus in the **present-day nation of Spain**.”^{vi}

The pertinent question to most Bible students today is always is timing? That question will be addressed in our next Study, The Timing of the Gog Invasion. We will also assess the current status of these national alliances.



- i Mark Robinson, The Timing of the Gog Invasion, Jewish Awareness Ministries
- ii BibleHub.com
- iii Thomas Ice
- iv Midrash Tanchuma, Qedoshim
- v Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL:Tyndale House Publishers 1994), p. 100
- vi Mark Hitchcock, *After the Empire*, pp. 100–101

Map ageofcivilizationsgame.com