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Gog, Magog, Meshech and Tubal

by Dana L. Goodnough

The prophecies of Ezekiel 38-39 mention several intriguing names including Gog, Magog, Meshech, and Tubal. How these people and places figure into future events has captured the attention of many students of God's Word. Historical, geographic, and linguistic backgrounds help clarify these names and their relationship to God's future timetable.

Gog

The name Gog appears 13 times in the Bible (1 Chronicles 5:4; Ezekiel 38:2, 3, 14, 16, 18; 39: 1—two times, 11—three times, 15; Revelation 20:8), twelve of those times in reference to a prophetic personality (1 Chronicles 5:4 refers to an unrelated historical figure). The name "Gog" is of uncertain derivation with similar roots found in Accadian and Babylonian literature.¹ In Ezekiel's prophecies Gog appears as the personal name of the leader of a geographical region associated with Magog. He is, in fact, called the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. The word translated "chief" comes from the Hebrew root "rosh," which some have compared to the modern place name "Russia." For example, Walvoord states, ". . . the word itself seems to be an early form of the

word from which the modern word, Russia, comes."² Pentecost also asserts, "Thus the identification of Rosh as modern Russia would seem to be well authenticated and generally accepted."³ However, the Hebrew term "rosh" generally means "head" or "chief."

Should the Hebrew word, which means "head," be taken as an adjective ("head prince," i.e., "chief prince") or as a proper noun ("Rosh")? The evidence seems to favor taking it as an adjective. "Rosh" never appears as a nation in any other biblical list of place names while all the other names are well attested"⁴

At best it can be stated that Gog will be a political leader of the land of Magog.

Magog

Magog refers both to a person and to a geographical region. The name is used five times in the Bible. In Genesis 10:2 and 1 Chronicles 1:5 Magog is listed as one of the sons of Japheth, and thereby one of the grandsons of Noah. Later references to Magog imply a geographical region or possibly a people group, probably descendants of the grandson of Noah by this name (Ezekiel 38:2; 39:6; Revelation 20:8). The ancient historian Josephus identifies Magog with the land of the Scythians located between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea: "Magog founded those that from him were named Magogites, but who are by the Greeks called Scythians."⁵ According to Alexander, "This position is generally accepted."⁶ Pfeiffer describes the Scythians as . . .

A people who inhabited the region N and NE of the Black Sea in the 7th century B.C., and who later invaded Assyria and Palestine. They spoke an Indo-European language, lived a nomadic life, and were skilled horsemen. They invaded the Balkan peninsula and were attacked there both by Darius I and Alexander the Great with no decisive results. In the 3rd

century B.C. they were replaced by the Sarmatians to whom they appear to have been related.⁷

This region incorporates the Caucasus Mountains and lies within the territory of modern Russia.

Meshech and Tubal

Meshech is recorded as another son of Japheth and grandson of Noah (Genesis 10:2; 1 Chronicles 1:5). A different Meshech, a son of Shem, is mentioned in 1 Chronicles 1:17 but this individual is unrelated to the Meshech of Ezekiel 38-39. Ezekiel 27:13 describes the descendants of Meshech (the son of Japheth) as carrying on slave trade in ancient times. Meshech is associated with the people of Tubal in Ezekiel 32:26, 38:2-3, and 39:1. Together Meshech and Tubal are identified with the land of Magog and the future leader known as Gog. In Psalm 120:5 Meshech is associated with Kedar, the descendants of the son of Ishmael by this name (Genesis 25:13; 1 Chronicles 1:29), possibly because both were barbaric, nomadic groups.

Tubal, like Meshech, was a descendant of Japheth (Genesis 10:2; 1 Chronicles 1:5) and usually mentioned with Meshech (Ezekiel 27:13; 32:26; 38:2, 3; 39:1). Isaiah 66:19 mentions Tubal alongside Greece and various regions colonized by the Greeks. This identification may, however, merely describe the geographical and spiritual distance between these nations and the land of Israel.

Together, Meshech and Tubal refer to a region near Magog and the Black Sea. Unger states:

In the records of Tiglath-pileser I (c. 1110 B.C.) and Shalmaneser III (860-825 B.C.) the land of Musku (Meshech) is mentioned and situated in the mountains on the northern boundary of Assyria and bordering on Tabal, Biblical Tubal, in the W. The Moschoi and Tibarenoi are referred to by Herodotus as living in the mountains S.E. of the Black Sea (III.94, VII.78). Both Strabo and Pliny refer to Moschoi.⁸

Meshech and Tubal, together with Magog, refer to a region north of Israel near or around the Black Sea. However, a precise identification with modern countries is risky.

The biblical and extrabiblical data, though sparse, would imply that Meshech and Tubal refer to geographical areas or countries in eastern modern Turkey, southwest of Russia and northwest of Iran. This, however, gives no basis for identifying these place names with any modern country. Some would see in Meshech and Tubal references to the modern Russian cities of Moscow and Tobolsk. However, there is no etymological, grammatical, historical, or literary data in support of such a position.⁹

Nevertheless, this region will one day have a dominant leader known as Gog who will attack Israel but suffer defeat (compare Revelation 20:8). At that time Jesus Christ will overcome every enemy as King of kings and Lord of lords.

¹ Koehler, Ludwig and Baumgartner, Walter. *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958, p. 174.

² Walvoord, John F. *The Nations in Prophecy*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967, p. 108.

³ Pentecost, J. Dwight. *Things to Come*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958, p. 328.

⁴ Dyer, Charles H. "Ezekiel" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuch, Editors. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985, p. 1299.

⁵ Josephus. *Antiquities of the Jews*. 1.6.1 (123).

⁶ Alexander, Ralph H. "Ezekiel" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 6. Frank E. Gabelein, Editor. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986, p. 929.

⁷ Pfeiffer, Charles F. *Baker's Bible Atlas*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1973, pp. 317-318.

⁸ Unger, Merrill F. *Unger's Bible Dictionary*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1966, p. 716.

⁹ Alexander, p. 930.