

How Russia Will Be Destroyed **(or When Russia Comes Down Against Israel)**

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Why would Russia, as we see it today, have any interest in invading Israel?

I think you'll find satisfying answers to that question in the classic passage of Ezekiel's tremendous prophecy, chapters 38 and 39. It is without doubt one of the great prophecies of Scripture, as you will see. To get in the atmosphere of this, let's begin with the first eight verses of Ezekiel 38:

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal: 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 armor, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords: Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them....

Here we have mentioned the nations which will be allied with Russia in the last days. Persia, of course, would be Iran today. Ethiopia and Libya are in Africa.

... all of them with shield and helmet: Gomer, and all his bands [Germany]; the house of Togarmah [Turkey] of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee. 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.

Now if Russia should come down against Israel tomorrow, it would not be a fulfillment of this prophecy. Because God makes it very clear that when the nations listed here come down in fulfillment of this prophecy, it will be when the nation Israel is dwelling in safety. And at the time of this writing they are anything but safe in the little land of Israel.

May I say first of all that when I entered the ministry, even when I began work on my doctoral degree, I did not at all accept the fact that Russia was the nation referred to in Ezekiel 38 and 39. I had attended my denominational seminary which taught amillennialism and did not believe that Russia was being referred to in this portion of Scripture. But since it was the view of many Bible expositors whom I respected, I began to make a study of this passage on my own and attempt to arrive at a decision whether or not this could possibly be Russia.

Well, I would like to present three points of proof, three lines of identification that convinced me. One line of proof would be enough, but there are three here that convinced me beyond a shadow of a doubt that Russia is the enemy referred to in chapters 38 and 39.

Language

The first proof that I would like to mention is the linguistic phenomenon—that is, the language that is used. Some of the words are quite remarkable—you'll find them nowhere else in the Scriptures. I turn first to Ezekiel 38:2 and note the word “*chief, prince of Meshech.*”

And the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. (Ezekiel 38:1–3, emphasis mine)

If you compare an *American Standard Version*, the *New King James*, and some other newer versions of the Bible, you will notice that there is a change in translation. The word “chief” has been changed to the Hebrew word *rosh*, and it literally means “head,” or “beginning.” *Rosh* is a proper name, however.

It was the learned Dean Stanley’s exhaustive history of the Eastern church (not only exhaustive but *exhausting*) published a century ago, that contains a note on the Hebrew scholar Gesenius that the Hebrew “rosh” is mistranslated “chief” in the English version, that it should be “russ” or “Russia.” And Stanley added this comment: “It is the only name of a modern nation found in the Old Testament” (“modern nation” in the sense of coming into existence during the past few centuries). That’s quite remarkable, coming from the source that it does.

Another historian wrote, “Rosh, taken as a proper name in Ezekiel, signifies the inhabitants of Scythia from whom the modern Russians derive their name.” In 1533, Ivan IV, known as Ivan the Terrible, came to power. (I understand that his portrait still hangs in the museum in Russia today.) He was the first to assume the title of czar of Russia, taking, if you please, the name of the people who had migrated from the area around the Caspian and Black Seas and probably earlier had come up through the Tigris–Euphrates Valley. For those who believe that the United States is in prophecy, I’d like to take note of that. Two of the greatest scholars I suppose that we’ve ever had have made the statement that Russia is the only modern nation that is ever mentioned in the Word of God. My friend, the United States is never mentioned in the Word of God.

“Son of man, set thy face against Gog.” The word “Gog” here is not so much the name but the title of the ruler. “Gog” is a tartaric word that means “roof,” it means the person who is at the top, on the roof. I can’t think of a better name for the dictator than to call him the boy on top, he’s the one on the roof. This certainly would be the picture of a dictator.

“Set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh [Russ or Russia], Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him.” Now Josephus has said that Magog founded those who from him were named Megagites, but who by the Greeks were called Scythians. And Russia was first called Muscovy, which was derived from Meshech, until about 1533.

So what we have here is a linguistic phenomenon—a name of a modern nation. Added to that are these two words, *Meshech* and *Tubal*. In Hebrew they are lots closer to *Moscow* and *Tobolsk*, the Russian side and the Siberian side, both that are mentioned here. And I say to you that this is indeed a remarkable thing.

Geography

Then there is the geographical phenomenon. Another way that this nation is identified is that it is located in the north. And you will find that identification in Ezekiel 38:6, 15: “the north quarters” and “Thou shalt come from thy place out of the north parts.” Again you will find it in Ezekiel 39:2: “And I will turn thee back, and leave but the sixth part of thee, and will cause thee to come from the north parts, and will bring thee upon the mountains of Israel.”

We also need to understand that directions in Scripture always relate to this nation Israel. When God says it's in the north, He does not mean north of California, or north of where you live. He means north of the land of Israel. When God says south, He means south of Israel. And when God speaks of it being west, He means it's west of Israel. And when He speaks of coming from the east, He's speaking of east of the land of Israel. It has no reference to the United States or to any other part of the globe.

Russia hovers over Palestine like an umbrella. I don't care whether you point north, northwest or northeast, you are pointing to the Russian republics. It is the kingdom that is definitely in the north. And the very interesting thing is that it would be difficult to find another kingdom in the north that would meet the requirements of Scripture. The geographical phenomenon is the second reason (and we believe it is a valid reason) for believing that Magog is Russia.

Basic Philosophy

Now the third, and to me the most convincing one of all, is the philosophical (or ideological) reason. It is that there has come into existence a nation whose basic philosophy fits that described in Ezekiel's prophecy.

World War I brought circumstances into a position for the first time in the history of the world where a nation whose basic philosophy, whose whole political economy, was based on atheism. This was something that the world had never seen before, that had never existed in the past. Somebody says, "But what about the great nations of antiquity such as Egypt and Babylon and Syria, also Persia and the Median Empire?" Not one of them was an atheistic empire. All of them were polytheistic—that is, they worshiped many gods. The reason mankind was not atheistic in ancient times was that they were too close to the time when God had created human life, and it would be very difficult for them to deny His existence. After all, Noah had children who knew a man who knew a man who knew Adam. And when you are that close to Adam, and Adam tells you about coming from the hand of God, it is mighty hard for anybody to become an atheist.

Back in the time of Moses God gave no commandments about atheism. His first two commandments were about polytheism: "thou shalt have no other gods before me" and "thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." It was a warning against polytheism, not atheism. As man began to get away from God and move away from His revelation, atheism came in. But even as far along as the time of David, we find written in Psalm 14, "The *fool* hath said in his heart, There is no God"—today he is a college professor! How far we have strayed through the centuries! In our day it is considered blasé and sophisticated to deny the existence of God. In David's day you would have been a fool, and in Moses' day you wouldn't have even been in existence. You might have worshiped the sun, moon, and stars, but you would not have been godless.

Joseph Stalin said, "We have deposed the czars of earth. We shall now dethrone the Lord of heaven." And that has been the whole thesis and philosophy of the Russian way of thinking since the revolution.

It was when their rocket went by the moon, you will recall, that they made this statement which was aired on the Moscow radio back in December 1960:

Our rocket has bypassed the moon. It is nearing the sun. We have not discovered God. We have turned lights out in heaven that no man will be able to put on again. We are breaking the yoke of the gospel, the opium of the masses. Let us go forth, and Christ shall be relegated to mythology.

Did they think that God was hiding out there somewhere behind the moon or some other planet? How utterly ridiculous and preposterous! But their statement is a revelation of their hatred and bitterness against God. They were shocked to hear our USA astronauts read the first chapter of Genesis from the moon, and they asked on radio, “Was it really a joke?”

May I say that I could give you quotations galore showing that the Communistic system and the nation of Russia even today are absolutely atheistic, as far as the rulers and those who are in power are concerned. For the first time in the history of the world a nation has emerged with this atheistic philosophy.

God’s Strange Work

The very interesting thing is that God says in Ezekiel 38 and 39, “I’m against you.” Notice how strong the statement is. “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Behold, I am against thee.” Now I want to say to you, that this troubled me at first. When I began to study this, I wondered what right has even God to condemn the nation before it even appears in history? That’s not like Him. In the Old Testament you’ll find that God always was gracious. God was always slow to anger. God always wanted to save. And even Isaiah says that judgment is His strange work. He is in the saving business, that’s the whole thought of both the Old and the New Testaments.

You will recall when the people of Israel came into the Promised Land, that they conquered it in battle. Some of the so-called higher critics say, “Wasn’t it terrible that they went in there and destroyed Jericho and so many of those people!” Have you ever read what the harlot Rahab said to Israel’s spies? She said, “We have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt. . . .” (Joshua 2:10). When did that happen? Forty years before that. My friend, may I remind you that God granted Jericho forty years more. He kept His people out in order to give the people of Jericho and all Canaan an opportunity to make up their mind whether they would accept Him or not. Isn’t forty years long enough? I believe if there had been any hope of their turning to God that He would have given them even more time. God is “slow to anger and of great mercy.”

Abraham thought God was rather severe in His judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah. And God told him that if he could find someone down there who was righteous, He would save him. Abraham had to give up. He couldn’t find anyone down there. He was afraid even Lot wouldn’t make it. My friend, God is gracious.

God sent that message out—even to the brutal nation of Assyria. God sent His prophet Jonah to Nineveh. Jonah couldn’t understand why God would send him up there—that’s the reason he didn’t want to go. He said, “I don’t understand this. What is Your concern for Nineveh and these brutal Assyrians?” God said,

And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle? (Jonah 4:11)

And God saved the entire city!

God's wonderful mercy makes His judgment of Russia more remarkable. But God says here, "I'm against you." And they haven't even come into existence. Why is God against them? Because they came into existence as militant atheists. Although they had the Word of God, they set themselves against Him and destroyed every evidence in their manifestos. Centuries before Communism declared itself against God, He beat them to the draw and said, "I'm against you." And this is the only nation, up to the present hour, that could possibly fulfill this particular statement that God has made here.

Men in high places, ever since World War II, have felt that Russia would not move in any direction but toward the South, and that in preparation they have been stirring up the Arabs. Another report is that the Arab block intends to invade Israel as soon as it is ready again. Only the date is uncertain. Both Russia and Germany wish Israel to be exterminated, and they have both encouraged the Arabs. That is one of the things that has made this area the most sensitive spot on the earth.

Now we are told in the Word of God that Russia is going to come down out of the north parts, and they're going to come down into the land of Israel. That is the direction God says they are going to move. He says it again and again,

And 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. (Ezekiel 38:8)

Now I want you to notice *why* they are coming down. God gives a very good reason, and I think that we can see that today.

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.
(Ezekiel 38:4)

God said that Russia is to move southward. The little nation of Israel knows that her neighbors are living for the day when they can push her into the sea.

Notice again the remarkable language of Ezekiel 38:4: "I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth." There have been those who have interpreted this to mean that God is going to put hooks in the jaws of Russia and bring them up out of the land of Palestine. The very interesting thing is when you read this chapter and the next, you find that Russia is not ever going to *come out* of the land. God says of that invading army that comes against Israel:

And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will give unto Gog a place there of graves in Israel, the valley of the passengers on the east of the sea: and it shall stop the noses of the passengers: and there shall they bury Gog and all his multitude: and they shall call it The valley of Hamon-gog. And seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may cleanse the land. (Ezekiel 39:11, 12)

God intends to bury them right there in that land. In fact, God says that it will take seven months just to bury the bodies.

Since the invading armies will not be coming up out of that land at all, what does God mean by “I will put *hooks* into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth”? That is the remarkable thing God says concerning a powerful war-machine nation that has totally rejected Him! In effect, God says, “I’m baiting a hook for you, and you’re going to take it, and you are going to come down into the land of Israel.”

Now I do not know all the bait that God has for that hook, but I do know that He has on it some very interesting bait.

Warm-Water Port

First of all, may I say to you that Russia must have a warm-water port. And they have made several efforts to get one. The coast of Palestine along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea is the proper place for the Russians to get a warm-water port that will be available to them. They are looking in that direction. After all, why should they want to move north and get another frozen port? They have enough of those right now. But if they could move into the Mediterranean they would have a warm-water port the year around.

Oil

There is another hook that obviously is in their jaws, the one with which we are most familiar, and that is oil. The largest oil reserves in the world are not in Texas. I made that statement in Houston, Texas, and I almost had to leave town! But the largest oil reserves are today in the Middle East, and Russia has been after that oil. Any modern nation with a war machine and modern gadgets must have oil. God for millions of years has been storing barrels of oil in the Middle East.

The Dead Sea

There’s a third hook and this is the one He’s really loaded. I do not mean to be irreverent, but had you met the Lord ten billion years ago over in that land, and you had said to Him, “I don’t understand something that You are doing here. You are running water down there in the Dead Sea and just letting it evaporate. And that’s the only place You do it like that. Why in the world are You doing it?” I think the Lord would have said, “Well, I have something in mind. I’m baiting a hook. Because a few billion years from today I’m going to have a nation come down to get the chemicals that I’m storing up here. And it will have to have them.” Chemicals are something else that a modern nation has to have. And God has been storing them up down through the millions, and I think billions, of years. Don’t be afraid of that—God is the God of eternity. He has had plenty of time. He’s in no hurry.

He’s been pouring the chemicals into the Dead Sea, and only basic salts are being taken out of there—magnesium salt, sodium salts—by the simple process of evaporation. But they haven’t even touched most of it today. It’s estimated—and I saw these figures several years ago—that the value of the chemicals in the Dead Sea were worth then twenty-seven trillion English pounds. That’s a lot of money! That was way back when things were not as expensive as they are today. There is no telling what those chemicals are worth now. They would be priceless to any

nation in time of war, and they rest there in the heavy waters of the Dead Sea. “I’m going to put hooks in your jaws,” God said, “and I’m going to bring you down into that land.”

When Will It Happen?

When will Russia come down? I’m not giving dates, and I hope you’ll understand that. This is a place where very fine men who study prophecy differ. On my desk I have books that give six different interpretations as to time, and they’re all written by men for whom I have great respect. But God has identified it far enough that I think you can see certain things. Let me just point to one or two.

We are told in Ezekiel 38:8,

After many days thou shalt be visited: in the latter years thou shalt come into the land....

Then in 38:16,

And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days....

Repeated again and again are the “latter days” or the “latter years” or the “last days” or the “time of the end,” as Daniel uses it. These are technical terms that relate to God’s purposes with the nation Israel.

Now when you come to the New Testament you will find that “in the last days” is referring to the last days of the church, right before the Lord takes the church out of the world.

But the last days for the nation Israel begin with the “great day of the Lord,” which, according to Joel’s prophecy, is nigh. It is the Great Tribulation Period that is yet in the future. We are told that during that period Russia will come down against Israel. Many of us believe that Russia and her allies will come down in the middle of the seven-year Tribulation period. It would seem, as Daniel divides it and as John in the Revelation divides it, that something *triggers* the Great Tribulation Period. In the first half of it, when Antichrist appears, he appears as a prince of peace. I’m confident he presents himself as the Messiah. The nation Israel will receive him as such. But they will find out they have been deceived the minute he runs an idol into the temple. However, at first they apparently will go after him, as will the other nations of the world.

We are told that the entire world is going to worship the Antichrist. Why? Because he’s going to bring *peace*. We have spent billions of dollars in our efforts to bring peace to this world. The nations of the world want peace at any price. There are many people who are willing to surrender to anyone in order to have peace, because they feel that nuclear war is something that would be frightful beyond words. And it would be.

Therefore when Antichrist appears (there’s a vacuum being created right now for his appearance) and promises peace and *produces* peace, the world will go after him. And if that man appeared today in Western Europe, for that is where he will first appear, they will not ask whether he came from heaven or hell. They won’t care where he comes from if he will just bring peace.

So the first half of the Tribulation, a period of three and a half years, I think will be a time of false peace by the Antichrist. They are going to have a real summit conference in that day. The

Antichrist will be there, and whoever is ruling Russia at that time will participate. The first one to break the peace treaty will be Russia because in the middle of the Great Tribulation there begins the war of Armageddon, a campaign of three and a half years. It will be Russia that first comes down against little Israel. *At that time I believe that Russia will catch the world off balance, because she has made the world believe that she is interested in peace.* There will be no hope of Israel's survival, but God will intervene with some great convulsion of nature when judgment comes down upon this invading horde.

Now that's the beginning of Armageddon—not the *battle* of Armageddon—you think of a battle being fought in a day or two, maybe a week or two; nowhere in the Bible is it called the battle of Armageddon. It is a campaign. It is the *war* of Armageddon. And it apparently lasts for the final part of the Great Tribulation Period. It appears that Russia must go down in defeat in order for Antichrist to become a world ruler. And Antichrist *will* become a world ruler. The thirteenth chapter of Revelation makes it clear that the entire world is to *worship* him and go after him.

Russia, therefore, must go down against Israel. How will they go down? Well, God makes it very clear how He intends to manipulate them. Notice this:

And I will turn thee back, and leave but the sixth part of thee, and will cause thee to come up from the north parts, and will bring thee upon the mountains of Israel.
(Ezekiel 39:2)

It is God who will bring them “from the north” and “upon the mountains of Israel.”

God says, “I will leave but the sixth part of thee.” The literal translation of that would be, “I will sixth thee.” Or let me give you what is probably the best translation of all: “I will afflict thee with six plagues.”

Now what are these six plagues? God says when Russia comes down there will be no deliverance for the nation Israel. Don't you know even today if Russia should move against her—unless America or some other nation would intervene—there would be no hope for that little nation? It would be absolutely exterminated. Israel would disappear from off the face of the earth. But God says that cannot happen because He will move in Israel's behalf.

And it shall come to pass at the same time when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, saith the Lord GOD, that my fury shall come up in my face. For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken. Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel. (Ezekiel 38:18, 19)

Now listen to this language: “*And I will plead against him...*” or “I will enter into judgment against him with six plagues.” What are they?

... With pestilence and with blood; and I will rain upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone. (Ezekiel 38:22)

Pestilence, blood, overflowing rain, great hailstones, fire and brimstone. These are the six plagues. In effect, God says, “I will deal with this nation personally.”

Does this remind you of something else in Scripture? Does this remind you of the record in Genesis 19, of how God intervened and dealt with Sodom and Gomorrah? These two cities of the plain had reached the place where God says that He gave them up. He sent no messenger, no prophet to Sodom and Gomorrah to warn them of impending judgment.

The apostle Paul in the first chapter of Romans says that certain individuals, certain cities, certain nations reach a place where God gives them up. He has no word for them at all. You mean the God of mercy? Yes, the God of mercy. You mean the God who is a Savior? Yes. He gives them up as He gave up Sodom and Gomorrah. He had absolutely no message for those cities. God says, “With fire and brimstone I am against thee, O Gog. I’m *against* this godless outfit. I will deal with them personally and will bring down this judgment upon them.”

Now the very interesting thing is that although God had no message for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, He sent two angels into the doomed city to tell *His* man that he had to get out. God said, “As long as you are in the city, Lot, I cannot destroy it. You’ll have to get out of the city.” And when Lot left, judgment came. May I say to you—and I do not want to press this—but what a picture of a future day! God says that judgment can’t come upon this world until He gets His people out. The Great Tribulation cannot come, it *cannot* come, my beloved, until God removes His people. Now I know there are people today who would argue, “But the church is in a state of apostasy, and the church *needs* judgment.” I agree to all of that, and I do not know how much trouble the church (meaning the body of genuine believers) will go through before it leaves this earth. I am of the opinion there is suffering ahead for the church, but not the Great Tribulation Period. On the other hand, the “make-believers” will have no part in the Rapture but will face the judgment of the Great Tribulation.

Again, will you look at Lot as recorded in Genesis 19. If you ask me, old Lot was as miserable a failure as any man I know of. And if I had only the information given in the Old Testament and you asked me, “Do you think old Lot was saved?” I’d say, “Well, personally, I don’t think so. I don’t think he made it.” Lot was a rascal. He went down there and made his home in the city of Sodom. He invested in it. He lost all of his children—they even *married* Sodomites! You remember that the record says he went around to his sons-in-law and said to them, “Look, get out! God is going to *destroy* this city!” The sons-in-law laughed—they thought he was kidding. They probably said something like this, “You don’t mean that. You are not living like a man who believes this city is going to be destroyed. You’re living just like it’s going to be here forever. Run on. We’re not listening to you.” Poor old Lot, nobody listened to him. He had no witness at all. He had lost his testimony. But he got out himself. God saved him.

My friend, God is going to take true believers out of this world. I think many of us are going to be ashamed as we stand before Christ at His coming. And I’m not sure that our friends and neighbors get very excited when they hear us say, “We believe the Lord is coming.” They are saying, “You sure don’t live like it. You’re not living today like you believe the Lord is coming.” But the Word of God says that He *is* coming. One of these days He will bring judgment upon this earth. Real judgment. Fire, if you please. That’s the language of Scripture. God says, “I’ll deliver My people,” and He has told us that we are to look for Him. We are not looking for judgment, but we are “looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13).

I’m not looking for Gog or Magog. I’m not looking for Antichrist to appear. But I am seeing a stage being set for Russia’s move against Israel. I do not know how close we are. I see not only one sign but the multiplication of all these signs about us and believe they are setting the stage. It

looks as if God is getting ready to move again in the affairs of this earth. Thank God today that He has said,

... He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment; but is passed from death unto life. (John 5:24, emphasis mine)

In our day there is no protection, no shelter, that can deliver you from the judgment that is coming except the blood of Jesus Christ. He is the only safe place in this world for any person to be.

Now God is slow at moving. Since it took Him millions of years to bait a hook, I don't think He's in any hurry today to move. Actually, I get a little impatient; I wonder why He doesn't move. But He says that He's patient, He is longsuffering, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to a knowledge of the truth. And the reason He didn't come last night was because there were some people today who were saved. Our Lord wanted them saved. Although I do not know when He will come, I do know this: He is coming some day. And when He does, it will be too late to get out of our present-day "Sodom," for the judgment will be here.

Editor's Note: Dr. McGee preached this sermon on Russia in 1969, many years before the changes that have occurred there since 1990. However, Russia is named in Ezekiel 38 and 39 as the king of the north and will have a significant role in Bible prophecy. Also, the situation in Russia could change just as quickly again. Perhaps God has allowed a little time for the spread of the gospel in this thirsty land.