

Robert Vannoy, Major Prophets, Lecture 28—Ezekiel #4

Gog and Magog (Ezek 38 & 39)

Reflections on Modern Israel & the Kingdom of God [Already but Not Yet]

I think that it is significant that Israel after all these millennia again is a nation. I don't see the fulfillment of this as a pouring out of God's Spirit. It's a secular state at this point. It may be in anticipation of movement toward fulfillment of the outpouring. It is significant, however, that Israel is back in the land.

I think that there are some legitimate uses to which kingdom terminology can be put. There is a sense that the kingdom is here now. But the kingdom is not here in all its fullness, so it is here but it isn't here. It's an "already but not yet" scenario. It is a better way to describe it than some of the dispensationalist people who say that the kingdom is not here. To them the kingdom is entirely and exclusively in the future. That doesn't do justice to the New Testament that speaks of the present aspect of the kingdom. But certainly there is a future aspect that is going to be more complete. You have to be careful that you don't use "already but not yet" to explain everything, but I think there are some legitimate uses of the concept. We have to seek for the approach to interpretation that has the least objections yet does justice to the requirements of the text. Now, the point is that the present notion of Israel is "already," but it is secular and "but not yet," the spiritual entity envisioned by the prophets is to come.

Context of Ezekiel 38 & 39 and Revelation 20 [Gog and Magog]

Before looking at some statements of chapters 38 and 39 as they're both fairly long chapters, I think as far as the flow in the book of Ezekiel is concerned, if chapters 36 and 37 have reference to the Millennial Kingdom, then I think it is at least of some significance that chapters 38 and 39 that speak of the prophecy against Gog and Magog appear after the picture given of the Millennium in chapters 36 and 37.

Chapter 38, verse 1, says, "The word of the LORD came to me: 'Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal;

prophecy against him.” I think it is possible that Ezekiel could give the picture of the Millennium and then go back and tell of something before the Millennium. It’s possible; we can’t rule it out. But it would be more natural to think chapters 38 and 39 would be describing something that occurred after what is described in chapters 36 and 37.

Now having said that, I certainly think it is worth noticing that when you turn to Revelation and look at the description of the Millennium in chapter 20, when you get down to verse 7 where the thousand years are ended, we read, “When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth--Gog and Magog--to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.” So when you look at the description of the millennial period in Revelation chapter 20, verse 7, it refers to Gog and Magog as something that occurs during this battle subsequent to the Millennium. There is no other reference to Gog and Magog in Scripture except in Genesis 10:2 where you have a Magog out of the line of Japheth and that’s parallel to the genealogy in 1 Chronicles 1:5 where Magog is mentioned. But other than that, Ezekiel 38 and Revelation 20:7 are the only references.

Now in spite of that reference to Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:7, there are many interpreters that will say Ezekiel 38 and 39 describes something that occurs prior to the Millennium. This battle with Gog and Magog is what precedes the millennial period, during the Armageddon battle, and not that it comes subsequent to the millennial period.

Ellison Gog and Magog Prior to the Second Advent

Look at Ellison on page 53 of your citations, at the bottom of the page. He says, “There are but two mentions of Gog and Magog in Scripture. Here, that is Ezekiel 38, and in Revelation, and unless very cogent arguments are mentioned to the contrary, we must let the latter interpret the former.” In other words, what he is saying, you want to know what is being described in Ezekiel 38 and 39, Revelation 20 is what puts that in the right framework. To place Gog before the Second Advent and then to add the final revolt of the nations at the close of the kingdom age--as does the Scofield Bible--seems like an illegitimate attempt to have it both ways. The only real basis for the common view that

these chapters see their fulfillment before the Second Advent is in Ezekiel 39:21-29. It is, however, far more satisfactory to look at these verses as a summary of the message of this whole section of Ezekiel.

Now, admittedly, if you look at Ezekiel 39:21-29, it does seem like there are events described there that are prior to the millennial period. You see what Ellison suggests is that verses 21-29 are sort of a summary of this whole section of Ezekiel, and I think that is a concluding part. When you get to verse 40, here you're into a new section of the book. So chapter 39 is a concluding summary looking back on the whole section that it concludes.

I continue Ellison's quote in the top of page 54, "If we place Gog at the end of the Millennium, we will not concern ourselves very much with what the names mean. They are referred to in the New Bible Commentary of J. H. Lang, and in a statement in the Scofield Bible that 'The primary references are to the European powers headed up by Russia. Quite apart from the many who have always refused to identify Rosh with Russia, there is a strong tendency among modernists, for example, to return to the old Hebrew Masoretic tradition as it translates this passage with the Authorized Version.'" Well, that's a reference to verse 2. We'll look at that in more detail later.

Ezekiel 38:2 Chief Prince or Prince of Rosh

You see the King James says, "Chief prince of Meshech and Tubal"; NIV "Chief prince of Meshech and Tubal"; NASV has, "The prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal," as does the New English Bible. Hal Lindsay reads it, "The chief prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal." You see that comes from the Hebrew *nessi rosh*. The question is: should *nessi rosh* be taken as "prince of Rosh," or is "Rosh" to be taken as "chief," "head prince," "chief prince." Is it a proper name, "prince of Rosh," or is it a descriptive word of "chief prince of Meshech and Tubal." So it has to do with how you translate *rosh*. Do you translate that as a proper noun "Rosh," or do you translate it as "chief prince." We'll come back to that later, but you can see what Ellison is saying: There is a strong tendency to translate it as "chief prince" rather than "prince of Rosh."

Revelation 20:8

When we find that all the names are of tribes on the fringe of the then known world, Gog and Magog, Meshech and Tubal, East Persia, South Kush and Put--those names that occur in this section--it becomes more probable that we're dealing with the symbolic use as Revelation 20:8 does by calling them the nations that are in the four corners of the earth. How then are we to understand the whole prophecy in light of this New Testament placing if we accept the concept of the Millennium as God's rule on earth when Satan is bound, and the curse is lifted, and Israel is at the center of blessing on earth? What room is there for any such outburst, or revolt against God? This question is often asked as an objection to the millennial view. Ellison says, that, "The Scriptures show us that in all ages, with all the varied circumstances of ignorance and knowledge, man has set his will against God and failed. The bulk of the Old Testament teaches the failure of the children of Israel and that is, after all, Ezekiel's message. You see this especially in chapters 16, 20 and 23.

Reflections on Gog and Magog and the Millennium

The New Testament introduces us to the beginnings of trouble in the church. It makes it clear that they will grow worse rather than better. Here too in the mysterious purpose of God, alongside the triumphs and failures of the organization, the final proof for the failure of man is to be his response when placed in the most favorable position conceivable. Though the sanctuary of God is with man, though the curse is lifted from nature, though the Tempter, the enemy of God, is bound, yet when the opportunity is offered, the deep seated rebellion in the hearts of so many at once becomes obvious.

I do not know if we are to understand the names Gog and Magog symbolically as those who have kept far from the glory of God centered in Jerusalem, or whether it refers above all to those in previous dispensations who have not been exposed directly to God's testing. In either case, there is no contradiction between 38:4, where God is pictured as drawing Gog to his doom and Revelation 20:8, where Satan is portrayed as the deceiver of the nations. Man must be put to the test or else it will not be clear what is in him. Satan

is a willing instrument by which the testing is carried out.”

So what Ellison does there is give a rationale for the millennial period and it seems to me to be a good one. Or you might ask regarding this whole approach, what is the purpose of the Millennial Period if again it is going to end in a rebellion? I think it pictures again that even though man is under the best of conditions, until sin is finally destroyed, and Satan along with it, and those who are not believers in the Lord are cast into the lake of fire, there's always going to be a chance for rebellion. This is the final proof of that so to speak. But in any case, Ellison then would view chapters 38 and 39 as descriptive of that which is going to occur subsequent to the Millennial Period primarily based on the parallel reference in Revelation 20, verse 7.

A very popular treatment of this passage today is in how Hal Lindsay describes it in *The Late Great Planet Earth* in chapter 5. I know you're familiar with that quote. But he sees Gog and Magog as occurring not after the Millennium, but prior to it. You notice that on these translations of verse 2b, it's interesting he takes it both ways. He has “chief prince of Rosh.” The problem is you either have to have “chief prince” or “prince of Rosh.” Mostly other translations vary between “chief prince” or “chief of Rosh” for the *nessi Rosh*. Look at page 55 in your citations, under Lindsay, there in the middle of the page. He says, “For centuries, long before the current events could have influenced the interpreters' ideas, men have recognized that Ezekiel's prophecy about the northern commander referred to Russia. Doctor John Constance, writing in 1864 says, ‘This kingdom in the north I can see it to be the autograph of Russia as Russia occupies a place where the prophetic word has been admitted by all those expositors.’” What's the evidence? “Ezekiel describes this northern commander of Gog of the land of Magog, the chief prince, the ruler of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. Ezekiel 38:2 gives the ethnic background of this commander and his people. In other words, the prophet gives the family tree of the northern commander so that we can trace the migration of these tribes to the modern nation that we know. 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 are called Rosh, Meshech and Tubal.” Top of page 56, “William Gesenius, the great Hebrew scholar 19th

century, discusses these words in his unsurpassed Hebrew Grammar. He says Meshech was the founder of the Moski; the Moski people dwelt in the mountains. This scholar goes on to say the Greek name derived from the Hebrew name Meshech is the source of the name of the city of Moscow. In discussing Tubal, he says Tubal is the son of Rath founder of the people who dwell in the Black Sea and west of the Moski. He concludes by saying these people make up the modern Russian people.”

Lindsey on Rosh [head/prince or Place Name] Contra Keil

There is one more name to consider in this line of evidence – that is the Hebrew word “Rosh” translated “chief” in Ezekiel 38 in the King James Version. The word literally means in Hebrew, the “top” or “head” of something. According to most scholars this word is used in the sense of a proper name, not as a descriptive noun qualifying the word “prince.” The German scholar Keil says that after careful grammatical analysis that it should be translated as a proper name that is “Rosh.” He says that the Byzantine and Arabic writers were frequently mentioning the people they called Rosh, Rosh dwelling in the country of the Taurus, and reckoned among the Scythian tribes. Doctor Gesenius says Rosh was a designation for the tribes north of the Taurus mountains dwelling in that neighborhood. He concluded that in this name and tribe, we have the first statement that Rosh is the Russian nation. So it’s quite clear what Lindsay does; he puts it before the Millennium and links this prophecy with Russia. Of course, with the cold-war situation and the movement of Russia into the Middle East over the last 15 years it seems to many not to be a forced interpretation.

Notice that in the third to the last paragraph, he says the German scholar Keil translates Rosh as a proper name. Look at page 55; I have that paragraph in Keil. It’s interesting what Keil says because Lindsay only partially quotes him. I don’t know if we need to read the whole paragraph, but down towards the end is where it gets to that: “Gog is further described as the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. It is true that Ewald follows Aquila, the Targum, and Jerome connecting ‘Rosh’ with *nessi* as an appellative in the sense of ‘chief prince.’ But the argument used to support this explanation, namely

that there is no people with the name of Rosh mentioned either in the Old Testament or by Josephus, is a very weak one. The Byzantine and Arabic writers frequently mentioned people called Rosh, dwelling in the country of Taurus and among the Scythian tribes. So that there is no reason to question the existence of the people Rosh.”

But then that’s where he stops his quote. Notice, however, the next statement: “Even though the attempt to find the trace of such a people as the Rosh, by explaining this name as the combination “Rosh and Meshech,” it is just doubtful that the name of the Russians is connected with this Rosh.” In other words, Keil does say, Rosh can be a designation of a people, but what he says, it is not to be connected with Russia. He says that quite strongly. He says this suggestion is doubtful that the name of the Russians is connected with Rosh. Now, I guess Lindsay didn’t find it appropriate to quote that part because that would go strongly against the way he is interpreting it.

3.D.3. Alexander on Rosh (JETS Article)

Look at, 3. D. 3. under the heading R. H. Alexander’s, *Ezekiel* in the Expositor’s Bible Commentary, page 122. It says, “Some understand Rosh to mean modern Russia but this identity has no basis. Those holding such a view normally appeal to etymology based on similar sounds to the hearing between the two terms. But such etymological procedure is not linguistically sound at all. The term Russia is a late 11th century A.D. term.” So Russia is a late 11th century A.D. term and linguistically to connect Russia with Rosh here seems to have no basis at all.

Yamauchi’s Response to Lindsey on Tubal and Meshach

Notice also there in your bibliography I have two entries under Edwin Yamauchi. One is from a JETS article “Meshach, Tubal and Company,” which is a review article, and the other is a book called *Foes from the Northern Frontier: Invading Hordes from the Russian Steppes*, reprinted in 2004, where he has a rather lengthy discussion of these names. But look at the bottom of page 56 in your citations, taking some material first from the JETS article then from the book. Meshech and Tubal are two names that occur

there in verse 2. I might say that Lindsay connects Tubal with Tobleh, a Russian city, and Meshach with Moscow. So you have Lindsey averring Rosh being Russia and Meshach and Tubal being Moscow and Tobleh in Russia. But notice what Yamauchi says, “Meshach and Tubal are the most controversial names in the list of Genesis 10:2 and 1 Chronicles 1:5 as the sons of Japheth. If their names had only occurred in these lists, their identification might have simply been an academic issue. But the names recur in a prophetic passages in Ezekiel 27:13, 32:26, 38:2, and 39:1. The Hebrew word for “chief of Rosh” in Ezekiel 38:2 was transliterated by the Septuagint as a proper name “Rosh,” giving rise to the widespread impression that Russia was intended. According to Custance, it may be observed that *nessi rosh*, which in this passage is translated as chief prince, signified inhabitants of Scythia from whom the Russians derived their name. Russia was known as Moskove until the time of Ivan the Terrible at which time it became connected with Meshach. Much later in history we meet the word Meshach in the form of Moscov. It is possible that the two famous cities Moscow and Tobleh still preserve the names Meshach and Tubal.” That’s the same kind of idea that Lindsay promoted.

Now, Yamauchi’s comment is that “these groundless identifications have unfortunately gained widespread currency in the evangelical world through many channels in the first and second edition references in the Scofield Bible. Notice this in Genesis 10:2 and Ezekiel 38:2. This view is also expressed in the phenomenonly popular book of Hal Lindsay *The Late Great Planet Earth* and the lectures of Campus Crusade evangelical Josh McDowell on numerous campuses. The perpetuation of such identification is based on superficial similarity. It is completely untenable in the way that the clear evidence of a cuneiform text which locates Mushcu, biblical Meshech, and Tabel, biblical Tubal in Central and Eastern Anatolia,” That’s Turkey. “The Muski persevered through the Hittite Empire, and Tiglathpileser I encountered 20,000 of them in the region on the upper Tigris. Ashurnasurpal received presents from the Muchki, whose capital was Azaka, classical Caesare in modern Eastern Anatolia. In 863 B.C., Shalmanesser attacked Tabel in the region north of Cilicia and Tubal in 732 B.C. when the king did not present the expected tribute. After the conquering of Anatolia by Cyrus,

546 B.C., and the subsequent reorganization under Darius, the remnants of the Mushki and the Tabel may be seen in the Greek names of the population which were included in the 19th satrapy of northeast Anatolius, the Moski and the Tibereni.”

It is a reflection on evangelical scholarship when he speaks of a groundless identification of Rosh as Russia, and of the association of Meshe with Moscow, and of Tubal with Tobel, “when we have had uniform texts and discussions on them that have provided true clarification of these names at the end of the 19th century. It is true that some of these studies were in French or in works that are not readily accessible or widely distributed but less excusable and more indicative of a parochial vision of the ignorance of critical commentary on the Ezekiel passages when we have firsthand information on the correct interpretation of Meshach and Tubal.

Then in his book *Foes from the Northern Frontier*, he says though the identification of Gog and Magog still remains disputed, the identification of Meshe and Tubal have for a long time not been in doubt. All in formal conjectures associating these names with Moscow and Tubal are untenable. The names Meshe and Tubal are preserved by the Greek historian Herodotus as tribes of Eastern Anatolia. Josephus was also aware of their location. Since the late 19th century, Assyrian texts have been available which locate Mushtu and Tubal in Central and Eastern Anatolia respectively.”

So I think we have to be careful about the approach when it sees in Ezekiel 38 a prophecy that is presently being anticipated by Russian involvement in the Middle East, which has been a popular sort of interpretation of Ezekiel 38 particularly when it rests on that kind of basis.

Alexander’s Double Fulfillment Prior to and After the Millennium

Now, the expositor Alexander that I mentioned who did Ezekiel in the Expositor’s Bible Commentary, also wrote an article on Ezekiel 38-39 in JETS 1974. Alexander sees it as a double fulfillment. Page 168 in JETS he says, “Undoubtedly the reader may be perplexed by this section. It most certainly appears that two separate positions have been approved by the writer. He says that is precisely the proposal that is offered. The full

description of the events as recorded in Ezekiel, the apostle John only summarizes the account of both in Revelation 19 and 20 since readers would have been familiar with Ezekiel 38 and 39.” Skipping down a ways, he says, “The hermeneutical principle of multiple fulfillment declares that a given prophecy has one meaning applied in two or more ways. There may be a near and a far fulfillment two near fulfillments, or two far fulfillments. The latter is proposed here. That is two far fulfillments. Ezekiel 38 and 39 has a multiple fulfillment: one, the demise of the beast, the chief instrument of Satan in Revelation 19:17-21, and two, the final fall of Satan--that Gog who is the supreme enemy of Israel who makes the final attempt to regain the land of Israel from God’s chosen people. The multiple fulfillment is concentrated on similar events with the last and greatest enemies of Israel--both the beast and Satan--who seek to defeat Israel to the acquire the land. Both events are forwarded by the Lord. The former in one sense prefigures the latter. Gog, therefore, refers both to the beast in Revelation 19 and to Satan in Revelation 20. The time of these accounts are between the end of tribulation and the beginning of the Millennium. The first fulfillment is before the Millennium and the second after the Millennium, respectively.”

Vannoy’s Response

So this is an example of someone who sees it both ways: before the Millennium and after it. The writer believes Ezekiel 38-39 is one of the most difficult texts in Scripture and is solved by the concept of multiple fulfillment. But that must be rejected. The only apparent alternative is to declare one of the chapters Revelation 19 or Revelation 20 as the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy and affirm the remaining chapter is just an allusion, or analogy, to Ezekiel 38-39. I don’t want to get into the details of that but that was R. H. Alexander and the JETS article in your bibliography.

Transcribed by Michelle Lee
Final edit by Dr. Perry Phillips
Re-narrated by Dr. Perry Phillips