

Israel-Hamas War 2023 – What the Bible Says Part 1

Introduction

As I write in October 2023, the State of Israel is engaged in the heaviest combat it has seen on its own territory in the last half century against Iran’s proxy terrorist invaders – Hamas from Gaza, Judea, and Samaria and Hezbollah from Lebanon and Syria. Many people are naturally wondering how the current situation relates to the end times prophecies found in God’s Word – particularly the so-called “Gog-Magog” invasion foretold in Ezekiel 38-39.

CAVEAT – Before we launch into this discussion let me start by saying along with Amos that I am no prophet, nor am I a son of a prophet. As always, many brash predictions and much doomsaying is being put out on the Internet and in the media about current events in the Middle East. Although I’m neither a prophet nor an “trained and ordained” Bible expositor, I have to bluntly, honestly, and (as always) humbly say that most of these prognostications are not soundly founded in scripture and therefore not to be trusted or believed. This misinformation isn’t just coming from the usual “lunatic fringe” but from respected Bible expositors like David Jeremiah and Greg Laurie. As always, whenever new violence erupts in the region, many people fear that they will usher in the end of days. These fears are being stirred up from pulpits around the world. Shamefully, some of the folks doing this fear mongering are in it for the money and fame rather than sincere desire to illuminate the Word of God for His children. But most of those making these unfounded predictions have apparently just not done their proper exegetical homework before making their prognostications.

Make no mistake. The modern State of Israel has been at war with the neighboring nations of the region (oftentimes through their proxy terrorist arms like Hamas, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and Hezbollah) off and on since its very inception in 1948. The nation is under continual threat that this conflict may erupt into renewed violence and even full-blown military combat at any time just as it did in the Six-day War of 1967, the Yom Kippur war of 1973, the Intifadas of the late 1980s and 2000, and the Israeli invasions of Lebanon combatting Hezbollah in 1982 and 2006. In each of these cases, people feared that these events were the foreshadowing of the end times wars we read about in Biblical prophecies.

Fear of the unknown future is only natural. In fact, it is beneficial as a survival mechanism, provided we don’t allow ourselves to become so obsessed with the future that we forget to continue living in the present, or even worse, forget the day-to-day provision and protection of the living God! Even those with scant knowledge of Biblical prophecy know that God’s Word has much to say about end times, so they seek from those familiar with the prophecies advice on facing the uncertain future. Sadly, in such times many charlatans and outright wackadoodles seem to bubble up out of the woodwork with all manner of wild pronouncements that rarely align with what God’s Word actually says!

So, God has laid a burden upon me to share whatever I can in all humility and diligence what the end times prophecies found in God’s Word actually say about the upcoming battles in Israel, with a minimum of my own editorial comment or prognostication. In the immortal words of that great theologian SGT Joe Friday, let’s consider “just the facts.”

Fear Not

Throughout the Bible when God sent forth one of His angels as a messenger to someone, oftentimes the first words the angel spoke were “Fear not!” Regardless of what the future holds, God’s “got this.” He has known everything that is to come since before even time itself existed. Furthermore, God loves us – His children – more than anything else in His entire creation. Speaking to His chosen people Israel who were suffering in Babylonian captivity over 2,500 years ago, He reminded them...

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¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. ¹²Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. ¹³You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. Jeremiah 29:11-13 (ESV)

Jesus spoke clearly about our fears.

²⁸...do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Matthew 10:28 (ESV)

Certainly, God will one day bring His current creation to an end, and He will make all things new. First though, He will judge all mankind – ushering some of us into eternal life in His glorious presence and casting others into eternal condemnation and torment – forever separated from Him in what Jesus called “***the outer darkness.***” But God’s single criterion by which He will pronounce judgment upon us is not any of our own works, but only whether our names are written in His Book of Life. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Each of us has the opportunity every moment of every day to ensure our names are written in the Book of Life by a heartfelt belief in the resurrection of Jesus and a clear verbal declaration of our willingness to submit ourselves to Jesus’ lordship over us. In that very instant, God seals our eternal redemption out of death into eternal life with Him by the indwelling of His Spirit within the newborn believer. Therefore, we can truly “Fear Not!” (Romans 10:8-10)

Israel’s Homeland in Biblical Prophecy

God ordained and foretold His provision of a homeland for the Jewish people in Canaan by His promise to Abraham – the first man to be called a Hebrew (Genesis 14:13). The expanse of land God promised to Abraham’s descendants is far larger than the Israelite people have ever yet possessed. Even in the heyday of King Solomon, Israel has never even come close to what God promised.

¹⁸On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt [the Nile] to the great river, the river Euphrates, Genesis 15:18 (ESV)

When the Israelite people returned from Egyptian captivity, under the leadership of Joshua, they failed to conquer the land as God had commanded, leaving the original Canaanite occupants of the land in control of much of the territory God had promised to Israel. In fact, the very name Palestine is derived from the Philistine people who came to the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean from the region of the Aegean Sea just about the same time the Israelites arrived back in the land following the Egyptian captivity. The Philistines were a seafaring people who established five cities along the coast. One of these five cities was Gaza. For over 3,000 years, the struggle of the Hebrew people to occupy the promised land has continued. In 70AD, following the unsuccessful Jewish rebellion against the Roman occupation of the land, almost all of the Jews were expelled from the land and scattered throughout the world.

ASIDE – Much of the rhetoric surrounding events in the Holy Land condemns so-called “illegal settlements” established by Israelis in the “occupied territories” (including Gaza) seized by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War. However, if we think carefully about God’s promise to Abraham, we find that even if Israel were to take over all of Gaza, the “West Bank,” Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the Sinai, and the portions of Turkey and Iraq south and west of the Euphrates River it would not be “illegal” in the eyes of God. In fact, it would be evidence of Israel at long last obeying the will of God for Israel to

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occupy the land that He promised to Abraham’s descendants and commanded them to subdue in the time of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles!

Since the destruction of the temple in 70 AD and the subsequent expulsion of the Jews from Roman-occupied Canaan and their dispersion around the world until the middle of the 20th century when UN resolution 181 established an international Partition Plan for the former British Mandate of Palestine, no one imagined that the Israeli people would ever return to occupy the land. In fact, for most of church history, the doctrine of Supersessionism (a.k.a. Replacement Theology) was the accepted view – that the Church of Jesus Christ had replaced the Hebrews as God’s chosen people through whom He would fulfill His plan of salvation for all mankind. Note that this concept flies in the face of what the Apostle Paul wrote about his people Israel in Romans 11:25-32. That passage is worthy of a brief detour because it gets to the heart of God’s reasons for bringing about the Magog invasion prophesied in Ezekiel 38-39.

²⁵Lest you be wise in your own sight, I do not want you to be unaware of this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. ²⁶And in this way all Israel will be saved, as it is written,

***“The Deliverer will come from Zion,
he will banish ungodliness from Jacob”;***
***²⁷“and this will be my covenant with them
when I take away their sins.”***

²⁸As regards the gospel, they are enemies for your sake. But as regards election, they are beloved for the sake of their forefathers. ²⁹For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. ³⁰For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, ³¹so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. ³²For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all. Romans 11:25-32

(ESV)

This passage for me is poetic, poignant, and awe inspiring. God will use the rebellion of Israel to bring the Gentiles to faith and obedience, and then use the rebellion of the Gentiles to bring His chosen people Israel to repentance and faith – all so that He can demonstrate His mercy upon **all** mankind.

Furthermore, there are multiple Old Testament prophecies concerning the eventual return of the Jewish people to their promised homeland in Canaan. For example...

¹⁵“Son of man, your brothers, even your brothers, your kinsmen, the whole house of Israel, all of them, are those of whom the inhabitants of Jerusalem have said, ‘Go far from the LORD; to us this land is given for a possession.’ ¹⁶Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while in the countries where they have gone.’ ¹⁷Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.’ Ezekiel 11:15-17

(ESV)

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Perhaps the most famous of these prophecies is Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37). After showing Ezekiel the vision of a valley full of disjointed, dried up skeletons, He asked, “**Son of man, can these bones live?**” to which Ezekiel astutely replied, “**O Lord GOD, you know.**” After commanding Ezekiel to prophesy over the bones, they came to life again. Finally, God revealed to Ezekiel who the dry bones in his vision represented.

11Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.’ 12Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. Ezekiel 37:11-12

(ESV)

Nevertheless, Replacement Theology continued to be the accepted doctrine among Christian scholars until the late 19th century Zionist movement when the scattered Jewish people began returning to the land. Then, when the trickle of returning Jews became a flood in 1948 after the Nazi holocaust wiped out the majority of Europe’s Jews, God finally fulfilled His plan for restoring them to their promised homeland just as He had foretold through His prophets – establishing the modern State of Israel in the land.

A Brief History of the Modern State of Israel

Look at the Brief History of Modern Israel handout and the Israel and the Occupied Territories map in the Ezekiel 38-39 Maps handout. Let’s quickly examine them together.

So, What Does God’s Word Say About the Current War?

The short answer is – not much. Possibly God was speaking of the people of Gaza in Ezekiel 39:6.

6I will send fire on Magog and on those who dwell securely in the coastlands, and they shall know that I am the LORD. Ezekiel 39:6 (ESV)

The question on many people’s minds though is, what if the war expands to the entire region or even worldwide? Russia and China have both done considerable “saber rattling” over the last couple of weeks about it. Turkey and most of the other countries in the region have expressed support for Hamas and Hezbollah. That has people wondering whether the current war in Gaza might be the harbinger of the so-called “Gog-Magog” invasion prophesied in Ezekiel 38-39, the battle at Armageddon we read about in Revelation 16, or the final defeat of Satan found in Revelation 20 just prior to God’s final judgement.

First, let’s put to rest the whole idea that the current war might be the foreshadowing of the battles in Revelation. Bluntly, it can’t be! Before those battles can take place a number of other prophecies must first be fulfilled including most importantly Jesus’ return riding a white horse bringing His saints with Him that we read about in Revelation 19:11-21 and His subsequent 1,000-year reign over the Earth found in Revelation 20. Furthermore, before **those** things take place, other prophecies must first be fulfilled – the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, the rise and reign of the Antichrist, and the horrendous cataclysms of the Great Tribulation foretold in Daniel 9, Matthew 28, and the earlier chapters of Revelation.

That leaves us to consider just the “Gog-Magog” invasion of Israel prophesied in Ezekiel 38-39.

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Understanding the Gog-Magog Prophecy

Before we launch into a discussion of the prophecy itself, look at the Ezekiel 38-39 Names & Maps handouts. In my (always) humble opinion, a good deal of misinformation has been put forth over the years regarding the names found in end times prophecies – particularly Rosh and Meshech. So, it will be helpful for us to remember the Biblical contexts where these names are found. Wherever a name refers to a person or a people, it is also very important for us to know the geographic location where they now dwell or dwelt in ancient times when the prophecies were written. We find a great deal of information regarding these peoples gathered conveniently in Genesis 10 – the so-called “Table of Nations” where we read about the descendants of Noah’s sons Shem, Ham, and Japheth following the Great Flood.

So, with that foundation for our understanding established, let’s look in detail at the prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39.

The first thing we need to note is that no further Biblical prophecies that had not yet been fulfilled before the establishment of the modern State of Israel, need still to be fulfilled before the invasion foretold in Ezekiel 38-39 can take place. The so-called “Gog-Magog” invasion may or may not be the next prophecy to be fulfilled, but there are no other unfulfilled prophecies that **must** precede it.

The return of the Jews to the land was the last necessary precursor to the “Gog-Magog” invasion. This is really a “no-brainer.” After all there would not be anyone for Gog of Magog’s armies to attack if the Israelites hadn’t returned to the land! Now that they **have** returned, God can implement the foretold invasion. Yes. You read that right. It is God who will stir up this coming invasion so that His name may be glorified among the Gentiles and His chosen people Israel as we shall soon see.

¹The word of the LORD came to me: ²“Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him ³and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Ezekiel 38:1-3 (ESV)

Look at the Ezekiel 38-39 Names handout, and the Genesis 10 map in the Ezekiel 38-39 Maps handout. Notice first that Gog is not a name, but a title that we can take to mean “prince” or “king.” The State of Israel is the only true democracy in the Middle East. The leaders of the other countries in the region are called by titles like “President,” but in fact they are autocratic rulers. Therefore, any of them would be a good candidate for the “Gog” of Magog. **If** God intends to fulfill the prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39 using the political players **currently** in power, then all we really need to identify this “Gog” is to figure out where Magog is. That’s easy. It is northern Turkey around modern Ankara – the country’s capital city! That makes Turkey’s ruler – currently Recep Tayyip Erdoğan – the best candidate as Gog of Magog. The other names mentioned in Ezekiel 38:3, 4, & 6 – Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, and Beth-togramah are also regions of Turkey.

It is therefore safe to say that this great army which God will bring against Israel will come from various regions of Turkey under the leadership of Turkey’s leader whenever God chooses to bring this invasion about. Is Turkey behind the current attacks being carried out by Hamas and Hezbollah in Israel? If so, they haven’t said so. Neither has the media implied anything of the sort.

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NOTE/WARNING – Some English translations add Rosh to the list of names in Ezekiel 38:2.

2“Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, Ezekiel 38:2 (NKJV)

Some Bible expositors like David Jeremiah teach that this is a reference to Russia. I’m not entirely sure what their scriptural basis for this teaching is. Bluntly and with all due respect – this idea is **hogwash!** Some have also compounded this error, saying that **Meshech** – מֶשֶׁךְ **mešek** is a reference to Moscow. In fact, the first known written historical reference to Moscow was in 1147 AD – some 1800 years after Ezekiel’s prophecy! Having said that, I must admit that there is at least one instance in Biblical prophecy where a proper name for someone who had not yet been born was given – the name of Cyrus king of Persia (Isaiah 44:28-45:1). Nevertheless, I can’t see any sound Biblical basis for the contention that Rosh and Meshech in Ezekiel 38:2 are references to Russia and Moscow. All I can imagine is that this false teaching is based on the similar sounds of the words – ironically their sounds **in the English language**, not Russian! This alone is an indicator of the American-English chauvinism of many Bible expositors in the USA and should be a caution to those who seek to rightly divide and expound the Word of God.

We have already established that **Meshech** – מֶשֶׁךְ **mešek** is region in Turkey. The Hebrew word **Rosh** – רוֹשׁ **rō’š** is not a proper name at all. Like **Gog** – גּוֹג **gôg** it is a title. The word means head, top, summit, upper part, chief, total, sum, height, front, beginning. So, a proper English translation of the Hebrew text of Ezekiel 38:2 is as the ESV renders it. “**...Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal...**”

4And I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in full armor, a great host, all of them with buckler and shield, wielding swords. 5Persia, Cush, and Put are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; 6Gomer and all his hordes; Beth-togarmah from the uttermost parts of the north with all his hordes—many peoples are with you. Ezekiel 38:4-6 (ESV)

Iran (formerly called Persia) has been funding and supporting terrorism in the region and around the world through its proxy Hezbollah and other terrorist organizations like Hamas and Islamic Jihad for decades since the Islamic “republic” of Iran was created after the 1979 rebellion against the Shah of Iran. Iran’s current leaders have expressed support for attacks on Israel, and Hamas has acknowledged receiving weapons and support from Iran as well. There is no doubt at all that Iran has its hand in the current attacks, but Iran is not closely allied with Turkey who will doubtless lead the prophesied invasion by Gog of Magog whenever it comes as we have already seen.

Cush (Ethiopia) is not a military power in the region currently, although Muslim extremists in Ethiopia and neighboring Sudan actively persecute and murder their own Christian citizens. Nor is Ethiopia currently closely allied with Iran. It is unlikely that Ethiopia is a player in the current Israel-Hamas War.

Libya (Put) on the other hand is closely allied with Iran, but it is not a powerful military presence in the region. Nevertheless, Libya has been the source of many terrorist attacks over the last half

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century, including the bombing of Pan Am flight 103 over Scotland in 1988 and the seizure of the US consulate in Benghazi and the murder of the US ambassador to Libya in 2012. It is possible that Libya is currently active in providing weapons and other military support to the Hamas and Hezbollah terrorists in Israel as an agent of their ally Iran – possibly facilitating terrorist training in Libya.

Before we move on, take a closer look at Ezekiel 38:4. Notice that it is God Himself who will use Magog and its allies to attack Israel. We shall see later in the prophecy that God will do this to glorify Himself among both the attackers and His people Israel when He miraculously thwarts the invasion that He Himself will instigate. Recall that God had earlier raised up Babylon to assault Israel for the same reason – to turn the hearts of His chosen people back to Him.

²²Thus says the LORD:

“Behold, a people is coming from the north country, a great nation is stirring from the farthest parts of the earth.” Jeremiah 6:22

(ESV)

NOTE – Much has been made over the years of the reference in Ezekiel 38:6 to “***...the uttermost parts of the north.***” Some (e.g., David Jeremiah) have taught that this refers to Russia. This makes Vladimir Putin’s frequent remarks in support of Iran and its Hamas and Hezbollah proxies particularly frightening since Russia is a global nuclear superpower. But of course, “***...the uttermost parts of the north***” is a nebulous term. All the Turkish regions mentioned in the prophecy lie to the north of Israel. It is questionable exactly how far one must go north (particularly on foot as most people traveled in Ezekiel’s day) before reaching the “***uttermost parts,***” but surely, one doesn’t have to walk all the way to Moscow from Jerusalem! In the final analysis of course, one would need to walk all the way to the North Pole to reach the ***uttermost parts of the north,*** but I sincerely doubt that Ezekiel is telling us that the invaders will set out from the North Pole. 😊

Having identified the peoples who will take part in the invasion and their allies, God continues to speak through Ezekiel to Gog of Magog.

⁷“Be ready and keep ready, you and all your hosts that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them. ⁸After many days you will be mustered. In the latter years you will go against the land that is restored from war, the land whose people were gathered from many peoples upon the mountains of Israel, which had been a continual waste. Its people were brought out from the peoples and now dwell securely, all of them. ⁹You will advance, coming on like a storm. You will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your hordes, and many peoples with you.” Ezekiel 38:7-9 (ESV)

We see clearly in these verses that God intends to instigate this invasion in the end times (***latter years***) ***after*** His people Israel have returned to the promised land. Perhaps the war from which the land is restored that the prophecy speaks of in verse 8 is the WWII Holocaust which so severely devastated the Jewish population of Europe.

ASIDE – The statement in verse 8 about the mountains of Israel having been a continual waste prior to the return of the Israelites to the land is reminiscent of Mark Twain’s commentary on the land in his book The Innocents Abroad. Describing the landscape, Twain bluntly wrote, “***Palestine is***

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desolate and unlovely.” Recalling an encounter with a herd of goats and sheep grazing near a small stream in the area of Dan, Twain wrote:

...on its banks a great herd of curious-looking Syrian goats and sheep were gratefully eating gravel. I do not state this as a petrified fact — I only suppose they were eating gravel, because there did not appear to be anything else for them to eat.

Mark Twain – The Innocents Abroad

Mark Twain visited the Holy Land in 1867. Most of Canaan is a desert, and after centuries of neglect and abuse before Twain arrived, the land was indeed desolate. But in the latter half of the 19th century, the financially strapped Ottoman government began relaxing their centuries-old prohibition against selling any of their lands to non-Muslims. They began by offering lands for sale that were deemed worthless – famously, the Sharon Plain on Israel’s central Mediterranean coast. The plain had been completely deforested, overgrazed, and over-settled through the preceding centuries of Ottoman mismanagement. Much of the land was consequently swampy and uncultivable. In the early 20th century, Zionist immigrants arrived. They drained the swamps by planting imported Eucalyptus trees and began intensive settlement and agriculture of the former wastelands. The Sharon Plain and Galilee today would be unrecognizable to Mark Twain.

¹⁰“Thus says the Lord GOD: On that day, thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil scheme ¹¹and say, ‘I will go up against the land of unwalled villages. I will fall upon the quiet people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having no bars or gates,’ ¹²to seize spoil and carry off plunder, to turn your hand against the waste places that are now inhabited, and the people who were gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell at the center of the earth. Ezekiel 38:10-12 (ESV)

It is difficult to imagine this description of “***quiet people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having no bars or gates***” being even remotely applicable to the current citizens of the modern State of Israel during any period of its history. The Jewish people who have returned to the land in the last 150 years have yet to live quietly and securely without walls. Quite the contrary.

Therefore, and because Turkey has no apparent involvement in the 2023 Israel-Hamas war, it seems that the prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39 remains to be fulfilled sometime in the future. Perhaps when the current combat subsides and the diplomatic reproachment between Israel and its Islamic neighbor states that began several years ago have a chance to bear peaceful fruit, God will stir up Gog of Magog and the hordes he commands to invade the land of promise as Ezekiel prophesied.

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Nevertheless, let us continue to examine the prophecy so that we will be prepared to recognize the signs of the times whenever God **does** choose to bring about this invasion.

13Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all its leaders will say to you, ‘Have you come to seize spoil? Have you assembled your hosts to carry off plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to seize great spoil?’ Ezekiel 38:13 (ESV)

In my hippie youth, the popular saying was, “War is not healthy for children and other living things.” Indeed, we are witnessing that tragedy yet again today in Israel and Gaza. But the cynical, jaded former hippie of my dotage must certainly acknowledge that war is also **very** profitable for anyone willing to cast aside conscience and God’s commandment against murder to exploit war’s economic opportunities for non-combatant “neutral” third parties. Put more simply, there’s plenty of money to be made by selling arms and providing other military support to those fighting wars far, far away – just as businesses in the USA have been doing since the end of the war of 1812 with the active cooperation, encouragement, and participation of the US government.

That kind of war profiteering is what God speaks of here in Ezekiel 38:13. Looking at the names and maps handouts, we find that Sheba and Dedan were descendants of Noah’s son Ham who dwelt along the seacoast of southern Arabia – the area that is now Yemen. These people were merchant seafarers, as were the people of Tarshish. Here in Ezekiel 38:13, God points out their hope upon learning that Gog of Magog is preparing for war is to make some profits out of it. Will the USA be among them as it has been in Ukraine?

CAVEAT – The Genesis 10 map in the handouts shows Tarshish along the southwest coast of Italy. We know from several scriptures (e.g., Psalm 72, 1 Kings 10, and 1 Kings 22) that the people of Tarshish were seafaring merchants just like the descendants of Dedan and Sheba. Recall that when Johah wanted to run away from God’s call for him to preach to the city of Nineveh, he boarded a ship for Tarshish – presumably a ship crewed by men of Tarshish. We can also assume since Nineveh is in Mesopotamia (Iraq) and Jonah presumably would have run away in the opposite direction that Tarshish lies somewhere to the west of Joppa from where Jonah set sail. Many locations have been proposed for Tarshish including Spain and believe it or not – Great Britain. Who knows? Maybe Tarshish is the same as Carthage. The two names sound a lot alike, right? That sort of reasoning has worked for others. Why not for us? 😊 Seriously though, the exact location of Tarshish remains unknown and in dispute.

14“Therefore, son of man, prophesy, and say to Gog, Thus says the Lord GOD: On that day when my people Israel are dwelling securely, will you not know it? 15You will come from your place out of the uttermost parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great host, a mighty army. 16You will come up against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the land. In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations [n̄gôy] may know me, when through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. 17“Thus says the Lord GOD: Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel, who in those days prophesied for years that I would bring you against them?” Ezekiel 38:14-17 (ESV)

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As Ezekiel continues, we see once again clearly that this prophecy will be fulfilled in “*the latter days*.” The invasion of Israel from Magog must therefore take place sometime toward the end of the current age. In truth, the world has been living in “*the latter days*” ever since Jesus ascended back to His Father from the Mount of Olives nearly 2,000 years ago. Recall that on that day two “men” in white robes promised Jesus’ disciples that He would come again in the same way that they had just seen Him go into Heaven (Acts 1:11). But remember also what Jesus told them that same day just before His ascension after they asked when He would restore the kingdom to Israel.

7He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.” Acts 1:7 (ESV)

It is only human nature for us to want to know when “*the latter days*” referred to in Ezekiel’s prophecy will draw to a close – possibly beginning with the invasion of Magog. Much as we might say otherwise, none of us really likes to be taken by surprise. Yet without doubt, God has chosen not to reveal the exact days and hours to us. That in itself is a great blessing we rarely acknowledge. Imagine how frantic and unproductive our lives would be if we knew the exact hour of our impending deaths or the return of our Lord Jesus to gather us to Himself. God has chosen not to reveal these things to us simply because He knows we would be unable to cope with that knowledge or apply it wisely. He loves us and wants to spare us the stress. We must therefore simply wait, watch, hope, and above all share the Gospel and its associated prophecies with those around us who don’t know Jesus as Lord.

The main point of Ezekiel 38:14-17 isn’t the “when” of the Magog invasion, but the “why.” In verse 16, we read plainly that God Himself will thwart this invasion that He Himself instigated, so that His holiness may be vindicated in the eyes of unbelievers – called in Ezekiel 38:16 “*the nations*” – גוֹי *gôy*.

Looking Ahead

Hopefully, we have answered a few questions regarding the Ezekiel 38-39 prophecy – particularly *who* the invaders will be, and *where* they will come from. Although we are unable by God’s own design to determine exactly *when* the invasion will take place, we have certainly seen *why* God will fulfill this prophecy – so that all the nations may know Him and His holiness. Far from arousing fear, that should bring great joy and anticipation into the heart of every true Gospel believer. Instead of fear, it should bring a renewed “godly unction” for us to share the Good News of Jesus’ Gospel with all we meet who don’t yet know Him as their Lord and Savior.

God willing, next time we’ll examine the remainder of the prophecy and learn *what* will transpire during the invasion and *how* God will use it to glorify Himself among both “the nations” and His chosen people Israel.