

Gog, Magog . . . Russia and the Rapture?

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MY GOOD FRIEND, JOEL Rosenauer, has a saying: “When there is a lack of information, there are overactive imaginations.”

Overactive imaginations seem to be running wild in an article by Steppes of Faith titled “Who is Gog and Magog in Bible Prophecy.”¹ According to the article, the infamous “Gog of the Land Magog” (Ezek 38-39) will wait until after the rapture to invade Israel. And why will this prophetic villain wait until after the rapture? Because the United States will be the hardest hit by the rapture—giving Gog the perfect opportunity to make his move. They, of course, understand Gog and Magog in terms of modern-day Russia. In the article, Steppes of Faith appeals to a theory by “respected theologian Ron Rhodes” (as they call him) to put it all together for us:

“After the Rapture, the world will be in a state of mayhem. Rhodes’ theory states that the United States—with a heavy Christian population—will have one of the most significant impacts from the rapture. Russia and its Muslim allies will take advantage of the U.S.’s weakened state and launch a massive attack on Israel, which the U.S. had protected until this time.”

Lack of information is precisely the problem with this approach to the Gog and Magog prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39. As Gary DeMar and others have demonstrated, this prophecy finds its fulfillment in history’s past and not in our future.² Specifically, the prophecy finds its fulfillment in the book of Esther and the failed attempt of Haman the Agagite to wipe out the Jewish people.

Nevertheless, Steppes of Faith attempts to give us four reasons why “we can say with certainty that Gog is a future person and not someone from the Bible’s past.” Their four stated reasons will be considered below.

Reason number one: “No one has ever invaded Israel to the degree described in Ezekiel 38-39.”

Response: The battle in Esther more than meets the criteria for something of the scope and size of that which is described in Ezekiel 38-39. When all was said and done, the Jews annihilated

over 75,000 of their enemies throughout all the provinces of the entire Persian Empire (Esther 9:6, 12, 16). This is a greater number of fatalities than the American Revolutionary War (25,000), the Korean War (36,516) or the war in Vietnam (58, 209). What is described in Ezekiel is epic and huge, as is that which is described in Esther.

Reason number two: “There has never been an attack on Israel involving the nations Ezekiel mentions.”

Response: The nations mentioned by Ezekiel (Ezek 38:5-6) were all part of the Persian Empire of his day, and the attack in Esther comes from the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire of her day (Esth 8:1, 9). As James Jordan writes: “. . . the explicit idea that the Jews were attacked by people from all the provinces of Persia is in both passages.”³ In fact, Ezekiel and Esther both specifically mention Ethiopia (Cush) and Persia (Ezek 38:5; Esther 1:1, 3). The other nations Ezekiel mentions would have fallen within the boundaries of the Persian Empire of Esther’s day which “extended from India to Cush, 127 provinces” in all (Esther 8:9).

Reason number three: “Respectively, Ezekiel 38:6 and 16 both say the attack would occur in ‘the latter years’ and ‘in the last days,’ two phrases frequently used to describe unfulfilled prophetic events.”

Response: Of course, these prophetic events would have been “unfulfilled” when they were originally given, but this in no way means they remain “unfulfilled” today—2600 years later. According to the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, in and of themselves, these expressions simply mean “in the after(wards) of days,” “in the following days,” “in the course of time,” “in the future.”⁴

Accordingly, the Brown-Driver-Briggs (BDB) *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* translates Ezekiel 38:16 as “in the end of days” and defines it as “a prophetic phrase denoting the final period of the history *so far as the speaker’s perspective reaches*; thus the sense varies with the context”⁵ Ezekiel is writing sometime after the Babylonian exile, and the events of the book of Esther take place shortly after the return from exile. This fits the historical context “of the speaker’s perspective.”

Regarding the usage of these phrases in Ezekiel chapter 38, Daniel Block writes: “Unlike Daniel 2:28 and 10:14, where it serves technically for the eschaton, here both expressions refer simply to a later time, when the historical phase of the exile is over and the new period of settlement in the

land has arrived.”⁶ The historical phase of the exile was over, and the new period of settlement had arrived in the time period of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther.

Reason number four: “Ezekiel 38:8, 12 says the attack would not occur until the Jews had been ‘gathered from many people.’ Note this does not refer to Israel’s freedom from exile from places such as Babylon. Rather, it refers to people returning to Israel from around the world, which is occurring in modern times.”

Response: Cyrus’ decree to call the Israelites back home after the exile was issued not merely in Babylon alone, but throughout his entire Kingdom (Ezra 1:1). As a result of this proclamation, Ezra tells us that “all” the sons of Israel were dwelling “in their own cities” and were “gathered together as one man” (Ezra 2:70; 3:1). Even the Assyrians, who had taken the 10 northern tribes captive 136 years prior to the Babylonian exile of Judah, were fully assisting in the restoration effort (Ezra 6:22). Additionally, Mordecai (Esther’s older cousin) himself is mentioned by name as one of the returning exiles (Ezra 2:2), thus dove-tailing these events with the book of Esther.

Cyrus’ proclamation was far-reaching and involved a regathering of God’s People from the entire known world of that era. This occurred in the due course of time from Ezekiel’s perspective. The resulting attack upon the Jews, after this return, involves the very nations that Ezekiel mentions. The scope and size of the attempted attack, along with the magnitude of victory for God’s People, aptly satisfy the conditions specified in Ezekiel 38 -39.

An informed reader of Scripture need not look to modern-day Russia nor wait until after the supposed rapture to find the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy. The answers aren’t in the latest news headlines, nor are they in future news headlines. They are right there in the pages of our Bible. Right there, in the book of Esther. Right there for us to see. There is no need for an overactive imagination when we can simply reference the Bible and let Scripture interpret Scripture. ✚

¹ <http://www.stepsofffaith.com/apologetics/gog-magog-bible-prophecy>

² Gary DeMar, *The Gog and Magog End Time Alliance* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 2016). For a nice summary of how Ezekiel 38-39 interlocks with the book of Esther, see: <https://preteristpapers.com/48-who-was-gog/> and <https://kaysercommentary.com/Sermons/Old%20Testament/Esther/battle%20of%20Ezek.md>

³ James B. Jordan, *Esther in the Midst of Covenant History*, p. 7.

⁴ H. Seebass, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 1:210-212.

⁵ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford University Press, [1907] 1976), 31. Emphasis added.

⁶ Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-48* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p. 443.