

Haman, Hamas, and the Headlines: getting Gog & Magog Wrong . . . Again

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This article appeared in the 2023 Winter issue of *Fulfilled!* Magazine

“The word of the Lord came to me: Son of man set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.’” (Ezekiel 38:1-4)

PIN THE TAIL ON the Antichrist has been a favorite game of the prophecy speculators for well over a century now. Whoever makes the headlines, makes the cut as the new cosmic bad guy. Just as the identity of the supposed end-times supervillain changes with each passing newsmaker, however, so does the particular villain that grabs the fortune tellers’ attention. With the recent attack upon Israel by Hamas, the Antichrist has taken a backseat for the moment. For the time being, Ezekiel’s “Gog of the land of Magog” has stolen the spotlight.

For example, Joseph Morris, of Harrison House, wrote this within days of the Hamas attack:

“For the first time in thousands of years of history, nations that will come against Israel right after the Church is raptured are literally lining up and getting into position for the Ezekiel 38 War. This lineup makes it pretty clear that the Church leaves soon. Moreover, the nations of the world are aligning against Israel exactly as the Bible said they would. It’s not similar—it’s precise. And it’s flawless to watch.”¹

So, it seems we’re going to get a break from the Antichrist for a while as Gog takes front and center stage. True to their course, however, the sensationalist pundits are no less fickle with Gog’s identity than they are with the Antichrist’s. If past precedent is any indication, we can *predict* that their *predictive abilities* will be far from “flawless.” After all, their track record has not been very good. All we need to do is look at the *last major crisis* that was supposed to be the warmup act for Gog to make his appearance.

From Ukraine to Hamas

Last year, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine was lighting up the switchboards of those who monitor world events in light of Bible prophecy.² As it turns out, the crisis in Ukraine wasn’t all that it was prophetically cracked up to be. Predictably (notice the pun), we are now being told that “the Hamas attack on Israel is threatening to be the spark that ignites the prophesied war of Gog and Magog that pits the forces of good against the forces of evil as a prelude to the Messianic era.”³ So, as the leading candidate for Gog of the

Land Magog, Russia is out, and Hamas is in. For the time being, the Antichrist has left the stage—at least for now.

As the spotlight shifts from the Antichrist to Gog, and from Russia to Hamas, our attention unfortunately shifts away from the biblical text itself. When we actually drill down on the specifics of the passage, it isn't about modern-day Israel, Islamic terrorist groups, or anything in today's headlines. In fact, Ezekiel was singing a completely different tune.

Same Song Different Lyrics

We all remember when MC Hammer sampled Prince's song, "When Doves Cry," to create his highest charting single, "Pray." It was the same tune with different lyrics. Similarly, the new take on Gog is an older song recycled, with a slight change of lyrics. The Russian version focused on the Hebrew word for "prince," i.e., *Rosh*. According to the original version of the song, that word *sounds* a lot like Russia. But matching sounds between languages is no way to do exegesis, and *Rosh* is not a place name anywhere in the ancient world.⁴ Prince's song was a hit. MC Hammer's song was a hit. The *Rosh* = Russia theory is a flop. But the newly released version of "Gog and Magog" hopes to top the charts with the help of Hamas.

The Hamas version of the song can at least point to a concrete location within the Ezekiel text itself, namely, Persia. For example, Rabbi Jack Abramowitz says, "Well, the prophecy of Gog and Magog lists some of Magog's allies. One of these is Persia, known today as Iran. It's no secret that Iran funded Hamas in this endeavor, so that suggests that this war might be the war of Gog u'[sic] Magog."⁵ In like manner, Bob Russel states, "*Ezekiel 38-39* speaks of a great battle in Israel in the 'latter days' involving a people from the far north called 'Magog' led by a king named Gog. Among the countries mentioned as joining in the battle against Israel is Persia, which is modern-day Iran."⁶

This is closer to the money than the Russian rendition in that *all* the nations listed by Ezekiel were, in fact, part of the Persian Empire of his day. But the Hamas version of Gog and Magog still hits a sour note. It is out of tune with Ezekiel's historical context. The nations listed were part of the Persian Empire of *Ezekiel's* day, not ours! In fact, the Persian Empire doesn't even exist in our day. This being the case, why would Ezekiel's original audience have even cared about modern-day Iran—a nation 2,600 years removed from their own time? If Ezekiel 38-39 were about the events of October 7, 2023, then the passage was completely irrelevant to the people to whom Ezekiel was writing.

Ezekiel 38-39 is by far a favorite passage of the purveyors of pop-prophecy, as the song is recycled and replayed every time there is a major crisis in the world. But they completely ignore Ezekiel's historical context. Discovering that context is an epiphany of sorts, showing just how off the mark the popular approach really is. This is not unlike having a favorite song that you've loved for years, only to find out that you've been mishearing the lyrics all this time. To understand what Ezekiel was talking about, we need to listen to the original version of his song.

The Chief Prince of Meshech and Tubal

As it turns out, the Hebrew word *Rosh* and the nation of Persia really do play heavily into identifying Ezekiel's Gog of the Land of Magog. Ironically, they likewise play heavily into debunking the modern misidentification of this figure. In making Gog's identification, each of these textual indicators point to the far-distant past—not our future.

In Ezekiel 38:2, Gog is called the “chief (*Rosh*) prince of Meshech and Tubal.” These place names stretch all the way back to the Table of Nations (Gen 10:2), and they had both become part of the growing Persian Empire by the time Ezekiel wrote.⁷ The remaining five nations listed as Gog's allies were also part of the Persian Empire of his day (i.e., Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, and Beth-Togarmah, in Ezek 38:5-6).⁸ The figure whom Ezekiel designates as Gog, therefore, was the “chief prince” of those Persian nations.

Rather than checking the timeline in our favorite social media app to understand whom Ezekiel could possibly be talking about, perhaps it is better to check the timeline of Scripture? Ezekiel wrote while Babylon was still the major power player in the ancient world. That was soon going to change, however. In 539 BC, the Persian Empire would overtake Babylon, and the Persian King would free the Jewish exiles and allow them to return to their homeland. Ezekiel 37 and the Valley of Dry Bones coming to life is about this rebirth of the Jewish nation. The following two chapters describe what was coming up next on the timeline.

In chapters 38-39, Ezekiel is telling his readers not to get too excited too fast. Another attack was on the horizon from the next empire to rise to power. It would fail, but it was on the way nonetheless, and it would be led by the chief prince of those Persian nations. When we allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, it's not terribly difficult to know exactly who this chief prince was.

The Enemy of the Jews becomes the Chief Prince

In Ezekiel, Israel's antagonist is referred to as “Gog,” and his goal was to come in “*like a storm,*” “*like a cloud covering the land,*” against God's People—Israel (Ezek 38:9, 16)—and his aim was to seize spoil and carry off plunder (Ezek 38:12). In the book of Esther, we're introduced to Haman, who was “*the enemy of all the Jews*” (Esther 8:1; cf. 3:10), and who “*schemed against them to destroy them*” (Esther 9:24). Haman's objective was to “*destroy, kill and annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, women and children, in a single day: the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, and to seize their possessions*” (Esther 3:13). If we were to do criminal profiling here, Haman fits the profile.

As Josh Peterson writes: “Ezekiel 38:2 refers to Gog as ‘the chief prince.’ This means Gog is not the actual king of an empire or kingdom, but rather is a high-ranking official. This is a fitting description for Haman, who was not the king of Persia, but rather was a high-ranking official.”⁹ The book of Esther bears this out:

*“After these events, King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the Agagite, and advanced him and established his authority **over all the princes** who were with him.” (Esther 3:1-2)*

*“Then Haman recounted the glory of his riches, and the number of his sons, and every instance where the king had magnified him, and how he had promoted him **above all the princes** and servants of the king.” (Esther 5:12)*

If Haman was “*over all the princes*” and “*above all the princes*” in the Persian Empire, then he was in fact the “chief prince,”¹⁰ and this coincides perfectly with Ezekiel’s description of Gog. Likewise, the time of Haman’s attack in Esther coincides perfectly with the time of Gog’s attack in Ezekiel.

Unwalled Villages

Ezekiel tells us that Gog would launch his assault at a time when the Jews were living in “*unwalled villages*” (Ezek 38:11). We definitely cannot look to today’s headlines to find the fulfillment of this verse. Modern-day Israel is protected by a 500-mile-long wall called the “West Bank Barrier.”¹¹ Where we *can* look to find its fulfillment is in the book of Esther. Esther 9:19 speaks of “*the Jews of the rural towns, who live in the unwalled villages.*” These are the very Jews whom Haman and his armies sought to exterminate. As such, the attack of Gog and his allies (in Ezek 38) comes at a time that accurately describes the unique living conditions of the Jews (“*unwalled villages*”) in the book of Esther, when Haman and his forces set out to annihilate them.

Just as the timing of the attack helps us identify Haman as the attacker, Haman’s identity in turn helps us understand why Ezekiel would refer to him as “Gog.”

Haman the Agagite

Esther tells us that Haman was an “Agagite” (Esther 3:1,10; 8:3,5; 9:24), referring to the descendants of Agag—the king of the Amalekites, whom Saul was supposed to kill back in 1 Samuel 15:2-3. As an “Agagite,” therefore, Haman was part of the royal bloodline of Israel’s ancient enemy—the Amalekites. Conversely, it’s no small coincidence that Mordecai was a descendant of Saul—as Mordecai and Saul were both Benjamites from the line of Kish (cf. 1 Sam 9:1; Esther 2:5). As James Jordan says, “The conflict between Saul and Agag (1 Sam 15) is rejoined in Esther. What Esther records is the last great attack upon Israel by Amalek, and the final destruction of Amalek.”¹²

The final destruction should have come a long time ago. Apparently, no one before them had the tenacity or the resolve to get the job done. Anne Wetter puts it this way, “Esther and Mordecai prove to be the worthiest bearers of the Jewish tradition: They have not forgotten to blot out Amalek (Deut 25:19), and, unlike their forefathers, they have actually managed to perform the deed.”¹³

Unlike Saul and the others who went before, Esther and Mordecai took out the Amalekites—all of them. This included the royal descendant of King Agag himself, Haman, along with his sons (Esther 7:9-10).

Like a magnet, Haman's connection to Agag takes us straight back to the book of Ezekiel and links him to the prophet's "Gog of the Land of Magog."

Agag = Gog

Just on the surface of it, the terms "Agag" and "Gog" appear similar at face value. And, in fact, they are equated in the Septuagint. The Septuagint is the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, written during the intertestamental period between Malachi and Matthew. The New Testament writers quoted the Septuagint twice as often as they quoted the Hebrew Old Testament.¹⁴ With this in mind, Numbers 24:7 is the key text here. In the Hebrew Bible, the verse reads as follows:

"Water shall flow from Israel's buckets, and his seed shall be in many waters. His king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted." (Num 24:7 ESV)

Next, here is the verse in the Septuagint:

"A man will come forth from his seed and prevail over many peoples, and he will be raised up higher than the kingdom of Gog, and his kingdom will increase." (Num 24:7 LXX)¹⁵

If it's accurate to refer to "Agag" as "Gog," in light of the Septuagint translation of Numbers 24:7, then it would be equally accurate to refer to an "Agagite" as a "Gogite." And in fact, some Septuagint manuscripts do just this and refer to Haman as a "Gogite," instead of an "Agagite," in Esther 3:1 and 9:24.¹⁶ Simply put, the terms are interchangeable. As Phil Kayser says: "Saying that Haman was an Agagite is (using a different national pronunciation) the same thing as saying that he is a Gogite."¹⁷

Haman the Gogite was the chief prince of the Persian nations who attacked God's people at a time when they were living in unwallled villages. The book of Esther makes Ezekiel's prophecy come alive with meaning, and it is the deathblow to the modern interpretation of Gog and Magog. With that said, Ezekiel 39:11 is the final nail in its coffin.

Gog's Burial Site

When all is said and done, and the battle of Gog and Magog is over, the Lord says, *"On that day I will give Gog a burial place there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea, and it will block the way of those who would pass by. So they will bury Gog there with all his horde, and they will call it the Valley of Hamon-Gog."* (Ezek 39:11)

On this passage, Gary DeMar writes: "According to Ezekiel 39:11 and 15, the place where the army of Gog is buried will be known as the Valley of Hamon-Gog . . . The word *hamon* in Ezekiel is spelled in Hebrew almost exactly like the name Haman. In Hebrew, both words have the same 'trilateral root' (*hmn*). Only the vowels are different."¹⁸ With this in mind, vowels weren't added to the Hebrew language until sometime between 700 and 1000 AD.¹⁹ In other words, Ezekiel is writing 1,600 years before Hebrew

vowels even existed. This means that when an ancient Jew read the books of Ezekiel and Esther, “Haman” and “Hamon” would have been the exact same word. Accordingly, it means Ezekiel 38-39 and the book of Esther describe the exact same thing.

Just as Gog was laid to rest in the Valley of Hamon-Gog, it’s time to lay the modern misuse of the Gog prophecy to rest. Haman’s dirge was the song Ezekiel was singing in chapters 38-39. The modern approach misunderstands the lyrics along with their meaning. The technical term for misunderstanding phrases or lyrics is “mondegreen.”²⁰ When the true lyrics are discovered, it often changes the entire meaning of the song. As it turns out, Ezekiel wasn’t writing about modern-day Israel, Hamas, or even Russia. While the pop-prophecy pundits of our day hope the hits just keep on coming for them with every new crisis in the world, it’s time for God’s people to tune in to a new station. More precisely, it’s time for God’s people to let the modern station fade out and get back to the actual roots of the music to discover the true meaning of the song.²¹ †

1. <https://harrisonhouse.com/blog/joseph-morris-israels-war-the-prophetic-signs-of-ezekiel-38-decoded>
2. <https://www2.cbn.com/news/world/god-getting-ready-do-something-amazing-cbn-founder-pat-robertson-russia-and-its-place>
3. <https://www.israel365news.com/377442/did-the-hamas-attack-signal-the-beginning-of-gog-and-magog/>
4. <https://nakedbiblepodcast.com/podcast/naked-bible-152-ezekiel-38-39-part-1/>
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6. <http://www.bobrussell.org/are-christians-to-stand-with-israel/>
7. “Meshech and Tubal were areas of the Persian empire of Asia Minor and the northern Pontus and southern coasts of the Black Sea.” <https://shreddingtheveil.org/2020/03/29/ezekiel-in-revelation-part-vi-the-land-of-gog/>
8. See: Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25-28* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), p.439; Sverre Boe, *Gog and Magog* (Germany: Mohr Seibeck, 2001), p. 310; Gary DeMar, *The Gog-Magog End-Time Alliance: Israel, Russia, and Syria in Bible Prophecy* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press, 2016), p. 56.
9. Difficult Passage: Ezekiel 38, Part 2 – Providence Christian Church (providencechristianm.com)
10. The word in Esther is שר (sar) ‘ruler’ (H8269), whereas the word in Ezekiel is נַסִּי (na.si) ‘leader’ (H5387a). But the difference is inconsequential in that both words retain the same, basic meaning. This is merely a matter of preferred word choice among two separate authors.
11. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/background-and-overview-of-israel-s-security-fence>
12. http://www.biblicalhorizons.com/biblical-chronology/8_06/
13. Wetter, Anne-Mareike. “How Jewish is Esther? Or: How is Esther Jewish? Tracing Ethnic and Religious Identity in a Diaspora Narrative.” (2011): 602.

14. See: Mogens Muller, *The First Bible of the Church: A Plea for the Septuagint* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic press, 1996).
15. Lexham English Septuagint Translation
16. Lewis B. Paton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther*, page 194; Sverre Boe, *Gog and Magog*, p. 71
17. <https://kaysercommentary.com/Sermons/Old%20Testament/Esther/battle%20of%20Ezek.md>
18. *The Gog and Magog End-Time Alliance: Israel, Russia, and Syria in Bible Prophecy* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision Press. 2016), p. 59.
19. Bodie Hodge, *Tower of Babel: The Culture History of Our Ancestors* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2013), p. 114, fn.
20. <https://www.dictionary.com/e/mondegreen/>
21. I am indebted to Daniel E. Harden for not only his editorial work, but all of his input and suggestions on the content of this article.