

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 152

Ezekiel 38-39, Part 1

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Episode Summary

As was the case with Ezekiel 37, these chapters are among the most familiar in the entire book of Ezekiel. This first of two episodes on these chapters focuses on the terminology: Gog, Magog, Meshech, Tubal, and Togarmah. It also addresses the fallacies of translating Hebrew *nesi' ro'sh* as “prince of Rosh” and interpreting the phrase as modern-day Russia, and the difficulties ancient translators had with the term. An alternative understanding of Gog is offered, one that is consistent with the supernaturalistic worldview of the “foe from the north” motif in Old Testament thought.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 152: Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39, Part 1. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike, how are you doing?

MH: Pretty good, having a good week. I am pug-sitting this week. We have a second pug in the house, so it's awesome.

TS: How's that going? Do they like each other? Are they friends?

MH: They do. They're friends. The new one has this odd habit of perching himself on the top of the corner of the couch, and he'll just sit there and stare at everyone. I don't know what's up with that!

TS: I think we've started a trend in our Facebook group. People have been posting your *Reversing Hermon* book with their animals. Chickens, other dogs...

MH: Great!

TS: So if you've got an animal you want to pose with your *Reversing Hermon* book, go for it!

MH: There you go.

TS: Maybe you could do the same—your two pugs with you sitting in between.

MH: We're planning on getting a picture of me with both pugs, trust me. That will show up somewhere. Today was his first full day. They brought him over yesterday. His name is Bruno. So Bruno and Morrie are in control of the house right now. Having a good week, yeah.

TS: Good. Well, Mike, I'm excited about this week and the next week. I know eschatology is not your favorite, but it's just so hard to get away from in the Bible. It's everywhere, so I think you should just start to embrace it.

MH: Not so much.

TS: Not so much? (laughter) But you can't escape it! It's everywhere, and ever more present in the next two episodes.

MH: I'll be unkind and say it's imagined in more places than it is, but I'll admit that it's a big deal. I just don't like the popular takes on it, and we're going to get one of those in this part. One of the reason we're doing two parts on this is that today in this episode... It's kind of a nuts and bolts episode. This is chapters 38 and 39 of Ezekiel. It's the "Gog from the land of Magog" prophecy. It is a prophecy; it was forward-looking. But again, we have this question (as always in the Old Testament and in the prophets in particular): how forward-looking was this? Was it like ten years or a hundred years later, or is it future in our time and even future to our time? A lot of people who are "into prophecy" assume the latter, but that really isn't always the case. Chapters 38 and 39 will have some stuff that I would think of as true eschatology (end-times stuff) even in relationship to us, but it has very clear connections to known history in the Old Testament period, known places, known terms. And that's going to matter because in this first part (like I said, kind of the nuts and bolts episode—part 1 of 2), we're going to talk about the terms: Gog, Magog, Tubal, Meshech, Togarmah... all those sort of things. We'll see what they point to and what they mean. That's going to naturally be a set-up, a really important framework to set the stage for the second part, which will be focused on interpretation. So Part 1 is nuts and bolts: who are we talking about, what do the terms mean? And then the second part will be more interpretation. Even though this first part is essentially word study and geography and all that sort of thing, I think listeners will actually find it quite interesting.

Since we're dealing with two chapters and we're going to have two parts, for this episode I'm just going to read the first few verses of each chapter—chapter 38 and chapter 39 of Ezekiel—because that's where we get our terminology from. So we'll read through that and then we'll just start drilling down into some of the

words and places that are used and talk about what they mean and what they don't mean.

So jumping in here with chapter 38. We'll start with verse 1. Again, I'm reading from the ESV.

5:00

The 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 ³ and say, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. ⁴ And 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. ⁵ Persia, Cush, and Put are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; ⁶ Gomer and all his hordes; Beth-togarmah from the uttermost parts of the north with all his hordes—many peoples are with you.

That's the first six verses of chapter 38. The more obvious terms here: Persia, Cush, Put is Libya... Again, we're not so much worried about them. I'm worried about the ones that are from the north. Those particular places are not northern locations because, again, I want to set up Part 2 where we talk about interpretation. We'll pick up some of these other ones in Part 2, as well. So we're concerned with Meshech, Tubal, Gog, Magog, Gomer, these sorts of things. They're going to be references to northern places.

Before I read a few verses in chapter 39, did you notice (we're not going to talk about this today, but I'm thinking of the next part) this description: "I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws?" That might ring a bell with some other things we've talked about, some other mytho-poetic things we've talked about that will be important for properly understanding why we get this description and why it's important when we're talking about a northern enemy—an enemy from *tsaphon*, which is the mythic north, the bad place. It's the place where Baal held dominion—the rival gods and all that sort of stuff. That description I'm not going to tell you precisely what I'm thinking here, but "turning you about," "putting hooks into your jaws"... if you look that up in the Bible you'll find some interesting references that go along with a mythic approach to certain biblical/theological ideas. That's about all I can say, and that's the way I have to say it so I don't spill the beans here before we get to Part 2. That's just to set your mind in motion there.

Then we go to chapter 39 and we read:

“And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. ² And I will turn you about and drive you forward, and bring you up from the uttermost parts of the north, and lead you against the mountains of Israel. ³ Then I will strike your bow from your left hand, and will make your arrows drop out of your right hand. ⁴ You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your hordes and the peoples who are with you. I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. ⁵ You shall fall in the open field, for I have spoken, declares the Lord God. ⁶ I will send fire on Magog and on those who dwell securely in the coastlands, and they shall know that I am the LORD.

A couple of things here to prep you for Part 2. Again, the description "I will give you to the birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured" and then the "sending fire." I'm not going to say any more about that, but if you want to prep yourself for Part 2, go look some of that stuff up in your Bible and you'll find some interesting things.

Now, we read those two sections of each chapter and our focus here is identifying these terms for northern enemies. The identification of Gog in Ezekiel 39 (this is no secret) has proven to be one of the most vexing problems in Old Testament study—really in biblical studies. The textual situation is pretty chaotic. Here you are in the sixth century with Ezekiel. This is when the book is going to be composed. It might undergo some editing, which we've talked about before, but it's pretty close to the beginning of the Second Temple period. You're less than a hundred years away from getting a second temple (the first one was destroyed). In the Second Temple period, there's lots of speculation, lots of opinion about what in the world Ezekiel is describing here. Jews writing in the Second Temple period are all over the place. They're not only all over the place, but they actually misread (and I'll show you a few examples of this later) certain terms in the text like "Gog." Believe it or not, the Septuagint, for instance (which was produced in the Second Temple period) sometimes substitutes "Og" (the giant Og of Bashan)... It's not spelled the same way, but that's the way they'll render it in their translation when no Hebrew text says that. It shows you that they don't know who this Gog is, but "Hey, this one sounds kind of close. Maybe it's the same guy, so let's put him in there." They'll do stuff like that in the Septuagint and in other Second Temple texts. If you actually look in the situation of Jews in antiquity trying to figure this out, it's kind of a mess. It's sort of a free-for-all. We'll get into more of that next time, but just so that you're prepped here because when we go through the terms here, what I just told you is going to matter a little bit.

10:00

Now everybody would essentially agree that Gog was (or will be) an eschatological enemy. He either was subsequent to the time of Ezekiel's writing, or this is something still yet future. It's some kind of future foe relative to Ezekiel's time. Everybody agrees with that. There's disagreement, though, with how the figure can be associated with either a historic figure (enemy) or an antichrist figure, or whether even Gog should be associated with the antichrist. There's disagreement among scholars on all those things. Scholars have pursued several options for identification, so let's just start there with trying to get a historical alignment here of some kind. Spoiler alert: this has not been successful. But I'm going to go through a couple of the options.

The dominant interpretive strategy tries to take the geographic places named in Ezekiel 38 and 39 (places like Meshech and Tubal) and then look through historical sources where those place-names occur, and then look to try to find a tyrant candidate or some sort of warlord candidate to hopefully identify who in the world Ezekiel is talking about here when he starts talking about Gog. I have a quote here from Johan Lust from DDD (*Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*) and this is part of his entry on Gog. He writes:

In an attempt to identify Gog as a historical person, attention has been drawn to a city prince Gâgi mentioned in the annals of Ashurbanipal (Cylinder B iv 2), a powerful ruler of a belligerent mountain people not far to the north of Assyria. More frequently, though, Gog is identified with Gyges (Gûgu in the Rassam-Cylinder, II 95), king of Lydia. Note, however, that the Gog of Ezekiel has the Cimmerians or Gomer as his ally, whereas the same Cimmerians appear to have attacked and defeated Gyges of Lydia.

So the ones who are supposed to be the allies of Gog in Ezekiel 38 and 39 are the enemies of this historical figure. So this particular figure can't be the identification for Gog. It doesn't work.

Such data suggest that Gog can hardly be identified with Gyges. Alternatively, Gog has been said to be the name of a country, *Gaga* or *Gagaia*, allegedly mentioned in the El Amarna Letters (*El Amarna* 1:38).

The Tell el-Amarna letters were correspondence between the Egyptian pharaoh and his underlings in Syria-Palestine in the New Kingdom (1200 B.C. or so). The language of that correspondence was Akkadian, even though it was from an Egyptian to people in Syria-Palestine. Akkadian used to be what English is today—it was the lingua franca, the language of international correspondence. So in the Tell Tell el-Amarna letters, we have a reference to *Gaga* or *Gagaia*.

It has become clear, however, that the writing *ištēn^{kur} Ga-ga-ya* is erroneous for *ištēn^{kur} Ga-ašga-ya*, 'one Kashkaean', so this identification must be abandoned as well.

15:00

In other words, what they thought referred to this Gogai place actually refers to a different person or different place. So it doesn't work. That's the end of Lust's quote. I gave you that because scholars have tried to identify Gog with a historical figure. They find similar-sounding names, both for a person and also for a land (that's going to be relevant as we go on—Gog might have something to do with a land, as well) in material that is geographically overlapping. Again, this is Mesopotamia. Ezekiel is in Babylon. This is to the north of Israel, so it's the right context or it's at least an option for fulfilling the context here. But none of the identifications have worked. They all have serious problems, and in some cases scholars just know now that it just isn't going to work—it's just wrong, but you'll find these things in older literature. Currently, nobody is claiming with any amount of certainty (or even half an amount of certainty) that they know who Gog is, so that's a problem.

There are other problems, aside from not having a historical match to Gog, with identifying Gog. We'll get to those in a moment, so we'll return to the problem in a bit. But I want to take a look now at the geographical terms because, honestly, they're just a lot easier. Then we'll go back to the Gog reference.

Tubal, Meshech, and Magog are listed elsewhere in the Old Testament among the sons of Japheth (Genesis 10:2). This is, of course, part of the Table of Nations. Togarmah is also listed in the same Table of Nations in the very next verse (Genesis 10:3) as one of the sons of Japheth in the Table of Nations. So Genesis 10 sort of certifies (makes it clear) what geographical region Ezekiel has in mind when he starts writing about the hordes from the north, and he gives these names—Tubal, Meshech, Magog, Gomer, Togarmah. These are all situated and knowable and discoverable in contemporary ancient material, and it's all consistent.

I'm getting a little ahead of myself here, but what you're going to find is that all of these place names are in what used to be called Anatolia or Asia Minor. We've posted a map for this particular episode. I pulled out some images from the internet and put them in a PDF so you can see it and maybe even follow along now. This region, Asia Minor/Anatolia, is to the east of Greece and the Greek Isles, which is obviously north of Israel. It is what is today modern Turkey for the most part. In the northeast quadrant of that you're going to have the Black Sea. The Black Sea is kind of on top of this region. All of these places are knowable and discernable. To make that point (just so that you don't have to take my word for it), I'm going to read some excerpts from the *Anchor Bible Dictionary* that are entries on all these place names. All of them are written by David Baker, who is a guy I know. David is an evangelical scholar, so if any of you might be listening to this episode in the future, most of my audience is going to know already that I don't think this has anything to do with Russia or communism or anything like this. Someone might say, "You're just saying that because you're a liberal or your

sources are liberal." No, not so much. David Baker is an evangelical with a high view of Scripture like any other evangelical. So we can get that out of the way and dispense with that red herring sort of comeback. But I want to read a few excerpts here from Anchor Bible Dictionary in the essays that David wrote. We'll start with Tubal.

Tubal was one of the seven sons of Japheth, Noah's son, according to the Table of Nations (Gen 10:2) and the parallel genealogy in 1 Chr 1:5. Descendants of Tubal and his siblings (Gomer, Magog, Madai, Yavan, Meshech, and Tiras) are located to the N of Israel, in Greece, Asia Minor, and N Syria. It is logical, therefore, to expect to find Tubal in the same N area.

Tubal is mentioned six further times in the prophets. Isa 66:19 speaks of the distant location to which Yahweh will send messengers of his grace. They include Greece (Yavan) and Tubal, as well as "Lud, drawers of the bow (MT)." Lud, or the Lydians in W Turkey and Greece, is the only name in the context with a descriptive epithet. Rather than seeing it as such, LXX revocalizes it and reads Meshech [MH: which is really bizarre], one of the brothers of the forefather of Tubal in the genealogies. This fits well with the other prophetic references to Tubal, in which Meshech is always found. These include an oracle against Tyre in which trade relations between the two and Tyre include their provision of slaves and instruments of bronze (Ezek 27:13)...

20:00

... Herodotus mentions two nations, the Moschoi and the Tibarenoi (3.94; 7.28), and Josephus writes of Thebel and the Meschenians (*Ant* 1.124). Older, Akkadian texts mention *tabal* (Parpola 1970: 341–43) and *muški* (Yamauchi 1982: 25–27). These are located in E Asia Minor. Tabal occupies the territory S of the Halys river, to the W of Togarmah (Barnett *CAH* 2:422; *MBA*, 15).

That's the end of what I'll read about David's entry on Tubal. Notice (and here's the point) that all of these place names, even though they differ... You can obviously hear the phonetic similarity and if we were looking at text you could see the similarity in spelling. All of them are knowable and discoverable in ancient material and we know what region it is. Greek Isles... moving to the east Asia Minor, Anatolia, north Syria, and to the further north you hit the ceiling of the Black Sea. It's a known place, a known region, and these are known place names. I'm mentioning that for a specific reason that's going to come up.

About Meshech, David writes:

Meshech is one of the seven sons of Japheth, Noah's son, according to the Table of Nations in Gen 10:2 and the parallel genealogy in 1 Chr 1:5. The latter genealogy also lists another person with the same name as a son of Shem (1:17). In the Table of Nations (Gen 10:23) there is no second listing for Meshech, but

there is a Mash, son of Aram, in the parallel position to 1 Chr 1:17. This could be a scribal error in which the last Hebrew letter of Meshech was dropped (so LXX). Mash could also be an entirely different entity. **[MH: Or Mash could be an entirely different entity. We don't know.]** Whatever the case regarding the name in Genesis, the Chronicles genealogy indicates two ethnically distinct groups, one of Semitic and one of non-Semitic descent.

Most references to Meshech in the OT are to the non-Semitic peoples. Five times in Ezekiel they are associated with Tubal. **[MH: What he means by non-Semitic is that they're descended from Japeth and not Shem.]** In Ezek 27:13, Meshech and Tubal, along with Javan (Greece), traded slaves and bronze with Tyre, the capital of Phoenicia. They must therefore have had some skill in metallurgy, since Tyre itself served as a source for metalworking skills (1 Kgs 7:13–14).

Akkadian sources from as early as Tiglath-pileser I (ca. 1100 B.C.; Parpola 1970: 252–53) mention Meshech, or the *muškaya* from the land of *mušku*. These people paid tribute to Assurnasirpal II (ca. 882 B.C.) from their capital in E Asia Minor (*GARI* 2: 123). This tribute included goods of bronze (see Ezek 27:13 noted earlier). At the end of the 8th century B.C., the king of Meshech was Mita, the famous Midas whose touch, according to legend, would turn everything to gold. In a letter to Sargon II dated ca. 709 B.C., Midas, ruler of the “land of Muski,” seeks a peaceful relationship with the Assyrians.

Both Herodotus (7.78) and Josephus (*Ant* 1.124) place Meshech (Moschoi) in E Asia Minor. The latter locates these people in the area later known as Cappadocia. Herodotus (1.14) equates them with the Phrygians somewhat farther W in Asia Minor. These people migrated from E Europe into Asia during the 12th century B.C. (*CAH*³ 2: 417–18; Yamauchi 1982: 27). Some of the people of Meshech seem to have moved even farther east, around the Black Sea.

This reference to the Black Sea and some of these people groups... Those who say Gog must be the Russians will seize on the Black Sea idea because the Russian boundary touches the Black Sea. Well, if you actually look at the map, all these place names (again, I hope you're not getting sick of me repeating this) are in Asia Minor. Asia Minor is underneath the Black Sea. Russia is above the Black Sea. The reference to the Black Sea that some of these peoples migrated near doesn't mean they went to Leningrad or Moscow or Stalingrad or something like that. It doesn't mean that at all. So it's dishonest and it's geographically disingenuous to take references in these reference works like Anchor Bible Dictionary or a map and sort of play fast and loose with the geography. We're not talking about Russia here. We're talking about Anatolia, Asia Minor, east Asia Minor, and northern Syria. These are known places from contemporaneous primary texts.

25:00

Let's move on to Magog.

In the Table of Nations (Gen 10:2) and the parallel genealogy in 1 Chr 1:5, Magog is one of the six grandsons of Noah through his son Japheth. Others of this line are associated with Asia Minor (Javan, Tubal, Meshech), so a location for Magog also in this area is logical.

Not all of the listed allies are to the N of Israel, however, so the evidence is not compelling. Ezek 39:6 foretells judgment on Gog, which will include fire falling on Magog as well as upon “the island dwellers.” (consistent with Javan, Greece, for instance). [MH: Even an obscure reference like “island dwellers,” we know where that geographically makes sense in relationship to all the other places.] The latter two passages portray these peoples as warriors from a distant land who will descend upon Israel in a cataclysmic battle.

Scholars suggest several different locations for Magog. Skinner (*Genesis ICC*, 197) assumed the identity of Magog and *Gagā (ya)*, which is mentioned in one of the Amarna letters from the mid-2d millennium B.C. (see *YGC*, 14 n. 40). [MH: Lust, in the little snippet that we read earlier pointed out that the cuneiform evidence turned out to not be right there, but Baker mentions it here.] They are identified there in a general way as people from the North. A more popular identification is that Gog is a Hebrew [adaptation] on the name of the Lydian king Gyges (ca. 680–ca. 648 B.C.E.; Akk *gugu*)...

Baker's going to go along and say, “Well, these are all possibilities that have been suggested. Nobody is persuaded. They all have problems. So on and so forth.”

Now a note on Josephus here that David brings up:

Josephus (*Ant.* 1.123) understood Magog to refer to the Scythians (Yamauchi 1982: 22; see 63–85), while the *Targum. Neofiti.* interpreted the name as *grmnyh (Germania)*. This is possibly Germanica of Commagene in E Asia Minor.

So again, I point this out to say that even in ancient sources... Now we're getting into targums and Josephus sort of editorializing on what he thinks the term means. Even when you get that kind of material, what they reference is in the same region: east Asia Minor, Asia Minor (used to be known as Anatolia), Greek Isles, northern Syria—that part of the world. That is completely consistent with the Table of Nations in Genesis 10:2-3.

Moving on to Togarmah:

According to the Table of Nations (Gen 10:3) and the parallel genealogy in 1 Chr 1:6, Togarmah is one of three sons of Gomer, who himself is a son of Japheth, Noah's son. His descendants, or at least those called by the same name, are mentioned twice in the book of Ezekiel. In an oracle against Tyre, Beth-togarmah or "the house of Togarmah" is described as exchanging war horses and draft horses and mules with Tyre for her merchandise (27:4). The geographical location of other trading nations from the same biblical context (Ezek 27:1–13; Greece, Meshech, Tarshish, Tubal) would place Togarmah to Israel's N. The same N direction is found in 38:6.

30:00

The geographical location of all of them is consistent. The Tarshish there, for those interested, is actually in Spain, which *The Unseen Realm* gets into. This is a different use of the term "Tarshish." If you wanted a bibliographic reference for why we have a Tarshish here as opposed to the Tarshish that is in Spain, I have a really nice one: John Day in his book on Genesis 1:11 has an article specifically on this. So if you were interested and have the Divine Council Bibliography you could get that. I do reference it in *Unseen Realm* so you can get the reference there.

Neo-Assyrian texts apparently refer to this location as *Til-garimmu*, which is on the E border of Tubal. Sennacherib campaigned against the city in 695 B.C. (*LAR* 2: 138, 148; cf. 154; Parpola 1970: 353–54). Hittite texts refer to a city and district of *Tegarama* in the area of the upper Euphrates which was captured by Suppiluliumas (*ANET*, 318) along with other parts of the kingdom of Mitanni, in the mid-14th century B.C. The Assyrian and Hittite sources apparently refer to the same site, which has been identified with the modern Gurni.

This is the same geographical location. You can just look it up on a map. By the way, the Hittite empire was focused in Anatolia—Asia Minor, the same place. It's all very consistent. You're probably getting a little bored with this now, but there's a point to all this. The point is that this ain't a mystery. These terms are not mysterious. These terms have nothing to do with Russia as we know it.

Some are likely to wonder at this point, "What about Rosh? My translation has 'Gog the prince of Rosh.' You skipped Rosh in all that list countries and lands. What about Rosh? You're cheating, Mike." Actually, no I'm not. Gog is not the prince of Rosh. That is a mistranslation and we'll comment on it in a few minutes. There are a number of reasons that it's a mistranslation. Among them is the fact that there is no such place name in any ancient text. There is no place name *Rosh* known in the ancient world. Period. It's not a place name. Rosh is not a place. As Michael Astour has noted, the closest geographical correlation that could be argued is Ra'shi or Ara'shi in Neo-Assyrian records—a district on the border of Babylonia and Elam. But as Astour comments, this has nothing in common with Meshech and Tubal. He's correct—it doesn't. It's in a different

geographical region to the southeast. It doesn't point to Russia—that would be far north, north of the Black Sea. Again, the point being made is that nobody in the ancient world knew of a place named Rosh. It is not a Rosh. That's contrary, I know, to what a lot of listeners may have heard. Listeners may have heard that Gog is the prince of Rosh and the Rosh is Russia. I've posted an article with this episode that is also a little bit of a set-up, at least to kind of get the lay of the land for the battle for the king of the north in Daniel that we'll be bringing into the discussion in Part 2. But the article posted on the episode page for this episode is by Paul Tanner. He talks about the invader from the north. The subtitle of his article is, "Do We Owe Russia An Apology?" And it's like, yeah—we do. But that article is kind of nice because it takes you through how the Russia idea was popularized by evangelical dispensational interpreters. He points out some of the problems with it. He doesn't point out all of them. Other scholarly sources will beat that dead horse, despite the fact that it's dead. You should know as a listener that the idea that Ezekiel 38 and 39 is about Russia or a Russian invasion has literally no merit in terms of exegesis and it has no precedent in terms of a place name in the entire ancient world. It's a fabrication. It's a Cold War hermeneutic. The Russia idea became popular in the 70's. I remember reading it in prophecy books as a teenager, a new Christian. The bad guys for the end of the world in the Cold War era... they were Russians. And the "prophecy experts," the prophecy pundits of the 70's and 80's that wanted the end-times to be imminent (right around the corner)... Well, who's the enemy? Who's the logical enemy? Well, it's the Russians. "Ah, Russia... Rosh! There we go." That's about all the thought that went into it. It is not a view that is based in primary source material or even coherent.

35:00

Let's say a little bit more about it, though. Despite the fact that you've heard that there's no ancient place named Rosh, there are other problems. Yamauchi, who actually has a good book for this subject matter... His book is entitled *Foes from the Northern Frontier: Invading Hordes from the Russian Steppes*. His book isn't about Ezekiel 38 and 39, it's about just what it says: ancient peoples of the northern frontier. Yamauchi is a historian. I think he's still teaching. He's an evangelical and he does a lot of work on Persia in the Bible and Africa in the Bible. Here he's doing these northern countries (Asia Minor and further north). In this book, he does tackle the Russia interpretation and basically slays it because it's not very hard to do. Again, he's a historian at the University of Miami at Ohio. It might be a familiar name to you because he's been around for quite a while. But Yamauchi points out in his study of the geography that the place name *Rosh* would have had no meaning to an ancient Hebrew audience since "The name *Rus* was first brought to the region of the Kiev [that's right around the Black Sea there] by the Vikings in the Middle Ages." In other words, you don't even find *Rus* earlier than the Vikings. So for an ancient person of the biblical period, talking about a place name *Ros* or *Rosh* would have been utterly meaningless to them.

Going even further, Yamauchi notes that *Rus* and the longer *Russia* are Indo-European words, while Hebrew is from the Semitic language family.

Consequently, a Rosh/Russia equation is a linguistic fallacy. It's a false etymology. Additionally, aside from Genesis 10's placement of Meschech and Tubal in Anatolia, Ezekiel's own description of these same places in Ezekiel 27:12-15 have them located among the nations adjacent to Anatolia. The place names are thus not the Russian cities but ancient ethnic groups firmly situated in the ancient Near Eastern geographical reality of the Hebrew Bible.

I want to talk about this fallacy a little bit. This shouldn't be earth-shaking, but I know a lot of people are exposed to well-meaning but really poor Bible teaching in this section, and just teaching about biblical languages in general that's really poor. The same set of sounds in one language that form a word do not equate to either the same word in another language or a word that sounds the same that has the same meaning as the first word. That's a little convoluted, so let me illustrate the point. *Chin* and *chin* in English and Chinese, respectively, don't mean the same thing. Even though they sound the same, they don't mean the same thing. So *Rosh* and *Russia* (even though they sound the same, or very similar) don't mean the same thing. *Chin* in English, of course, is (according to Webster) "the lower portion of the face underneath the lower lip and including the prominence of the lower jaw. In Chinese, *chin* means gold or metal or money—something bright. Completely different because they're different languages. The human mouth and tongue and lips and palate... You can only make so many sounds. Linguists will tell you there's thirty or so that you can make. Since every human being speaks, they have their own language and they're going to use the same set of sounds. But what they mean by the sounds that they articulate is not transferrable from one language to the next. You think, "Mike, who in the world would think that?" Trust me. Trust me. A lot of "Bible teachers" are making arguments like that in this passage. It's just absurd. It's absurd.

40:00

A couple of other ones. *Kol* in Hebrew and *coal* in English... guess what? They don't mean the same thing! *Kol* in Hebrew is a word that means all or every or whole. *Coal*, of course, in English is a black lump of rock. *Bar* in Aramaic is not the same as *bar* in English. *Bar* in Aramaic means "son." *Simon bar Jonah* means "Simon, son of Jonah." *Bar* in English could be like an iron rod or a place where you drink alcohol. It just doesn't mean the same. I know it sounds ridiculous that I have to spend time explaining something that is so obvious, but what I'm telling is stuff you'll actually find—not just on the internet, in the wacky world of internet Bible study, but you'll find it in books. You'll find arguments in things that have been published—not just self-published stuff, but published by actual real publishers (not academic places, but they exist to publish books... You'll find this kind of stuff in them. It's utterly absurd. It's nonsense. They're just linguistic fallacies. I think I've been blunt to this point, but I'll be even more blunt, okay? And those of you who are out there listening, yes you can quote me. Show me someone who does exegesis by matching sounds between languages and then saying the words mean the same thing, and I'll show you someone who doesn't understand either exegesis or languages at all. There's just no merit to this approach.

Now let's go back to the actual phrase, though, in Ezekiel 38 and 39 that some want to translate "prince of Rosh." The phrase is *nesi' rō'sh*. *Nesi'* is the word for "prince" and *rō'sh* is another noun that can mean "head" or "chief" or something like that—some high status.

There are two options grammatically that can be defended according to the rules of Hebrew grammar for this phrase. Option number one is "Gog the prince, the chief." In other words, *nesi'* and *rō'sh* are functioning appositionally. They're two ways of talking about the same person: Gog, the prince, the chief of Meshech and Tubal. That's the one that people like Dan Block prefer. It has a lot of merit to it. I think it's the most straightforward way to go. It has a nice actual parallel (at least the parallel for the idea) in 1 Chronicles 7:40. In English it says:

⁴⁰ All of these were men of Asher, heads of fathers' houses, approved, mighty warriors, chiefs of the princes. Their number enrolled by genealogies, for service in war...

So this idea of chiefs and princes are rank terms that have some relationship to each other. That might be the best way to understand this. Who is Gog? He's the chief, the prince. He's the prince and the chief of Meshech and Tubal. *Rō'sh* there is not a place name in that option.

Rō'sh is not a place name in option number two, either, because there was no place *rō'sh* in the ancient world. You could translate it this way: "Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal." They're both nouns, but you would take one as functioning adjectivally. In this case, the word *rō'sh* is chief prince. *Rō'sh* functions adjectivally in other places. There are places that refer to the high priest as *kohen ha ha ro'sh*. So *rō'sh*, even though it's a noun, can function adjectivally very easily and very well and does so in the Hebrew Bible. So this is another good option: "Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal." And, of course, your first option was "Gog, the prince, the chief of Meshech and Tubal." Either one of those works according to the rules of Hebrew grammar. *Rō'sh* is not a place name. Russia has nothing to do with this.

45:00

In my book, *Reversing Hermon*, I discuss how the Septuagint really is no help with any of this. I hesitated to even bring this into the episode because it may or may not translate well to audio. But I'm going to read this excerpt from *Reversing Hermon* just because I don't want anybody listening to this episode thinking, "Well, Mike, the answer here is the Septuagint! In the Septuagint, Russia is a place name... Gog is a giant," and all this sort of stuff. Well, that isn't true. Even if you get *Reversing Hermon* and you read chapter 11 about the connections of the book of Revelation back to the Watchers story and back to the giants, there is a conceptual connection between the eschatological enemies (including the antichrist) to Gog and also to giants. That's valid, at least in terms that there were

ancient Jews who thought in those terms. I give you all the data for that in the book. But it's not true to base that on the words of Ezekiel 38. I'm just going to read this, and you're going to see how confused the Septuagint translators were when it came to these names. I'm not blaming them and I'm not picking on them. Some of them might deserve a little criticism because they basically just change the text, but others are just confused and they make mistakes—they're human. That just happens. So here's what I wrote in part of that chapter of *Reversing Hermon*:

The Septuagint (LXX) translator of Ezekiel also misunderstood the grammatical limitations of *nesi' rō'sh*, leading to several mistakes in translation.

In Num 24:7, part of the Balaam oracle, the traditional Masoretic Hebrew text reads, “[Jacob’s] king shall be higher than Agag, and his kingdom shall be exalted.” The point is that Israel’s (eventual, Davidic) king will defeat the king of his enemies (in this case, a reference to Agag of the Amalekites in 1 Sam 15). But the Septuagint—created long after the days of Samuel and Agag—does something quite surprising with this passage. Instead of “than Agag” (Hebrew: *m'gg; mem, aleh, gimel, gimel*) the Septuagint has “his kingdom shall be higher *than Gog*.” The effect is to transform the prophecy of Balaam into a remote, end times prophecy pitting Gog against the Davidic messiah, as opposed to an Israelite king having victory over Agag in the early days of Israel’s monarchy.

How are we to understand this dramatic difference between the traditional text and the Septuagint? The LXX translation is only *textually* explainable if the Hebrew text being used by the Septuagint translator read *mgwg* (*mem, gimel, waw, gimel*) instead of the Masoretic Text’s *m'gg* (*mem, aleh, gimel, gimel*). However, it is more likely that the Septuagint translator may have been confused by *m'gg* (*mem, aleh, gimel, gimel*) and invented “from Gog” as a translation solution. The reason that confusion seems to be the best answer to the odd situation in Num 24:7 is that the Septuagint translator certainly blunders elsewhere with respect to Gog.

Again, the Septuagint was translated by more than one person so I'm not saying it's the same translator in the passages that I'm going to refer to next. But what it does show is that the people doing the Septuagint translation found the *mem, aleph, gimel, gimel* in Numbers 24:7 difficult to deal with. They didn't quite know what to do with it. And in other places they had problems.

Compare the traditional text with the Septuagint at the end of Amos 7:1:

Masoretic Text

Septuagint

This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, he was forming locusts when the latter growth was just beginning to sprout, and behold, it was the latter growth after the king's mowings [grass clippings] (*gzy; gimel, zayin, yod*).

Thus the Lord showed me and behold, an early offspring of grasshoppers coming, and behold one locust larva, Gog (*gwg; gimel, waw, gimel*) the king.

It's just so different! Gog is *gimel, waw, gimel*. It would have to be a different text than the Masoretic Text. I referred to Johan Lust earlier in reference to his DDD article.

50:00

Lust notes in regard to this verse, "In Amos' vision of the plague of locusts (7:1), the LXX translator read *gwg* (*gwg; gimel, waw, gimel*) for *gzy* (mowings; *gzy; gimel, zayin, yod*), focusing on Gog as the leader of a threatening army represented as a swarm of locusts." It's very hard to follow the logic of the Septuagint translator. The waters get muddied a bit more when we discover that the Septuagint translator arbitrarily transforms Og of Bashan in Deut 3:1, 13 and 4:47 to "Gog" in his translation. [MH: The Septuagint translator just adds a letter and changes the word!] Even more confusing is the fact that at least one Septuagint manuscript *does the reverse*—swapping in Og for Gog in Ezekiel 38:2.

So in one passage Og becomes Gog and in another passage Gog becomes Og in the Septuagint. This is the kind of thing I'm referring to that you look at it and you go, "You know what? They just didn't know what to do with this." It's just confusion.

One certainty arises out of this messiness: at least some Second Temple Jews were comfortable associating Gog with the giant of Bashan/Hermon and the great eschatological enemy. The question is why?

So at least a handful of Jewish people were writers. And, of course, their readers are going to be influenced by what they write. But some of them were comfortable mixing all that stuff. The question is, why? Why did they feel that was okay, or why did they feel that made sense? I address this in *Unseen Realm* a little bit, but I'm going to continue reading in *Reversing Hermon* as to why this is. This is going to lead us to the end of this episode and transition to the next one.

The real answer here, I think... The reason why the Septuagint translators weren't bothered by how they were fiddling with the text was because Gog for them was an enemy of the mythological—the mythic north. They were taking

north not just as a reference to geography—not just something "up there" geographically—but they associated the northern location in earthly geography with the dominion of Baal, with the dominion of darkness and with dark powers cosmically. So we leave literal geography and we go to cosmic geography. That's what we mean by "mythic geography," something that's supernatural in focus. If you think that way, then you are in the territory of Baal and Mount Hermon and the Watchers and the giants. So they were thinking on these terms and there were good reasons (not just contrived reasons) why they were thinking on these terms. They may have fiddled with the names Og and Gog in different passages or just not known what to do with them, but they were doing it because other things that are actually in the biblical text sort of legitimized it for them. Now, what am I talking about here? In *Reversing Hermon* I have a little section on Gog and the mythic supernatural north.

In terms of physical geography, the region of Bashan constituted the northern limits of the Promised Land. Biblical people of course knew there were enemy cities and peoples beyond Hermon. It is of no small consequence that when enemies from these northern regions invaded the land of Israel they came "from the north." The physical north, therefore, was associated with the terror of tyrants bent on Israel's destruction. [MH Israel got invaded from the north all the time. It was a scary thing.]

The "tyrant from the north" factor is one of the reasons why Antiochus IV has become the prototype for the final end times antichrist. Antiochus IV, whose violent career tracks closely with events of Daniel 8-11, was ruler of Seleucid Syria, just north of Bashan. It was he who invaded Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period, forced Jewish priests to sacrifice unclean animals on the temple altar, and saw himself as an exalted deity. It is therefore understandable that a figure like Gog, the invader from "the uttermost parts of the north" (Ezek. 38:6, 15; 39:2) is viewed by scholars as a foreshadowing of Antiochus.

Antiochus comes later than Ezekiel's time. Antiochus comes in the period between the testaments. So when Antiochus shows up and does what he does, it naturally would have made people think of Gog, because Antiochus came from the north and did all these awful things.

55:00

But these observations merely scratch the surface. There's much more to see. As readers will recall, Bashan was the land of the Rephaim, the region associated with gateways to the realm of the dead, and home to the city of Dan, the central cultic site for the worship of Baal, the lord of the Underworld. The foot of Mount Hermon overlapped the northern boundary of the region of Bashan. As I wrote in *The Unseen Realm* [MH: So here I put a little Unseen Realm into Reversing Hermon]:

The word “north” in Hebrew is *tsaphon* (or *zaphon* in some transliterations). It refers to one of the common directional points. But because of what Israelites believed lurked in the north, the word came to signify something otherworldly. The most obvious example is Bashan. We’ve devoted a good deal of attention to the connection of that place with the realm of the dead and with giant clan populations like the Rephaim, whose ancestry was considered to derive from enemy divine beings. Bashan was also associated with Mount Hermon, the place where, in Jewish theology, the rebellious sons of God of Genesis 6 infamy descended to commit their act of treason. But there was something beyond Bashan—farther north—that every Israelite associated with other gods hostile to Yahweh. Places like Sidon, Tyre, and Ugarit lay beyond Israel’s northern border. The worship of Baal was central in these places... Specifically, Baal’s home was a mountain, now known as Jebel al-Aqra’, situated to the north of Ugarit. In ancient times it was simply known as *Tsaphon* (“north”; *Tsapanu* in Ugaritic). It was a divine mountain, the place where Baal held council as he ruled the gods of the Canaanite pantheon. Baal’s palace was thought to be on “the heights of *Tsapanu/Zaphon*.” . . . In Ugaritic texts, Baal is “lord of Zaphon” (*ba’al tsapanu*). He is also called a “prince” (*zbl* in Ugaritic). Another of Baal’s titles is “prince, lord of the underworld” (*zbl ba’al ’arts*). . . . It is no surprise that *zbl ba’al* becomes Baal Zebul (Beelzebul) and Baal Zebub, titles associated with Satan in later Jewish literature and the New Testament.

Back to *Reversing Hermon*:

An ancient reader would therefore not only have feared the north because of the threat of invading tyranny, but for supernatural-theological reasons. This is the conceptual grid through which Gog of Magog must be understood.

The failure to find any secure historical referent for Gog and the fact that the “far north” from which Gog hailed was so clearly associated with dark supernatural powers has led many scholars to consider Gog as a supernatural terror **[MH: instead of a historical person]**. This trajectory is in fact more coherent.

Several scholars have proposed that Gog could be viewed as a personification of darkness, based on the meaning of the Sumerian *gûg* (“darkness”). This view has found little acceptance, but its detractors have offered next to nothing in the way of evidence for rebuttal. A supernatural figure of darkness actually comports well with Rev 20:7-10, which mentions Gog and Magog along with Satan and human armies arrayed against Jerusalem (the “holy city”).

I'm just going to summarize this because this is going to bleed into what we're going to do in Part 2, and that is interpretation. So by way of summary for this episode, five points:

1. The geographical references in Ezekiel 38 and 39 are clear. This is not modern Russia. The place names are all found in Anatolia—ancient Asia Minor. You can throw in the Greek Isles. It's the Greek Isles and modern Turkey, if you want a modern geographical referent for familiarity. It's all familiar.
2. Ro'sh is not a place name. This passage is not about Russia. There was no place name Ro'sh in antiquity.
3. As all the place names are from the north, the invasion of Gog is best understood as a cosmic invasion. That is, it would have been associated with dark powers or invaders who were a threat because supernatural forces of evil were empowering them.
4. As we'll see next time (and hinted at here), this is the way the passage was understood by John in the book of Revelation and other Second Temple writers. Human forces from the "bad place"—the geographic north, which was under the dominion of supernatural powers because it was the cosmic north—these were the enemies. The place from which they came was under the dominion of Baal, the lord of the dead, who was the Satan figure.
5. This is why it's misguided to look for a specific modern political entity for Gog. The idea is a Satan-empowered threat who seeks the inheritance of Yahweh (Jerusalem and Zion) for his own, and thus for his god, who is Satan—whether the figure in question recognizes that or not.

So stay tuned for Part 2.

TS: All right, Mike. I've got nothing really to comment on Part 1. I'll wait for Part 2. I'm looking forward to it.

MH: Yeah, there's a lot of interesting stuff. I wanted to throw that in just so it's on the record, so to speak. If you want sources for all that and you want more detail and more content, *Reversing Hermon* does have a chapter in which Gog/Magog is part of the discussion. So people can go there if they want more than what we just got on the podcast. But there's a lot of interesting stuff there. There really is.

TS: Don't forget, you can get that article, too, on the episode page, as well as that map. So please go to the nakedbiblepodcast.com and get those extra resources. Mike, is there anything else that you would like to discuss?

MH: No, I think that's it.

TS: Okay, we'll patiently wait for Part 2. And with that, I just want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.