

THE GOGIAN INVASION

Edward Whittaker, *The Gogian Invasion, The Testimony*
Vol.42, 1972 (494/50)

EDWARD WHITTAKER

Gog in Ezekiel's Day

THE DIVISION of Scripture into chapters has led to many wrong interpretations. In Ezekiel, the beginning of each separate revelation is marked by a formula such as at 38:1—"And the word of the Lord came unto me saying..."; this determines the structure of the Book as a whole.

After the introductions, some messages begin with an instruction to the prophet: "Son of Man, set thy face toward..." (6:2, 13:17...35:2). This does not mean that as he sat within the circle of his listening compatriots at Tel-Abib in Babylon, he solemnly attempted each time to orientate his body toward the distant city or nation that was the subject of the prophecy. God sets His face toward or against men or nations when He plans to punish them for their sins (14:8, 15:7...), and the prophet had to assume the same demeanour as he prophetically poured out his fearful denunciations.

Although there is no evidence that the nations concerned received copies of the doom prophecies, Ezekiel could not set his face toward them unless they were actually in existence at the time. Following this line of thought, it would be remarkable if Gog and his confederates were not powers known to exist in Ezekiel's day, when God said to him: "Set thy face toward Gog, the land of Magog..." (38:2 RV). Both Meshech and Tubal are mentioned as contemporary at 27:13 and 32:26: Persia at 27:10: Ethiopia at 29:10: Libya at 30:5: and Togarmah at 27:14. The term "Scythian" was given to the northern allies of Gog who lived around the Black Sea in the prophet's day.

Surprisingly, Young says of Persia: "in 640 B.C. it is subject to the Scythians" (*Anal. Conc.*). W. E. Barnes writes: "The Scythians, a people possibly related to the Cimmerians, traversed Syria, and reached the frontier of Egypt. There they too were stayed by the fortifications and the 'presents' of Psammet-

ichus I circa. 630-625 B.C. But these archer-horsemen left their mark on Palestine in the name *Scythopolis* (formerly Beth Shean) in the Jordan Valley" (S.P.C.K. *New Commentary* on Ezek. p. 539). Some see the Scythians in the scourge "from the north... stirred up from the uttermost parts of the earth" (Jer. 4:6 to 6:22 RV) partly because the phrasing is similar to Ezekiel 38:6,15, 39:2 (all RV). Herodotus alludes to the raid (i, 103-105), but no doubt its place in history has been rather obscured by the Babylonians dominating the political scene at the time.

Up to the end of verse 7, in this undated prophecy, Ezekiel is addressing Gog in a contemporary situation. God had said to Sennacherib the Assyrian when his army was at the walls of Zion: "I will put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest" (Isa. 37:29). The sense of Ezekiel 38:4 is similar; it implies that **while Ezekiel was speaking, the Scythians were still occupying parts of Palestine and the nations around**, but God was about to turn them back, drag them away (see same Heb. in Isa. 47:10 AVm), and bring the campaign hastily and unexpectedly to a premature end. Then Gog would retire politically from the comity of nations behind an iron curtain of ethnic isolation to "prepare" for a greater destiny. At last, "in the latter years", God would bring him again into His land on a course of conquest never surpassed for its strategic sagacity and military might (verse 8). A "gap" of 2,500 years was to separate verses 7 and 8.

In this adjusted interpretation, as with other prophecies in Ezekiel, the fulfilment of the first part of the prophecy was to be imminent (verses 1 to 7), and that of the second in the distant "latter years" (verses 8 ff). Only on this basis could the prophecy be pertinent in the slightest degree to those Jewish captives in Babylon to whom it was first given. They knew more about the Scythian hordes than

history can teach us, and the more devoutly studious among them would not fail to detect that this same confederacy was going to be held in reserve for use by God when He finally “restored again the kingdom to Israel”.

Merchants of Tarshish

In 1917, the present writer was in no doubt as to the identity of Tarshish in prophecy. The signal fulfilment of John Thomas’s expectation when Britain occupied Palestine, and administered the Mandate to aid the return of Zionists, was a triumph of Biblical interpretation. Since then, Britain has renounced the Mandate, has withdrawn from both Palestine and Egypt, has deteriorated into a second-rate maritime power, and lost many of her “young lions”. If brother Thomas’s identification of Britain as Tarshish was correct in 1917 it must remain so today and until Ezekiel 38 is fulfilled in the near future. Logically, some brethren still hold loyally to this view. The majority, however, now prefer to reserve judgement with the excuse that prognostication is unwise and indeed unscriptural, and yet they still cling with benign satisfaction to the 1917 fulfilment. Really, we must make up our minds!

Before venturing on a solution to this perplexing dilemma, a study of the place of “the ships of Tarshish” in Isaiah chapter 2 might open up a fresh angle of approach (see verse 16). The setting of this chapter is in the reign of Uzziah, king of Judah. With incredible industry he improved fortifications, enlarged his army, “built Eloth (on the Gulf of Aqaba) and restored it to Judah” (2 Chron. 26). Due largely to the east-west commerce through this port, the nation touched a peak of prosperity and prestige not enjoyed since the days of Solomon.

“When he was strong his heart was **lifted up** to his destruction”, and he arrogantly desecrated the Holy Place of the Temple. The pride of the king infected the nation. One can imagine Isaiah hurling his stern epithets of reproof at crowds of worshippers as they thronged the Temple Courts. The Lord was to destroy **by earthquake** everything “exalted” or “lifted up”, that He alone may be “exalted” or “lifted up” in that day. The many occurrences of the word “exalted” and “lifted up” (same Heb. word) in Isaiah 2 connect with “lifted up” in 2 Chron. 26:16 (diff. Heb. word), and along with other parallel details establish the connection between the Uzziah

reign and the prophecy. The earthquake would leave a trail of havoc and devastation from Lebanon in the north (Isa. 2:13) to “the ships of Tarshish” docked at or plying with Eilat in the south (verse 16). The people of Judah would flee from the scenes of their comfortable wealth and self-confident security to seek cover in the rocks and holes of the earth “for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty” (Isa. 2:10, 19, 21). And so it happened very soon. Isaiah actually saw mangled corpses buried in the debris of landslide and crashing masonry (5:25—see also Josephus), and the event was still deep in the nation’s memory 250 years later (Zech. 14:5).

At 2 Thessalonians 1:9 Paul wrote that “the Lord Jesus shall be revealed . . . taking vengeance on them that know not God and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, who shall be punished with everlasting destruction . . . **from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power**”. These last phrases are a back reference to Isaiah chapter 2 where they are translated “for the fear of the Lord, and for the glory of his majesty” (verses 10, 19, 21). Here is prophetic authority for seeking a parallel fulfilment of Isaiah 2 at the time of the Lord’s return.

Identification of Tarshish

W. F. Albright has suggested that the word “Tarshish” is not geographical, but should be understood adjectivally based on its root meaning. “Tarshish” carries the idea of mining or smelting, and in a sense therefore any mineral-bearing land may be called Tarshish . . . “An old Semitic root from which it may be derived means ‘to melt’, ‘to be smelted’.” Ships of Tarshish, therefore, were so called because they trafficked in ore whether from the west into ports on the Mediterranean seaboard, or to the east from the mines near Ezion-geber and Eloth. When Solomon’s ships brought “gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks”, they would not go out unladen. The obvious cargo would be copper ore (see *IVF Dictionary* “Tarshish”).

Latter-day Earthquake

Many prophecies portray in graphic terms how the Lord will use the power and destructive effects of earthquake to fight His enemies. Since two earthquakes occurred in three days at the death and resurrection of Christ, it would be unwise to assume that there will only be one when the Lord returns. And yet, since

Isaiah implies “the ships of Tarshish” are to be destroyed in or near the Gulf of Aqaba by earthquake, and Ezekiel says they are to be involved in a protest against the northern invader at the time when there is to be “a great shaking in the land of Israel”, there is strong presumption in favour of the two catastrophes being identical.

Habakkuk 3 helps to fill up the details of the prophetic picture. The scene is in the region of Cushan and Midian (verse 7), lands bordering on the Gulf of Aqaba, when the earthquake strikes down the Jordan Rift, through the Arabah and the Gulf, into the Red Sea. Adding to the chaos, the waters of the Red Sea rush north through the Arabah with the surge of a mighty tidal wave (verses 10 and 15 RVm) into the 1,200 feet deep natural chasm of the Dead Sea. Subterranean waters are violently upheaved to mount high above the ocean as if to bow before the presence of the oncoming Christ (verse 10). Cloud dust obscures the sun and moon and the whole land is enveloped in an indescribable darkness that can be felt (verse 11).

Disaster for the Jews

Isaiah 2 prophesies of the same occasion, **but in special relation to God’s punishment of the proudly prosperous Jews** settled in the Land, fulfilling the typical situation of the reign of Uzziah.

Already history has repeated itself remarkably. Eilat (the ancient Eloth) was restored to the Jews in the 1967 war, and is now being extensively developed as a port to replace the obsolete Suez Canal. A new pipeline has been constructed across the Negev from Eilat to Ashkelon to enable oil brought by tankers from the Persian Gulf to be pumped through to the Mediterranean. The destruction of Eilat and the fleet of tankers and cargo vessels using it will incapacitate all Israel’s east-west commerce. The wrack and ruin of towers and large buildings, of forests and of life itself, will banish all pride, and prepare the nation at last to meet its God.

Gog is Challenged

Before the horrific catastrophe strikes, “Sheba, Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish with all the young lions thereof” will enter a protest against the right of the northern aggressor to invade the lands in which they have such vested interests of incalculable worth (Ezek. 38:13). The names are given correctly

in order of commercial interest. Firstly, “Sheba and Dedan”; wherever the places may be located in the Arabian Peninsula, they aptly denote the Arab oil sheiks who jealously guard the small but priceless territories that are the source of their incredible wealth. Second, “the merchants of Tarshish”, as already explained, stand for the maritime fleets that ply in and out of the Gulf of Aqaba, including the international oil companies that have major interests. Thirdly, consistent with the use of the symbol throughout Scripture, “the young lions” are, of course, the Jews in occupation of the Land.*

Destruction of Gog

The Gogian army that is self-destroyed in the panic of the earthquake convulsions, will be consumed by “ravenous birds of every sort and the beasts of the field” (39:4). It has been noted that buzzards, vultures and birds of prey that in the past have been practically extinct due to the desolation in the land, are now returning, due no doubt to the return of man and his offal.

The skeleton remains of the invading hordes will be buried in the Valley of Abarim (39:11 —see *Expositors Bible*, etc.) east of Jordan, which will finally be sealed off from human access and curiosity.

A Second Invasion ?

Throughout the narrative of the Gogian invasion extending from chapter 38 to 39:16 there is a decided emphasis on Gog in person, expressed in the pronoun singular—“him . . . thou . . . he”. By contrast, chapter 39:17 to 22 describes God’s enemies as “the mighty . . . the princes of the earth . . . the mighty men . . . with all the men of war”: all in the plural. None of these phrases are used of the Gogian campaign, nor does the narrative mention any outstanding figure such as Gog, in command. One is therefore driven to conclude that this supplementary prophecy covers a second campaign “upon the mountains of Israel” corresponding to Psalm 2 and Revelation 19. This opinion is supported by the marginal references to Revelation 19:18. If His justice so requires, the Almighty is capable of providing a further feast for the carnivorous birds and beasts after a second defeat of the armies of the nations, so that at last Christ’s rule from Zion may be universally recognised.

* See page 63 for the traditional interpretation.