

"Russia and the King of the North"

Carl Armerding

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PRESENT interest in Biblical prophecy is a healthy sign. Previous to World War I such interest was limited, more or less, to those known as fundamentalists, or conservatives, except for the cults such as Seventh-Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses which have always made much of prophecy. But their interpretations are not always acceptable to conservative expositors of the Word of God.

The achievement of nuclear fission plus man's penetration into outer space have had a part in stimulating interest in what the Bible has to say about the universe and its future. Theologians and laymen have been studying the Scriptures with a zeal which is most commendable. But some of the conclusions arrived at have not been too well founded. In that connection we recall that during World War I some prominent Bible teachers stated quite emphatically that the German Kaiser was the Antichrist, and that the conflict then raging in Europe was the battle of Armageddon. But the fact that the Kaiser ended his days quite peacefully in Holland, devoting much time to the reading of the Bible, would indicate that he was not the one "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders," whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming (2 Thess. 2:8-9). Moreover, we know of no place in Western Europe which is "called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon" (Rev. 16:16).

World War II produced similar speculations concerning certain leaders in that conflict. Opinion was divided as to whether Hitler or Mussolini was the Antichrist. The fact that Mussolini "annexed" Ethiopia, and then proclaimed the revival of the Roman Empire, led some to believe that he was one of the two beasts described in Revelation 13. But a careful reading of that chapter should make it quite clear that neither Hitler nor Mussolini are in view there. Both of these monsters were anti-Semitic but I am not aware of any statement which would identify either one of them as the Antichrist (cf. 1 John 2:22).

The current interest in Russia has led to further attempts to identify the leader of that country with "the king of the north" (Dan. 11:40 ff.). That "Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal" (Ezek. 39:1) will be a Russian is not unlikely. The translation of that verse as given in the ASV has been used to support that view. But the fact that Gog will come from his "place out of the north parts" does not necessarily make him the same as "the king of the north" mentioned in Dan. 11:40 ff. "The king of the north" derives his title as such from the fact that his kingdom lies immediately north of "the glorious land," which is the land of Israel. The reference to Edom, Moab, and Ammon, which lie east and southeast of that land, would confirm that. In like manner, "the king of the south" derives his title as such from the fact that his kingdom lies immediately south of that land. In other words, he is the king of Egypt. Verses 42 and 43 confirm that.

The kingdom immediately north of Israel was Syria, whose capital was Damascus. Syria is mentioned quite frequently in the historical books of the Old Testament. The Syrians and the Israelites are closely related. Leah and Rachel, the wives of Jacob, were daughters of Laban the Syrian. Jacob himself is called a Syrian in Deuteronomy 26:5. Rebecca, a sister of Laban and the

wife of Isaac, was the daughter of Bethuel, a nephew of Abraham. Racially they were all Semites. So were the Assyrians. Asshur, which is the same as Assyria in the Hebrew, was a direct descendant of Shem (Gen. 10:22). Notwithstanding, the Syrians and the Assyrians were bitter enemies. The capture of Syria's capital, Damascus, and the deportation of its inhabitants is tersely reported in 2 Kings 16:9. Its king was slain. "The death of this the last of the Aramaean kings who ruled for almost two centuries was reported on a tablet of Tiglathpileser found and read by one of the early pioneers in Assyriology, Sir Henry Rawlinson. . . . With Rezin's death the Aramaic kingdom of Damascus passed away forever."[\[1\]](#)

In prophecy Assyria is much more important than Syria. It is referred to more than forty times in the prophecy of Isaiah. All of the references, except one, occur in the first part of Isaiah. Assyria is first mentioned in the Bible in Genesis 2:14. According to Genesis 10:11, it was Nimrod, a descendant of Ham, who went to Assyria and built Nineveh and its sister cities. Originally, however, the district was "dominated by the town of Asshur ... on the western bank of the Tigris, about 60 miles below Nineveh."[\[2\]](#) "The inhabitants were Semites (Gen. 10:22) who derived their culture from Babylonia, and probably emigrated thence."[\[3\]](#) "The inhabitants of Assyria belonged to the Semitic stock, that is to say, they were allied in blood and language to the Hebrews, the Aramaeans, and the Arabs. The older population had been either expelled or destroyed. The Assyrians thus differed from the Babylonians, who were a mixed race, partly Semitic and partly non-Semitic."[\[4\]](#) Assyria was wholly a military power whose "annals glory in the record of a ferocity at which we stand aghast."[\[5\]](#)

Since the northeastern corner of modern Syria reaches to the Tigris, we see no good reason why Syria and Assyria may not be included in the territory called "the north" in Daniel 11. From Daniel 11:40-45 we gather that the future ruler of this territory is called "the king of the north." Earlier in the same chapter the title is also given to one of the four successors of Alexander the Great (Dan. 11:3 ff.). The numerous references to "the Assyrian" in the prophecy of Isaiah indicate that that power will be revived just as Babylonia (Iraq) and Persia (Iran) have been revived.

That "the Assyrian" has a future is clear from Isaiah 10:12 where we read that "when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem," He will then "punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks." In the past the Lord used the Assyrian as the rod of His anger to punish His people. But because he did not own that in all of this he was but the servant of Jehovah, the fruit of his stout heart will be punished after the Lord has performed His whole work upon Mount Zion. That, of course, is still future. "When in the last days another mighty power comes against Palestine from the same region as that occupied by the Assyrians of old, his doom will be just as certain as that of the enemy of the past."[\[6\]](#)

But there is a bright side to the future of the Assyrian also. The time is coming when there shall "be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria, and the Egyptians shall serve with the Assyrians. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land: whom the LORD of hosts shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance" (Isa. 19:23-25).

Such are some of the distinctive features of "the king of the north." Many distinguished Bible scholars believe him to be the same as "Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal" whose country is called "the land of Magog" in Ezekiel 38:2. But when we compare Ezekiel 38 and 39 with the Scriptures which we have already considered we find some interesting and important differences. Magog, Tubal and Meshech, together with Gomer and Togarmah, receive their first Biblical notice in Genesis 10:2 where they are placed among the sons of Japheth. According to the

ASV Gog is "the prince of Rosh." In his comments on Ezekiel 38:2 W. Kelly says: "It is true that רֹשׁ , when the context requires it to be a common appellative, means 'head' or 'chief'; but it is this sense which in the present instance brings in confusion. There can be no doubt that it must be taken as a proper name. . . . This at once furnishes a suitable sense, which is strengthened by the term which precedes it, as well as by those that follow."^[7]

"Gog, the prince of Rosh," has a number of allies, or confederates. See Ezekiel 38:5-6, 9, 15, 22. Some of these come from "the uttermost parts of the north" (vv. 6, 15, ASV). "If we look carefully at the names of the peoples here mentioned, we see at once that we are in a different sphere from that of Daniel. We return to what we find at the very beginning: Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Gomer and such like, which carries us right back to Gen. 10; it sets before us the final history of those who, we may say, had as yet no history at all. It is evident that the sons of Japheth are here before us, and that Japheth is seen as the prodigal that has wandered away from God; and having lost God, he has lost himself no less."^[8]

Although Gog comes "out of the uttermost parts of the north," he is never referred to in Scripture as "the king of the north." He will come into "the land" in the latter years when it has been brought back from the sword, and its people have been gathered out of many nations, "all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates" (Ezek. 38:11). His purpose will be "to take a spoil, and to take a prey" (v. 12). Because of this he will be challenged by "Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof." These, we believe, will be a group of western powers. Finally, we note the terrible end to which Gog and his allies will come when the Lord judges him "with pestilence and with blood," and when He will rain upon him, "and upon his bands, and upon the many people that are with him, an overflowing rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone" (Ezek. 38:22). The detailed prophecy concerning the disposition of his dead is very striking (cf. Ezek. 39). He and his armies will be completely destroyed (v. 4).

All of this is quite different from the destiny of "the Assyrian" as we have seen (Isa. 19:23-25). They differ in origin also. "The Assyrian," or "the king of the north," is Semitic; Gog and his allies are Japhetic. "Further, while the Assyrian will overrun and desolate the whole land of Palestine, even going down into Egypt and robbing her of her treasures (Dan. 11:43), Russia, although casting a covetous eye upon the unwallled villages of Israel where the inhabitants are dwelling safely and at rest (Ezek. 38:11), will never get beyond the mountains of Israel; and while the Assyrian will be actuated by hatred and revenge, and will seek to exterminate the Jews, Russia will be actuated by greed, and her object will be to take a spoil and to take a prey" (v. 15). . . . Russia will never get near Jerusalem, but will meet her doom upon the mountains of Israel (presumably Lebanon mountains) and that after Christ has actually come to set up His kingdom (Ezek. 39:4). Not only will Russia and Assyria play distinctive parts in the great prophetic crisis towards which the world is rapidly moving, but their respective identity is retained even into the other world (Ezek. 32:22, 26)."^[9]

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[1] Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, p. 258.

[2] John D. Davis, *A Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 62.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] A. H. Sayce, *Assyria, Its Princes, Priests, and People*, p. 31.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[6] H. A. Ironside, *Expository Notes on the Prophet Isaiah*, pp. 192-93.

[7] W. Kelly, *Notes on Ezekiel*, pp. 192-93.

[8] F. W. Grant, *The Numerical Bible, Ezekiel*, p. 214.

[9] James Scott, *After These Things--What?*, p. 164.