

mourn over her” (v. 11), who “were made rich by her” (v. 15), who “were the great men of the earth” (v. 23). Verse 19 refers to “that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea” (v. 19). Surely John had Ezekiel 38:13 in mind, where “the merchants of Tarshish”, the great marine traders of the earth, ask Gog the question, “Art thou come to take a spoil?”. There is no response, and the young lions of commerce vanish from the scene.

It is really quite academic whether Britain, the USA, NATO, Liberia, Greece or the UN are “the merchants of Tarshish”; the recipients of Ezekiel’s prophecy would identify fully with his terms of reference. 2,500 years later we must wait and see how events develop to fit the circumstances to which the prophet’s words relate. We know Ezekiel’s prophecies remain to be fulfilled. We have been warned that in our patience we possess our souls (Lk. 21:19). Guesswork will get us absolutely nowhere. Insisting on archaic fulfilment simply leads to further frustration and a humiliating admission that we were mistaken. Gog and his hosts have an appointment with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob on the mountains of Israel, and the moguls of international shipping cartels can do nothing about it, except weep. Let them. We live in hope.

Ron Easson
Vernon, Canada

Prepared for invasion?

I thank Brother Nigel Bernard for his article of the above title (Oct. 2000, p. 386), in which he makes a valiant attempt to support Brother Thomas’s exposition of Ezekiel 38—but he seems to be struggling to uphold the standard interpretation, that of Russia invading Israel.

On a business trip to Moscow I was able to discuss with the president of Gazprom (the world’s largest gas producer) the demise of Russian military strength and the declining economy since democratisation, as a consequence of which Russia appears to be in no fit state to invade Israel. Thus, for Brother Bernard to contend that the decrease in the Russian armed forces by one third makes their military capability stronger is seemingly turning logic on its head.

While in Russia I had the opportunity to discuss with a group of linguists (including my Jewish lady interpreter) the Russian translation of Ezekiel 38. They did not consider that the

ancient names of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal correspond to the modern names of Russia, Moscow and Tobolsk—which traditionally we claim they do.

Looking specifically at Ezekiel 38:11, “I will invade a land of *unwalled villages*, I will attack this quiet folk who are all living in security, without gates and bars”,* this does not appear to fit the situation in modern-day Israel. The expression “unwalled villages” perhaps means something like “demilitarised zones”, of which there are few such places in Israel today. Israel is far from being a land of unprotected villages, since kibbutzim have become militarised areas, protected by machine-gun watch towers and triple-razor barbed-wire fencing.

Suffice it to say that “Gog” (whoever that might be) will attack the land of Israel at the “end of days” (v. 8), seemingly after the enthronement of the Lord Jesus Christ, when the land and her people will genuinely be at rest.

The sequence of events, in broad outline, appears to be as follows:

- **Chapter 36**—The restoration and spiritual renewal of Israel
- **Chapter 37**—The valley of dry bones and the advent of King Jesus
- **Chapter 38**—The invasion by Gog and the great earthquake
- **Chapter 39**—The destruction of Gog and the establishment of the Kingdom.

If the four chapters are in chronological order, the viewpoint expressed above may be worthy of further consideration.

Bill Davison
Nottingham

Reply

We thank Brother Davison for his comments, and agree that at present “Russia appears to be in no fit state to invade Israel” (although of course appearances can be deceptive). The article pointed this out and showed that the purpose of reducing the army’s size was not to weaken it but to strengthen both it and the country as a whole. If the aim is to strengthen an army it is not illogical to reduce the size if that will make it leaner and fitter.

Identifying the northern invader in Ezekiel 38 does not depend on the ancient names of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal being preserved into present-

* Quotations are based on the Russian translation referred to above.

day usage. It depends on identifying the peoples and areas they referred to when the prophecy was given. The ancient names of Rosh, Meshech, Tubal and also Magog can undoubtedly be linked to areas roughly covered by parts of present-day Russia and its environs. For a thorough analysis of the names in Ezekiel 38 and discussion of their possible link to modern names we recommend reading *Ezekiel* by Brother John Allfree (published by the Christadelphian Scripture Study Service).*

We would agree that the present situation in Israel does not fully match the criteria required by Ezekiel 38. Many Jews looking at their personal local circumstances at present cannot feel that they “dwell safely”. However, as a nation Israel is in a much safer position than in former years. Through agreements brokered by the Americans it has made peace with several of its neighbours. In addition it is generally agreed that it has military superiority in the region. Israel feels confident that it can deal with any future Arab aggression which may occur. Despite recent violence in Israel the overall trend is working towards the situation required in Ezekiel 38.

Ezekiel 36, 37, and 38 overlap each other. For example, in chapter 36 we read: “and they shall know that I am the LORD [Yahweh]” (v. 38). In 37:28 it is written: “And the heathen shall know that I the LORD [Yahweh] do sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore”. 38:23 states: “Thus will I magnify Myself, and sanctify Myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the LORD [Yahweh]”. The chapters arrive at the same point but do so from different perspectives. Note in particular that 38 and 39 are addressed to Gog and Magog. They are manifestly new sections separate from what has gone before.

Brother Davison’s own summary of the chapters is obviously correct as far as it goes, but it does not make sense if taken chronologically. For example, in his summary the restoration and spiritual renewal of Israel comes before the valley of dry bones. If Israel are restored and spiritually renewed how can they still be represented by dry bones? In chapter 37 he says we have “the advent of King Jesus”. However, if the summary is chronological, Israel has already been restored and spiritually renewed before his advent. But this will not happen before the advent of Christ (Zech. 12:10). In 36:35-38 and 37:24-28

the Kingdom is clearly established. But according to Brother Davison’s chronology the Kingdom is not established until chapter 39.

When Gog comes it will be from “the north parts” (38:15). When we move north of Israel it is not until we come to Russia that a country which matches 38:2 is found. When we look at Israel over the past few years we see a country moving slowly but surely, through treaty and trade, towards the safety and prosperity spoken of in Ezekiel 38. The evidence of history and current events confirms that the traditional interpretation of Ezekiel 38 is correct.

Nigel Bernard

Frogs, prophecies and the false prophet

Regarding Brother Roger Evans’ letter (Dec. 2000, p. 455), as an ex-Roman Catholic I would ask him to consider the following.

As a child I was taught that I had an immortal soul which was lozenge-shaped and lived within the chest diaphragm. If I died with a venal sin (small spot) on it I would go to purgatory. If I died with a mortal sin (soul completely black) on it, I would go to hell for ever and ever. I will spare you the details of what hell was supposed to be like.

I was taught that the church was one, holy, catholic and universal. All matters relative to salvation were completely within the province of the priesthood who were sanctified and ordained. Forgiveness of sins was only available by absolution at the confessional.

I never heard of Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob, Israel, the promises, the eternal covenant, or the covenants with Abraham and David. I never heard that marvellous word ‘righteousness’. I never knew that God had a Name, that wonderful Name, which is above every name.

Furthermore, the church claimed the power of intervention in the invisible world, and intercessory power in the realm of heaven. So many tellings of rosary beads or praying for the intentions of ‘our Holy Father, the Pope’ would guarantee so many days ‘plenary indulgence’, that is, a lessening of the days spent in purgatory.

Brother Evans’ use of the term “Victorian negativity” betrays a lack of historical perspective. As far as we can trace records, there have been

* See review, Jul. 2000, p. 281.