

Sealed Thunders : Gog & Magog

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Date: 14 July 2019

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[0 : 00] Now, these two passages that we read in Revelation, in chapter 10 and in chapter 20, they've each got elements in them that I'd like to look at, which are things which sometimes, I suppose you could say, people have thought about or been concerned about or certainly asked about in the past.

And the first, which is a very minor point you might think about, but you'd be surprised how many times, whether in fellowships or other occasions, people actually ask about this particular verse. And the first one I'd like us to look at is verse 8 in chapter 20 of Revelation. They shall go out to the sea of the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

And you would just be amazed how many people want to ask, what does Gog and Magog mean? Who are they and what are we concerned with here? But why is this description in here and what does it mean?

Well, of course, it may be no surprise to you to know that we're not going to be able to exactly identify, unpack or specifically set out every little detail of exactly who is meant here by Gog and Magog.

[1 : 13] But the first thing we need to recognise is that this is not the first occasion when these names appear in Scripture. They are mentioned in almost exactly these terms in the prophet Ezekiel at chapter 38, verses 2 and 3, where we read, Now what this tells us right away is that Gog and Magog, clearly from the Ezekiel passage, Gog is identified as an individual.

Magog is identified as a land, presumably the land over which Gog rules. Gog against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, prophesy against him.

Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I am against thee, O Gog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. So Gog is a person and Magog is a land. But why are they here in Revelation?

Well, the land that is identified as Magog here, we don't know where that land is, but it's reasonable to assume that the land over which the prince Gog rules is this Magog area.

In Ezekiel, we're told about Meshech and Tubal. Now these areas have been identified because Meshech is the central part of the sticky-out bit of what is now Turkey.

[3 : 04] If you think of a map with Turkey and sticking out sort of into the Mediterranean bit, and then you think of the sort of middle section of that, and then the slightly northern part of the middle section of that, that's Meshech.

And that is the area where the Meshech land was. And Tubal is to the east of that. It's sort of in the corner, you know, where the Mediterranean comes right into the corner of where Turkey is, and slightly to the north of that, that was the area of Tubal.

So these are both areas to the centre and east of what is now Turkey. And what is significant about them is that at the time when the Assyrian Empire was very strong, these lands and these nations were also strong at the same time.

And they were kind of pushing eastward and southward as the Assyrians were pushing northward and westward. And they're thought to have been also mixed in with peoples that came down from the land that is now roughly Armenia, which is between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. And it's, you know, it's not for nothing that when the Assyrians were attacking Israel, and when in the days of Hezekiah, of course, there was that great attempt to destroy Jerusalem, and the Assyrians came up against them.

[4 : 31] And then suddenly, of course, they were all destroyed by the angel of the Lord. Well, after the king of Assyria had had to flee on that occasion, then his two sons assassinated him, and they escaped.

And they escaped, we're told, in the book of 2 Kings, we're told, into the land of Assyria, of Armenia. And having escaped into the land of Armenia, they were then presumably given asylum there. But that isn't just because it was a convenient land, but rather because there was the political situation of those kingdoms which were against the Assyrians, they gave them asylum, the murderers of the king of Assyria.

So all of this politics is playing out at the time in the book of Ezekiel, whilst Israel is being oppressed. But these places then, Meshech and Tubal and Gog and Magog, they are also reckoned to be areas over which the king of a kingdom called Lygia, the Lythians were in the southwestern part of what is now Turkey, they were going over at one stage by a king called Gyges. Sometimes the Y and the U are interchangeable, and it becomes Gugis, which, of course, is what we get now Gog from. So Gog being a king of what was Lydia at one point, whose capital was at Sepharad, and Sepharad is mentioned in the prophet Obadiah, verse 20, and even unto Zaphath and the captivity of Jerusalem, which is in Sepharad, shall possess the cities of the south.

[6 : 10] Sepharad is the ancient name for a city that later became Sardis. And as some of you will know, Sardis is one of the seven churches to which the Lord writes, who are the seven churches of Asia.

So it was quite an ancient city, and one over which, when it was the capital of Lydia, was an incredibly wealthy, rich, and influential city. It is the same kingdom from which the semi-mythological king, Croesus, was meant to have come, because the Lydians had great reserves of gold and other precious metals, and so Croesus was meant to be super rich, because in his land and kingdom they could mine so much gold.

So the Lydians were that king in southwestern Turkey, over which at one stage a king called Gagis, or Gugis, Gog ruled over.

His influence obviously spread into the rest of Turkey, and he is described, or he symbolizes, those who rule over these nations, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against them.

If you look in Ezekiel 38, you'll see that a little bit further down, it's not just those nations which are mentioned, but also, where it's like Persia, Ethiopia, Libya, with them all, Gomer and all his bands.

[7 : 26] Gomer again was to the east of Meshech. Togarmah was a city again to the east of Tubal. So most of it is based in what is now Turkey. Some of it is on the other side of the Mediterranean, Libya and Ethiopia, and so on.

So what is envisaged here is all the countries of the world round about the central place, which is Israel, Jerusalem, and so on.

And these foreign nations are all being drawn into opposition and enmity against Israel, against the Lord's people.

And these heathen nations, Gog and Magog, are being used as, if you like, a poetic expression for the far-flung heathen nations in the different corners of the world, if these ones are coming in, Gog and Magog, the land over which Gog rules, if these are coming against the Lord's people, then it is evidence that they are coming from the furthest corners of the world.

Not only the Libyans, not only the Ethiopians, and the Persians, and so on, and the Assyrians with whom they were familiar, but also those in far distant lands, like the land of Gog, like Magog, Meshef, Tubal, all these distant, far-away countries with which the Israelites had no immediate dealings, except in so far as some of them in later years, as Obadiah makes clear, were sold as slaves into these faraway places.

[9 : 01] All these countries which had oppressed or enslaved the Israelites are taken as being the heathen countries from the farthest corners of the world, and by expressing them thus, Gog and Magog, it is indicative of all the far-flung heathen nations of the world.

But notice what it also says here in chapter 20 of Revelation, where it says that they went up on the breadth of the earth, he shall go out, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, and again, see, the four quarters of the earth, all the corners of the earth, all the heathen nations, even to the extent of the kingdom of Gog and Magog, the prince, Gog, Magog, his land, to gather them together to battle the number of whom it says the sand of the sea.

All these heathen nations are deceived into believing it to be in their interests to attack the Lord's people and to strike a blow against God thereby.

They are gathered there, they're brought there. You know, verse 8, as we can see there, gather as the number of the sand of the sea. They're all there, and all the nations under heaven, that so many

of them are all opposed to the Lord, all opposed to his people, and the expression Gog and Magog, although it has, in its origins, a particular person who could historically be identified as Gog, and although Magog would almost certainly be simply the kingdom, the land over which he wrote, his influence clearly extended far eastwards and far further throughout the whole of what is now Turkey, or it did at one time anyway, Meshech and Tuval and Togarna and Gomer and all these other ancient, mysterious sounding places, but is now taken as being poetically in Revelation, an expression for all the kingdoms of the world that are under the sway of Satan.

Because we have it there, the previous verse, Satan shall be loosed out of this prison, shall go out to deceive the nations in the four quarters of the earth, all the heathen nations of the world.

[11:18] Summed up in this expression, Gog and Magog, which although they were a particular geographical entity at one point, that is less significant than the expression of them to sum up all which is against the Lord's people and the Lord himself by extension.

Now, we read that they are deceived. They are deceived by Satan into thinking that this is going to be for their power, or this is going to be for their glory. It's going to help them by attacking the Lord and his people, which is a deceit.

Because Satan already knows they don't stand a chance. We read in verse 9, in less than a verse, you know, less than half a verse, you know, it's a third of a verse, simply, fire came down from God out to heaven and devoured them.

That's it. The description is over. That's the battle over. There's no great big sin of garments rolled in blood and clashing of swords and chariots and spears and thundering of hooves. No, fire came down from God out to heaven and devoured them.

That was it. No, so it's the sand of the sea for multitude. They come from all the four quarters of the world and they encompassed their beloved city. I can't remember. That was it.

[12:29] No context, no battle, no fight. They were deceived. They were fooled into thinking that they might gain from this. And in fact, it is just for their complete and total destruction. God, and my book sums up, poetically expresses, those who are deceived, all the power, the nations, the pomp, the circumstance of the world, deceived into believing that it is in their interests to be against the Lord.

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are and shall be tormented day and night forever and ever.

You see, revelation, although it is, it is, as its name suggests, revealing things of the last times, everything that it strikes is not a mechanically tangible brass tacks kind of description.

It is not sort of a, you know, bricks and mortar kind of thing. It is a poetic expression of that which sums up a greater truth. Gog and Magog are not to be confined to the southwest corner of Turkey. They are not even to be confined to Meshech and Tuba further east into Turkey. They are to be taken as expressive of all the heathen nations of the world. The four quarters there, as Ezekiel 38 makes clear, when it names lots of different, lots of different nations, lots of different peoples, and so on.

[13:58] In a similar way, if we were to go back a little bit in Revelation, you find the description of Babylon, the great whore, as it were, and the judgment of Babylon is fallen, is fallen, and so on.

There are perfectly good scriptural and doctrinal and historical reasons for identifying this to an extent with a false church, which many have applied to the Church of Rome, of course, historically over the years.

Well, we can't get denominationally, excuse me, denominationally superior about it because we can't say, oh, well, they're bad and we're good because what is described there in terms of Babylon, for example, is not a city on the Tigris or Euphrates or whatever in what is now Iraq, and so it's a geographically isolated thing, but rather it is sung up as the expression of that which is worldly, that which is fleshly, that which, in terms of, you know, it's hoarding, as it's described there, what is that? When it is there, it is a transaction, reducing that which is meant to be an expression of lifelong, intimate, commitment, mutual self-giving, mutual vulnerability, mutual lifelong protection, an investment of two people, one with another, for that which is a lifelong commitment in marriage, and it takes that and reduces it to a temporary commercial transaction, something which is purely a reflection, not involving anything of the heart or the spirit, purely commercial, purely a short-term transaction, and that is, sums up the things of the world.

It's short-term, it's about money, power, and or sex, and it's a commercial transaction. And that can fall not only into the world, that can work its way into the outward church as well, where we can be

fooled into thinking that, yeah, it's all about the influence we can have in the world, and yes, the church is an expression of people's faith, but, you know, it's the influence we can have here, any amount of power or wealth or influence we can have in society, that's what it's about, it's about making our mark, having a seat at the top table, no, it's not.

[16:12] Our kingdom is not of this world, God's kingdom, Christ's kingdom is not of this world. It's meant to be not only lifelong, it's meant to be eternal, it's meant to be the mutual investment of two people, the bridegroom and his bride, for all time and all eternity, where they are mutually vulnerable one with another, where they are mutually intimate with one another, where they give of themselves to each other, where she gives herself holy to him in love and he gives his life that she might be saved and all of the beauty and all of the eternity of that relationship, which instead with Babylon, the great whore, as the Bible describes her, is reduced to near commercial transactions and all that we have in chapter 17 and 18 of Revelation is talking about the gold and the silver and the wealth and the purple and all the precious things that had been amassed in this commercial transaction nature.

But it is not about simply Babylon. Well, we can identify where Babylon was geographically. It's not simply about sticking a pin in the map. That is true with Babylon and that is true with Gog and Magog.

We can identify a person historically who probably was Gog. We can identify by roughly the land that he would have ruled over. We can identify Meshech and Tubal and so on and the geographical places where they were but it's not about sticking a pin in the map.

It's about the expression of these kind of anti-God, anti-Christian forces and how they have rather sold out what the Lord offers in favor of the cheap, brief, temporary, commercial transaction of the world and chosen that instead.

And in the meantime because that which is good always casts that which is bad in a bad light, makes it look bad, therefore they are by nature at enmity with the Lord's people.

[18:17] So Gog and Magog sums up this enmity, sums up all the nations of the world. It's not any more geographically confined than Babylon, by nature and what is being described in it is geographically confined to one place or indeed to one branch of any church or whatever.

It is a concept, an idea of which we are all familiar with and which spreads throughout all of humanity. All of humanity is divided, not so much merely into different states and countries and places and people groups, but it is ultimately divided into those who are the Lord's and those who are not.

The Lord reveals things to us, but some things, of course, he keeps from us and this is what I'd like us also to look at briefly in chapter 10 where we read at verse 4, When the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered and write them not.

Now, when did the seven thunders utter their voice? Verse 3, That the angel which had his right foot upon the sea and his left foot upon the land, he cried with a loud voice as when a lion roareth. And when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. Now, it is not what the angel cries out, it is not what he speaks which is meant to be kept secret. It is the voice of the seven thunders.

[19:49] Now, seven, of course, is the biblical number for perfection. It often is taken as being the number for that which is divine. And what the thunder speaks, clearly, John, in his vision, must have understood.

He must have known what the thunders were saying. Otherwise, he couldn't begin to write it down. He couldn't say, I couldn't understand what they were saying, so I couldn't write it down.

No, I took up my pen to write. I was about to write. Therefore, he must have understood what the seven thunders were saying. It must have been intelligible.

It must have been understandable and clear to him. But the reason he is not to write it down is because he is given an explicit instruction to seal it up. Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered and write them not.

Now, as we were saying to the children earlier, when things are sealed up, of course, we're not talking now about a Tupperware seal on a plastic box. We're talking about the kind of seal which would have, in the olden days, have been applied with wax, hot wax, and then marked with a person's particular imprint or signet or whatever it might be to indicate who had sealed it.

[21:05] And if it is sealed, it is intended eventually to be opened. And it is sealed with the intention that when it comes to be opened, the seal will testify to the fact that it has not been

tampered with in the meantime.

That's the reason for the seal. That nobody could open it and write an extra bit or take a bit out or score something out. If it is sealed, then the contents are secure. They are sealed up for a purpose. Everything that is sealed is intended eventually to be opened. But to be opened in the knowledge that since it was sealed, it has not been tampered with.

It is secure. So that which the seven thunders uttered were sealed up, that means that eventually there will come a time when it will be right to have them opened.

It will be right for our men and women and boys and girls to know what was said. But that time is not yet. You know, right to the end of Revelation, we're given plenty of information.

[22 : 12] You know, we're told, it's a seed thou, you and I am thy fellow servant. The Proverbs 9 of chapter 22 of them, which keep the sayings of this book. And then it says, seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.

So the things which are given, the words which are revealed, they're all to be sealed up. They're to be opened, they're to be written, they're to be sent, distributed to the seven churches and around all the different churches that exist in the first century at that point.

People are to know, the Christians are to know, the world is to know what the Lord has revealed. Hence the word revelation. But there are some things that the Lord does not intend as yet to be revealed.

Now we've got evidence of this, of course, in 2 Corinthians where we read, for example, in chapter 12 where Paul is describing the vision of the man put up to the third heaven.

He's talking about himself but he's trying to be modest about it. So let's just read a couple of verses there. I knew such a man, whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell. God know. How that he was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter.

[23 : 29] Of such an one will I glory. He heard words that no man is able to speak but he heard them, he understood them, but he could not repeat them because they were either of such a deep and holy and divine nature that for him to utter them would be almost blasphemous or certainly unlawful but it is not unlawful for the Lord or the angelic spirit or whoever was uttering it in paradise to speak them.

He heard unspeakable words but it is not lawful for a man to utter but he still heard them. There will come a time when everything will be revealed. There will come a time when everything will be made known.

As 1 Corinthians 13 puts it, now I know in part but then shall I know even as also I am known. There is that which the Lord does intend us to know and what he intends us to know is sufficient.

he has given us enough. This very chapter in which we read of the sealed up seven thunders. What do we read? We read of an angel standing with one foot planted in the sea and one in the earth.

So in other words encompassing the whole of the nature of the earth. And he had in his hand a little book open. The book is not itself sealed, the book is not closed, the book is not secret, it is open.

[24 : 58] And then he is told, John is told, go to the angel and take the little book where it is open in the hand of the angel which stands upon the sea and the land. And I went unto the angel and said to him, give me the little book.

And he said, take it and eat it up and it shall make thy belly bitter but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey. And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, the book which is open, remember, and I ate it up and it was in my mouth sweet as honey.

And as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter. Now this isn't just a contrast between taste and digestion and the short term and the longer term. But we could also, of course, apply it in terms of, you know, it's wonderful to receive the gospel and forgiveness and so on, but of course the long slog of faithfulness is perhaps a little more bitter, a little bit more difficult.

But I also want us, I think, to understand it in terms of what Paul writes to the Corinthians, 2 Corinthians chapter 2, verses 15 and 16. We are unto God a sweet savor of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish.

To the one we are the savor of death unto death, bitterness, and to the other the savor of life unto life, sweetness. And who is sufficient for these things?

[26 : 18] How can the same material, how can the same little book be at one and the same time bold, sweet as honey, and also bitter in the belly?

Well, scripture would imply and certainly teach that it is not dependent on the quality of the world itself. It is not the content of the book which varies.

The book is open. It can be read by all, but it depends on the nature of those to whom it comes. And John, of course, in receiving that book, book, it is sweet in his mouth, it is bitter in his belly, to indicate the two kinds, I would suggest to you to indicate the two kinds of reception that that book will receive.

To the one a savor of life unto life, to another a savor of death unto death. And who is sufficient for these things? Because it is the same seed that falls into the ground in the parable of the sower. And what makes the difference as to the kind of harvest that is root is not the nature of the seed. It is equally grouped throughout. The little book is equally full of truth and goodness and blessing and the righteousness of God throughout.

[27 : 27] But depending on the kind of soil into which the seed is received, that makes the difference. And those to whom the word of God comes to some it will produce only enmity, Gog and Magog and all the nations of the world.

And that to others it will be sweet and like itself. As the psalmist says, how sweet unto night takes the Lord and all thy words of truth. God, although some things are kept from us for a time, and that he sometimes deals in mystery.

Mystery is not the same simply as secrecy. Things are not kept from us simply because they are kept from us for the sake of it. They are kept from us for a time until such time as it is right and good for them to be revealed to us.

They are kept for a time so that they may be the better when they are given, when they are received. God deals in truth. And what is needful, what is blessed, what is helpful, he will give and he does give.

What we cannot handle, he will withhold. And clearly at this stage and at this time, whatever it is that the seven thunders matter, we cannot deal with, we cannot comprehend.

[28 : 45] they are kept from us. But everything, excuse me, everything that is sealed up is intended at some stage to be opened.

And there will come the day when even the secrets of the seven thunders will likewise be opened and made clear. That day I would suggest to you is not here upon earth, it will be hereafter, when all things will be made known.

All things will be made new. But that which John hears and he knows and he is about to write is to be kept from the rest of the world, the rest of the church.

But what is not kept from the rest of the church is that which is in the book which is open, that which is in the unsealed testimony, that which is the everlasting gospel proclaimed throughout all the world.

What we have been given is enough. there is a great tendency with us and it is natural for human beings to want to investigate whatever is withheld from us, to be drawn to the one thing that is forbidden.

[29 : 54] You know, if God had said, you know, identified a different tree and the God said, you can't eat that one. You can eat the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, but this tree here in the corner, you're not allowed to eat that.

Then, yeah, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and a muncher and that and so on, and it wouldn't be a big deal, but that one would suddenly become so tantalizing and so tempting, because whatever we are forbidden, we just got to investigate.

We have to try and find it. It's human nature, and it is much harder to submit our human nature to the loving direction of a father who says, look, this is sealed up for now.

This is kept from you for now. It will be revealed in the fullness of time, but it is kept from you for now for your good. Everything that the Lord does is for our good.

Everything that he has revealed throughout salvation history, from creation through the times of the patriarchs and the prophets and the kingdoms of Israel and all the way through to the exile and the return and the coming of our Lord and the apostles and the giving of the Holy Spirit and the spreading of the gospel throughout the world.

[31 : 00] All of this is God's perfect time. All of it is God's perfect plan. We might say, why didn't he just give the Messiah right at the beginning? Why didn't he give him in the days of Noah?

Why have to send a flood? Why have to go through all this business with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and King David and Samuel and all the rest of it? God's time is perfect. God's timing is right. God's content is right. I was about to write. I was about to reveal and record. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, seal up those things.

Which the seven thunders uttered and write them not. But then he goes on to talk about what he can do. How he can reveal, take the open book, how he can reveal, how he can tell.

There's no shortage of information in Revelation. There's no shortage of information in the gospel accounts. There's no shortage of it in the epistles. I mean, all the teachings of the New Testament and the Old there's plenty there for people who want to dig and discover and find.

[32 : 01] But what do we focus on? We focus on so often the one thing that we are talking about. You can't go there. Well, why can't I go there? Some things are kept from us. Some things are sealed.

But they are sealed in the knowledge that one day they will be opened. One day all things will be made clear. But to get through to that stage we must first of all demonstrate that we are not deceived by Satan.

That we are not stupid enough to believe that by going against the Lord, by rebelling against his spirit, it is somehow going to benefit us. Nobody wins against God.

Satan himself does not win against God, but he deceives the nations, Gog and Magog and all the nations of the world. He deceives them sufficiently to make them think it is in their interests to oppose the Lord and his people.

But they are destroyed and he is destroyed and nobody benefits save those who have given themselves to the Lord, who are not received, who have received not the lie, not the commercial transaction of the flesh and the world and short-term gain, but rather have seen what the eye of faith, the fulfillment that seems for a time to be so long distant, but is in fact nearer than you would believe.

[33 : 32] For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent and the day is at hand and it will not be long before we see the fulfillment and all the seals are opened and all is made clear, but for now God deals in truth.

All that he gives you and me is truth. He doesn't give you it all at once. He doesn't give you everything that you might want, but he gives everything that you need. The Lord is my shepherd. I have everything I need. That's what we were looking at the other day. The truth as it is in Christ Jesus is sufficient both for time and also for eternity and everything will be made clear come that day.

But I would suggest you with all love and respect by that time it's not going to matter so much because by then we will have Christ in all his fullness.

And yes, all the seals that are opened and all the streets of gold and all the angels sounding trumpets and all the wonder and glory that is there. It will be wonderful, but it will matter less than just having Christ who is sufficient for all that is worthy.

[34 : 51] Amen.