

THE ARMIES OF GOG, THE MERCHANTS OF TARSHISH,
AND THE BRITISH EMPIRE

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The Gog prophecy in Ezekiel 38–39 is one of the more difficult parts of a difficult book. Israel, finally restored in peace to the Promised Land, faces one last threat in the person of Gog of Magog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. As the chapters progress, Gog gathers together an enormous horde of warriors with which he assaults peaceful Israel, only to be defeated not by human arms but by the miraculous power of God. A little less than half way through Ezekiel 38, as the monstrous Gog is about to launch his invasion of the land, the Authorized Version reads:

Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil? (Ezek 38:13).¹

At first sight these words do not look a very promising source of British imperial rhetoric. And yet, for a surprisingly large number of Victorian writers on prophecy that is precisely what they became. My aim in this paper is to examine how the merchants of Tarshish embarked on this imperial adventure, and to offer some reflection on the consumption of prophecy in mid-nineteenth-century Britain.

Decoding Gog in Nineteenth-Century Britain

The identification of Gog has always been controversial, and many Christian readers over the centuries have been tempted to find the political and military travails of their own age encoded in the text.² For St Ambrose (c. 339–397), Gog represented the Goths, marauding towards the Italian

¹ Biblical quotations are from the Authorized Version (KJV), since this is the biblical text most nineteenth-century British readers would have used.

² P. S. Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 152–57.

heartlands. For Martin Luther (1483–1546), it was the Ottoman Turks, who had reached the gates of Vienna for the first time in 1529. In England, William Lowth (1660–1732; father of the more famous Robert and author of the main 18th-century English commentary on Ezekiel) also sees the Turks as likely candidates, and this view is shared by the widely-read commentary of Thomas Scott (published 1788–92 and in numerous later editions).³ However, as Scott's commentary established its popularity, great events were afoot and the interpretation of Ezekiel was changing with them. The French Revolution and Napoleonic wars had thrown Europe into turmoil. It is no surprise that many devout Christians believed that the end times were upon them, which they sought to confirm from apocalyptic texts like Ezekiel and Revelation. For several British writers at this time Gog wore the face of Napoleon. The conservatively-minded pamphleteer Lewis Mayer expected him to meet his end in Palestine in 1809.⁴ Granville Penn (1761–1844; grandson of the founder of Pennsylvania) argued in 1814 that the prophecy of Gog had just been fulfilled in Napoleon's failed invasion of Russia.⁵ Nevertheless, as the century wore on the tectonic plates of international politics shifted and Gog came to acquire a new face, that of the Russian Empire—an interpretation which has had remarkable staying power amongst Christian millenarians for almost 200 years.⁶

The early and mid-nineteenth century in Britain witnessed a veritable flood of millenarian publications in the form of books, journals and pamphlets, along with numerous addenda, reviews and rebuttals. The authors of these works were less likely than before to be lower- or middle-class sectarians in the mould of Richard Brothers (1757–1824) or Joanna Southcott (1750–1814).⁷ Given impetus by such luminaries as Edward Irving (1792–1834), founder of the Catholic Apostolic Church, or the prominent

³ W. Lowth, *A Commentary on the Prophet Ezekiel* (London: W. Mears, 1723), p. 309; T. Scott, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old And New Testaments, According to the Publick Version; with Explanatory Notes, Practical Observations and Copious Marginal References* (London: L. B. Seeley, 1810), vol. 4, ad loc.

⁴ L. Mayer, *Bonaparte, the Emperor of the French, Considered as the Lucifer and Gog of Isaiah and Ezekiel* (London: Williams & Smith, 4th edn, 1806).

⁵ G. Penn, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel Concerning Gogue, the Last Tyrant of the Church, His Invasion of Ros, His Discomfiture, and Final Fall; Examined and in Part Illustrated* (London: J. Murray, 1814).

⁶ Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More*, 154–80; M. Lieb, *Children of Ezekiel: Aliens, UFOs, the Crisis of Race, and the Advent of End Time* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 84–99.

⁷ G. Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals: Protestant Secessions from the Via Media, c. 1800–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 154. On Brothers and Southcott see, e.g., S. Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of

banker and MP Henry Drummond (1786–1860), premillennial beliefs moved from the margins far closer to the centre of evangelical theology.⁸ In these years the predominant form of prophetic interpretation in Britain was not the futurist dispensationalism of J. N. Darby and the Scofield Reference Bible, which later took such hold in the USA. Rather it was what has been called the ‘historicist’ or ‘continuous historical’ school of prophetic interpretation.⁹ The crucial difference in the mid-nineteenth century was that Darby postponed the fulfilment of biblical prophecy to an undetermined time in the future, after the rapture of true Christians, whereas the continuous historical school saw the fulfilment of prophecy as already in process. They were therefore much more inclined to develop elaborate prophetic calendars, to scan their newspapers for ‘signs of the times’, and to see some continuing role for church and nation through the end times and beyond. While some millenarians published anonymously, others were proud to display their status as clergymen of the established church (mostly the Church of England, but with a few prominent contributors from the Church of Scotland). Premillennial theology is very often combined with a conservative political stance, since there is little incentive to reform society when the millennium is just around the corner, and Ralph Brown notes that, amongst the middle and upper classes, ‘adventist expectations were most prominent during those periods when working-class radicalism and political activism seemed most threatening to the political status and value system of the established order.’¹⁰ This was certainly the case for most mid-century millenarians, who tended to be politically conservative Tories: they are strong defenders of Britain’s Protestant constitution, and opponents of Catholic emancipation, horrified by the French revolution, the reform act of 1832, and the revolutions of 1848. There can be little doubt that this was an influential strand within British evangelicalism: it is likely that by 1855 half or more of the Church of England’s evangelical clergy supported a premillennial position.¹¹

Pennsylvania Press, 2006); D. Madden, *The Paddington Prophet: Richard Brothers’s Journey to Jerusalem* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010).

⁸ Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 154–55; R. Brown, ‘Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism: The Radical Legacy of Edward Irving’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 58 (2007), pp. 675–704.

⁹ D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 81–85; also M. W. Carpenter, *George Eliot and the Landscape of Time: Narrative Form and Protestant Apocalyptic History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), esp. pp. 9–25.

¹⁰ Brown, ‘Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism’, p. 681.

¹¹ Carter, *Anglican Evangelicals*, 155; Brown, ‘Victorian Anglican Evangelicalism’, 684.

The interpreters of prophecy undoubtedly thought of themselves not as marginal fanatics but as rational, scholarly historians of the future and passionate supporters of an orderly and paternal establishment. Ezekiel's Gog prophecy was therefore a highly appropriate source to mine for information about the course of current and future events.

The Eastern Question and the Rise of the Russian Gog

If the general atmosphere of mid-nineteenth century Britain was a fertile ground for apocalyptic speculation, nevertheless a combination of both exegetical tradition and political expediency was required for the identification of Gog with Russia to take hold. Politically, the so-called 'Eastern Question' was one of the perennial problems of nineteenth-century international relations.¹² In brief, the issue was how to deal with the decline of the Ottoman Empire. Ottoman Turkey—'the sick man of Europe'—was seen as increasingly weak, struggling to hold on to its European provinces in the Balkans and its control of the Near East. At the same time, the major European powers were concerned both to reap what benefit they could from Ottoman decline and to prevent their rivals from taking similar advantage.¹³ For the expanding Russian Empire, key concerns were the control of Istanbul and the Bosphorus, the only passage from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean. But also prominent in Russian thinking and rhetoric were religious and nationalist concerns; both to protect fellow Slav Christians in the Balkans and to secure rights of access for Orthodox pilgrims to the holy land. For the British, increasing volumes of trade within the Ottoman Empire in the first half of the nineteenth century made preserving Ottoman power economically worthwhile. Moreover, it was through the Ottoman Near East that Britain had its direct access to India, the most prized of imperial possessions. Britain and Russia were the two world powers of the day, and as the century progressed, the British public became increasingly aware of competing interests in Central Asia

¹² A. L. MacFie, *The Eastern Question 1774–1923* (Harlow: Longman, 2nd edn. 1996); O. Figes, *Crimea: The Last Crusade* (London: Allen Lane, 2010), pp. 23–60; cf. also E. M. Reisenauer, "Tidings Out of the East": World War I, the Eastern Question and British Millennialism', in K. Kinane and M. A. Ryan (eds.), *End of Days: Essays on the Apocalypse from Antiquity to Modernity* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), pp. 142–71.

¹³ W. Baumgart, *The Crimean War, 1853–1856* (London: Arnold, 1999), pp. 5–6.

(the so-called 'Great Game'); there was open conflict between the two nations with the outbreak of the Crimean war in 1853.¹⁴

Exegetically, the association of Gog with Russia was not a new one. It has its roots in a preference for the Septuagint version of 38:1, which sees the Hebrew *rosh* not as 'head' or 'chief' but as the proper name 'Rhos', which was then connected with 'Rus' and Russia. Nineteenth-century writers could look back as far as Bochart's magisterial *Geographia Sacra* of 1646, and find the idea proposed in the English commentators William Lowth and William Newcome, as well as more recent scientific studies such as Gesenius' lexicon.¹⁵ Not only did Ezekiel's 'prince of Rhos' imply the Tsar, but the identification was also made more secure by the association of the subsequent geographical names, Meshech and Tubal, with parts of the Russian Empire. For example, the pseudonymous 'Anael', in his 1854 pamphlet *Gog and Magog, or the Doom of Russia*, draws on Josephus, Bochart, and the Jewish Writer David Levi for support and concludes:

we may presume the Mosocheni and Thobelites, whom Josephus mentions [*Ant.* 1.6.1], to have advanced toward the north, and given their names to the cities of Moscow (or Moskwa) and Tobolsk, the European and Asiatic capitals of the Russian Empire. Thus we see the appropriateness of the phrase, 'Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal,' as applied to that overgrown power, of which the Czar in the pride of his exaltation call himself 'the Autocrat'.¹⁶

Proponents of the Russian theory were not necessarily millenarians themselves. Even the Scottish Presbyterian theologian Patrick Fairbairn (1805–1874), a vocal opponent of such speculations, goes so far as to claim that 'there is hence great probability in the opinion, that the people referred to were the Russi, from whom the modern Russians derive their name'.¹⁷

¹⁴ There is an enormous literature on the Crimean War: for orientation see, e.g., MacFie, *Eastern Question*, pp. 28–33; Baumgart, *Crimean War*; O. Figs, *Crimea*.

¹⁵ Lowth, *A Commentary on the Prophet Ezekiel*, p. 310; W. Newcome, *An Attempt Towards an Improved Version, a Metrical Arrangement, and an Explanation of the Prophet Ezekiel* (Dublin: R. Marchbank, 1788), p. 143; W. Gesenius, *Hebräisches und chaldäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament* (Leipzig: F. C. W. Vogel, 3rd edn, 1828), p. 758.

¹⁶ Anael, *Gog and Magog; or, the Doom of Russia as Pourtrayed in the Prophetic Scriptures: with Remarks on the Present Crisis and the Battle of Armageddon, Together with Strictures on the Pamphlet, 'the Coming Struggle'* (London: Piper, Stevenson, and Spence, 1854), p. 9; the triple identification is widely accepted amongst prophetic writers of the period.

¹⁷ P. Fairbairn, *Ezekiel and the Book of His Prophecy: An Exposition* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 3rd edn, 1863), p. 415 n. 2; on the other hand the conservative German commentator E. W. Hengstenberg (1802–1869) is dismissive of all historicizing interpretations and notes that 'the poor Russians have been here very unjustly arranged among the enemies of God's people' (E. W. Hengstenberg, *The Prophecies of the Prophet Ezekiel Elucidated* [trans. A. C. Murphy and J. G. Murphy; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1869], p. 333).

The subsequent associations of Meshech with Moscow and Tubal with the Siberian capital Tobolsk were less assured (and Fairbairn does not countenance them), but they seemed to most millenarian authors to follow naturally on from the initial recognition.

The combination of these exegetical insights with the rising urgency of the Eastern Question and the fear of Russia allowed interpreters of the prophets to map the course of the future by placing Ezekiel 38–39 alongside relevant texts from Isaiah, Daniel, and of course Revelation. Eric Reisenauer describes a four-stage scheme, which dominated prophetic speculation for the next hundred years:¹⁸

- i) The decline of the Ottoman Empire
- ii) The restoration of the Jews to Palestine, aided/instigated by Britain
- iii) The threat of Russian encroachment onto Ottoman lands, and especially the Holy Land
- iv) A final climactic war between ‘a hostile Russian confederation and a British-led alliance of nations offering protection to the Jews’¹⁹

The degree to which this scheme continued to fire the prophetic imagination is testimony to the deep mistrust that Russia’s rapid expansion and cultural ‘otherness’ had engendered in the British imagination. During first half of the nineteenth century, with conflict on the horizon, British society was ripe for a rising tide of ‘Russophobia’, and John Howes Gleason goes so far as to say that in this period we see develop ‘an antipathy toward Russia which soon became the most pronounced and enduring element in the national outlook on the world abroad’.²⁰ It is an antipathy which our millenarian writers were quick to take advantage of, and indeed its key elements are nicely summarized by David Pae (1828–1884) on the very first page of his anonymously published 1853 pamphlet *The Mission and Destiny of Russia*:

This power is comparatively of recent growth, and its elements are for the most part barbarous and multiform; yet it is regarded with fear by some, and

¹⁸ Reisenauer, ‘“Tidings Out of the East”’, p. 144; Reisenauer finds even more millenarian speculation of this sort during the Great War (1914–1918) than during the Victorian period.

¹⁹ Reisenauer, ‘“Tidings Out of the East”’, p. 144; he notes that the events do not always follow the same order.

²⁰ J. H. Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain: a Study of the Interaction of Policy and Opinion* (Harvard Historical Studies 57; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 1; on more mainstream/secular British Russophobia see also Figs, *Crimea*, pp. 70–83, 147–51.

a certain instinctive dislike by the whole, of the powers of Europe. Its sudden, mushroom-like growth, its monstrous extension of population, and the energy and capacity of its government, have rendered it at once an object of suspicion and foreboding to the rest of the nations.²¹

In a Fast Sermon for the Crimean War preached in April 1854, George Pinhorn, a country vicar in Shropshire, took Ezekiel 38–39 as his text. The sermon begins with a reference to ‘the unprovoked aggression and despotism of the [Russian] sovereign, who makes religion the cloke [*sic*] to cover his schemes of wrong and ambition . . .’²² Pinhorn goes on in a detailed discussion of Ezekiel 38:4–7 to note the connection with the ostensible cause of the war. The text, which describes a great assembly of troops, seems to foretell:

that this tyrannical invader of his peaceful neighbour, would make every possible preparation . . . and that he would seem to stand in the relation of a guardian to them [cf. 34:7 AV]. . . . Methinks you already begin to see peep forth, the Czar’s hollow pretext of the protection of the holy places, and of the rights of his coreligionists in Turkey and the holy land!²³

And Pae’s *Mission and Destiny of Russia* draws further analogies between Ezek 38:4 and the composition of the Tsar’s army:

Never was such a multiform and mixed force marshalled under one leader, or engaged in one enterprise. . . . Well may Ezekiel describe them as a ‘cloud to cover the land’, and as horses and horsemen *clothed with all sorts of armour*, a great company, with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. The wild horses and barbarous hordes of Tartary, and the semi-savages of Moscovy, will mingle with the trim and gaudy uniforms of the west, and the majesty of European cavalry. The music of all nations will be blended into one shrill war-hoop, wilder and fiercer than was ever heard among Indian tribes.²⁴

Orlando Figes notes that the numerous European publications on the threat of Russia ‘had as much to do with the imagination of an Asiatic “other” threatening the liberties and civilization of Europe as with any real or perceived threat.’²⁵ These interpretations of Ezekiel also appear to

²¹ D. Pae, *The Mission and Destiny of Russia, as Delineated in Scripture Prophecy, by the Author of ‘the Coming Struggle’* (London: Houlston & Stoneman, 1853), p. 1.

²² G. Pinhorn, *The Russian Antichrist; or Latter-Day Invasion of Gog and Magog* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longman, 1854), p. 4.

²³ Pinhorn, *Russian Antichrist*, p. 7.

²⁴ Pae, *Mission and Destiny of Russia*, p. 17.

²⁵ Figes, *Crimea*, p. 70.

draw as much on such ‘fears and fantasies’ as on the actual details of the text. Nevertheless, there is little question that the identification of Gog with Russia enabled British readers to align the monstrous characteristics of the biblical figure with an already traditional caricature of vicious Russian imperialism.

The Merchants of Tarshish and British Imperial Power

If the Russian Gog was a fearsome threat, the logical question to follow was: ‘Who will stand up to him and protect the peace-loving nations of the world?’ For British writers on prophecy this coalesced with perhaps more important questions still; ‘where is Britain to be found in Ezekiel’s prophecies?’ and, by extension, ‘where will Britain be when the Final Battle comes?’ For Lewis Mayer, writing in 1803 while Napoleon’s invasion fleet was gathering on the other side of the Channel, Britain is the ‘land of unwall’d villages’ (Ezek 38:11) which Gog so covets.²⁶ But for mid-nineteenth-century millenarians one interpretation returns again and again. Britain and its empire are to be found in the ‘merchants of Tarshish’ of 38:13, who offer challenging words to Gog and his invading horde. So, for example, Pae’s earlier pamphlet, *The Coming Struggle Among the Nations of the Earth*, trumpets:

‘Sheba and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto him, Art thou come to take a spoil? Hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey?’ How emphatically does this language identify Britain as the noble and single-handed opponent of Gog the king of the North. . .²⁷

Despite the rhetoric, to see Britain as Tarshish offers something of a challenge, not least because all of our prophetic interpreters are broadly committed to a literal interpretation of the text. Rhos, Meshech and Tubal are quite literally Russia, Moscow and Tobolsk. The Russian Tsar is the literal descendant of these ancient peoples. Can the same be said for Britain and Tarshish? Some writers do claim that Britain is identical with the biblical Tarshish. This is the line taken in the anonymous 1842 publication *The*

²⁶ Mayer, *Bonaparte, the Emperor of the French*, p. 25.

²⁷ D. Pae, *The Coming Struggle Among the Nations of the Earth: Or, the Political Events of the Next Fifteen Years: Described in Accordance with Prophecies in Ezekiel, Daniel, and the Apocalypse; Shewing Also the Important Position Britain Will Occupy at the End of the Awful Conflict* (London: Houlston & Stoneman, 1853), pp. 25–26.

Kings of the East, which argues rather implausibly and at great length that the ancients obtained all their tin from British mines, and that the Celts of Cornwall and Wales have a Phoenician origin.²⁸ Such arguments, even made in prodigious detail, failed to persuade most of his fellow millenarians, since the majority view appears to be that no literal Tarshish remains in existence and that, in this very special case, the text must be understood not literally but typologically. William Chamberlain, perhaps the most scholarly of our interpreters, makes the case in his 600-page *National Restoration and Conversion of the Twelve Tribes of Israel*:

the name is used by Ezekiel, ‘Tarshish, and all the young Lions thereof’, not literally, as of any sons of Javan, but typically, of some people in the latter days, being, like the sons of Tarshish, celebrated for *maritime, colonizing, and mercantile* ascendancy [*italics mine*].²⁹

Once these crucial characteristics are introduced, then a careful reading of the various biblical references to Tarshish allows Chamberlain to reach the following conclusion:

Thus, then, we have traced, and, I believe, fairly and truthfully traced, six various interpretations of the prophetic, or typical, Tarshish; and the sum of them is this:—Tarshish, in Ezek. xxxviii. 13, means, The most renowned maritime, colonizing, commercial, warlike people of the latter days, celebrated for manufactures both in metals and fabrics for clothing, and eminently engrossing the commerce of the west and east of the world, descended from Japheth, and residing in the islands of the west—in Europe.³⁰

Only Britain, currently reaching the height of its commercial and imperial power, fits the bill. Moreover, Britain does not stand entirely alone: the mention of Sheba, Dedan and the ‘young lions’ points to the eastward extension of the British Empire, and especially to the East India Company.³¹ Moreover, the heraldic connection with the British lion meant that the ‘young lions’ came to encompass not only Britain’s eastern possessions

²⁸ *The Kings of the East: An Exposition of the Prophecies Determining from Scripture and from History the Power for Whom the Mystical Euphrates Is Being ‘Dried Up’* (London: Seeley & Burnside, 1842), pp. 239–76; Anael, *Gog and Magog*, p. 24.

²⁹ W. Chamberlain, *The National Restoration and Conversion of the Twelve Tribes of Israel: Or, Notes on Some Prophecies Believed to Relate to Those Two Great Events; and Intended to Show That the Conversion Will Take Place After the Restoration; and That the Occasion of It Has Been Uniformly Predicted* (London: Wertheim and Macintosh, 1854), p. 369; Cf. J. Cumming, *The End: Or, the Proximate Signs of the Close of This Dispensation* (London: John Farquhar Shaw, 5th Thousand, 1855), p. 269.

³⁰ Chamberlain, *National Restoration*, p. 377.

³¹ Pae, *Coming Struggle*, 24–25; Anael, *Gog and Magog*, p. 24.

but the wider family of British colonies (and former colonies) throughout the world.³²

Yet even once Britain is identified as the Tarshish of Ezekiel 38:13, what difference does this make? There is still a significant exegetical problem, since the Gog prophecy leaves little room for human agency in bringing about Israel's salvation. Gog is defeated by cosmic upheaval, miraculous confusion, and fire and brimstone (38:19–22): this is all of a piece with Ezekiel's typical theocentricity, and the people of Israel themselves have little to do but bury the bodies and burn weapons. As is clear from the tone of the preceding comments, however, our prophetic interpreters will not be satisfied to see Britain as merely a privileged nation of rubbish collectors and undertakers.

Britain's opposition to the Russian Gog is discovered in the challenging questions that Tarshish asks: 'Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?' For *The Kings of the East* the tone of the words implies a taunt, and the assembled nations are 'intimating by their sarcastic questions the futility of the attempt, the utter discomfiture of all [Gog's] plans.'³³ Yet it is far from obvious that the merchants' questions in 38:13 *do* represent a challenge, far less a commitment to armed struggle. Those commentators down the years who have had anything at all to say about the verse have tended to find the merchants of Tarshish and their fellows to be enthusiastic accomplices to Gog's rapine and pillage. In his recent commentary Daniel Block goes so far as to describe them as 'vultures hoping to take advantage of the spoils of this war', and earlier commentators such as Lowth and Fairbairn express the same view.³⁴

Some of our millenarians simply assert that the questions are challenging, but once again Walter Chamberlain comes to the rescue with a piece of detailed exegesis. For Chamberlain the question 'conveys the force of *indignant disapproval*'.³⁵ He is aware that his view is contrary to the usual one, and his argument depends on the affirmative style of question asked: the text does not say, 'art thou not come up?' to which

³² Reisenauer, "Tidings Out of the East", p. 156.

³³ *The Kings of the East*, p. 283.

³⁴ D. I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48* (New International Commentary on the Old Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 449; Lowth, *A Commentary on the Prophet Ezekiel*, p. 314; Fairbairn, *Ezekiel*, p. 17 n. 2.

³⁵ Chamberlain, *National Restoration*, p. 234.

the expected answer would be 'yes thou art'. Rather it says 'art thou come up?', to which the implied answer is 'not with our consent'.³⁶ To support this contention he draws on the respected Hebrew grammarians Salomon Glassius (1593–1656) and Christian Noldius (1626–83), both of whom argue that the ה-interrogative used in a positive question normally expects the answer no.³⁷ Noldius goes so far as to say that such use implies 'in addition to the question a mood of indignation, reproach or wonder'.³⁸ Chamberlain then concludes that 'Sheba, Dedan, and Tarshish are prophesied of as inquiring affirmatively of a fact accomplished, viz., of Gog's invasion of Palestine, "Are ye come up?" and by that mode of speech are made by Ezekiel to express their indignation that he has done so.'³⁹ Chamberlain seems to disregard Noldius' 'wonder', preferring to emphasize indignation and reproach, and he finds Noldius remiss for failing to draw attention to how prominent the form is in this particular prophet's writings. He claims 38 examples within Ezekiel 1–39, of which he details three negative questions (13:7; 18:25, 29) and four positive ones (20:3, 4, 30; 23:36). In these latter, he argues, 'an inquiry is made affirmatively of *undoubted facts*, and the answer implied is that of *strong reproof and indignation*', which implies that in 38:13 then 'Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish (whoever they may be) are no part of Gog's confederacy, but condemn it.'⁴⁰

Chamberlain's linguistic argument here is careful and even plausible, although it has hardly proved popular with subsequent commentators. It was a godsend for other millenarians less inclined to bury themselves in the details of Hebrew grammar. Dr Cumming, who praises Chamberlain as 'a most able writer on the subject', offers his own expansive paraphrase:

We will wait a little; we are not quite sure that you will be allowed to have your own way in this matter. We understand your policy, we see your project; we do not agree to it; we choose to oppose it; and we speak therefore in the language of defiant sarcasm. Art thou come to take a spoil? You will find

³⁶ Chamberlain, *National Restoration*, pp. 234–35.

³⁷ Thus Chamberlain, *National Restoration*, 235, quotes Glassius as follows: 'Observatur et hoc, quod ה interrogativum in interrogationibus affirmativis *neget*, in affirmativis *affirmet*' (from his *Philologia Sacra*, i, p. 560).

³⁸ Chamberlain applies the following observation, made in no. 1059 of the 'Annotationes et Vindicationes' which form an appendix to Noldius' larger work, the *Concordantiae Particularum Ebraico-Chaldaicarum*: 'Quando praeter interrogationem connotatur *affectus indignantis, exprobrantis, vel admirantis*, dicitur ה, הַתִּימָהּ vel הַתִּמְיָהּ admirationis' (*National Restoration*, p. 236).

³⁹ Chamberlain, *National Restoration*, pp. 235–36. cf. GKC §150d 'a surprised or indignant refusal'.

⁴⁰ Chamberlain, *National Restoration*, p. 237.

it is not so easily done; for we mean to muster all our forces, whatever they may be and from whatever source they may come, to oppose, and resist, and repel you.⁴¹

This heartfelt conviction of Britain's active role in the Gog prophecy enables our prophetic interpreters to make a number of rhetorical moves, all of which tend to cut against the theocentric grain of Ezekiel's prophecy. In effect we see a collapsing of the distance between God's role and that of the British Empire, to such an extent that Britain almost eclipses God as the agent of millennial harmony. While these prophetic writers share some of the pessimism about the current state of the world common to all premillennial thinking, they are also patriots and they inherit a set of common cultural assumptions that Britain's imperial success is the result of divine favour and a reward for faithfulness.⁴² This common notion of the providential nature of British power reaches an almost ludicrous extreme in *'The Kings of the East'*, which offers a wealth of statistics 'based on government sources', and describing Britain's favourable population growth, life expectancy, mining productivity, trade volumes, and so on, concluding that:

... since mankind were first placed upon the earth, history has not recorded in the annals of any nation, a period, when wealth was accumulated so rapidly, and civilization advanced successfully, as in our own country since the commencement of the present peace.⁴³

For the author of *'The Kings of the East'*, Britain is not to be merely the passive recipient of this divine blessing but is especially called to work with God in the task of judgement, which should 'encourage our fleets and armies, and nerve the nation to undertake the work when called upon, with full assurance of victory.'⁴⁴ Moreover, Pae's *Coming Struggle* is striking in the way that it blurs the distinction between imperial, commercial and theological motives. Britain's resistance to the Russian threat may appear to be for secular reasons, but these are not paramount:

To preserve the East Indian market, and keep the path open to it, Britain will strive much and do much; but while her rulers may think that they are merely serving the nation they are really accomplishing one of the grand

⁴¹ Cumming, *The End*, p. 269.

⁴² See, e.g., S. Brown, *Providence and Empire: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain and Ireland, 1815–1914* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2008).

⁴³ *The Kings of the East'*, p. 50.

⁴⁴ *The Kings of the East'*, p. 55.

designs of God and evolving events, while they cause her to take measures for the preservation of this distant part of her Empire, will really and only produce occurrences which will facilitate the great design of Jehovah. . .⁴⁵

The expectation that the Jews would return to Palestine was a staple of eschatological speculation in this period, and Pae again aligns millenarian and strategic considerations by arguing that the placing of a Jewish colony in Palestine may seem to secular minds the only way to keep the path to India open.⁴⁶

The coincidence of theological reflection and practical politics only increased once hostilities with Russia had actually begun in late 1853. For George Pinhorn, preaching in rural Shropshire, the appeal to prophecy resolves the moral and religious difficulty of Christian Britain fighting alongside Muslim Turkey against Christian Russia: 'it is appropriate to ally with Muslim Turkey if it is to fulfil the word of prophecy'.⁴⁷ The popular preacher Dr John Cumming's 1855 summary of prophecy, *The End*, is marginally more guarded in its sabre-rattling conclusion. Even if Russian aggression is part of God's plan it is still wicked, and requires a response:

Our resistance of this aggression, on the supposition that Tarshish is the typical country indicating our own, is right in the light of duty, and it is indicated in the light of prophecy. I would not say that we ought to go and oppose the Russian aggression, because God has predicted that Tarshish shall do so; but I hold that in commencing this war—terrible as it is, unspeakably terrible—we were right; it was in the sight of God inevitably our duty. I have no sympathy therefore with those who think that war is and can be never a nation's duty.⁴⁸

And being on the right side in the final battle is not without its benefits. Cumming is confident that even if the end 'success rests with God', Britons will be rewarded for doing their duty:

In doing the right as a nation we are securing immunity for ourselves. When the clouds of wrath charged with righteous retribution shall sweep with impetuous career through the sky of broad Europe, it is a delightful thought that the homes and the hearths of your children, if not of yourselves, will

⁴⁵ Pae, *Coming Struggle*, p. 20.

⁴⁶ Pae, *Coming Struggle*, p. 22. Cf. Cumming, *The End*, pp. 282–83. For other examples of this alignment between millenarian and political concerns see E. Bar-Yosef, 'Christian Zionism and Victorian Culture', *Israel Studies* 8 (2003), pp. 18–44.

⁴⁷ Pinhorn, *Russian Antichrist*, p. 15. Figes notes that the 'issue of defending the Muslim Turks against the Christian Russians represented a major obstacle for Anglican Conservatives' (*Crimea*, p. 150).

⁴⁸ Cumming, *The End*, p. 280.

be sheltered by what our brave ones have endured and our gallant ones have done; and all because they did their duty, and our nation accepted its responsibility, and took its place in this great war.⁴⁹

Pae's *Coming Struggle* is even more expansive about Britain's place in the new divine order after the final battle. Britain will be one of very few nations to emerge with its identity intact and, what is more:

It is very natural to suppose that Britain will continue to hold a high place among the nations, on account of the noble and important mission she will have fulfilled, though what that position will be, or how long she will retain it, it is impossible to say. The Anglo-Saxon race must, from the very nature of their constitution, be the leading people, and will probably continue unrivalled in intellectual greatness.⁵⁰

And in fact, even though we are to expect a restored and glorious Jewish kingdom, this will not take away Britain's preeminent place among the nations:

but it is evident the Hebrews will have the chief place during that glorious era which these stirring changes are to usher in. They will become *officially* greater than any of the other nations, and that in virtue of their covenant agreement with Jehovah, but that appears to be the extent of their privilege.⁵¹

Moreover, as the emphasis turns to America as Britain's partner, the tone shifts from British imperialism to a simpler Anglo-Saxon racial superiority:

In point of intellectual attainments, the Jewish race can never soar above the Saxon mind, and therefore they can never become morally greater than Britain or America. These two countries, especially the latter, will continue to move forward the chariot wheels of the world's progression, and carry the human soul through endless stages of development, till the highest point of its earthly compass is reached, and the wider sphere and nobler pursuits of eternity shall unfold themselves.⁵²

We must be very careful before equating premillennial restorationism with any genuine enthusiasm for the Jewish people: Jewish restoration to

⁴⁹ Cumming, *The End*, p. 282.

⁵⁰ Pae, *Coming Struggle*, p. 28.

⁵¹ Pae, *Coming Struggle*, p. 28.

⁵² Pae, *Coming Struggle*, p. 28.

Palestine may be what Pae calls ‘the very keystone to the whole political structure of the world’, but it is far from the climax.⁵³

Reading Gog in Victorian Culture

The claims made in these books, sermons and pamphlets may seem outlandish to modern ears, and indeed they were never exactly mainstream in their own day. Eitan Bar-Yosef, in a 2003 study entitled ‘Christian Zionism and Victorian Culture’, makes a compelling case that despite the prevalence of millenarian beliefs and their elite origins, the cause of Jewish restoration was always seen as eccentric or marginal by the Victorian political mainstream.⁵⁴ This is true as far as it goes: Britain did not suddenly start laying on ships to ferry Jews to Palestine, and millenarian thinking clearly had little direct impact on foreign policy. However, I think it would be mistake to measure the influence of these works solely in terms of proto-Zionist policy. The authors of these tracts were often men of considerable authority and influence, at least within their own evangelical circles. They were well-known voices and a great number of people heard or read their words. For example, Dr Cumming’s sermons were extremely well attended, and while Pae was a popular novelist who became the first editor of the hugely successful Scottish periodical, *The People’s Friend*. His *Coming Struggle* was clearly designed have as wide an audience as possible: he was not averse to using the tactics of the novelist or even showman to get his message across, and it is possible that the pamphlet sold as many as 200,000 copies. Millenarian books and pamphlets were reviewed in the more mainstream press, even if only to discount their methods and conclusions. At the end of a scathing review of Pae’s *Mission and Destiny of Russia* the *Athenaeum*’s reviewer tellingly asks:

Why do we re-produce these absurdities? For this reason:—they are read by thousands and thousands of the curious, the credulous, and the ignorant. We desire that those who have charge of public opinion, who are in some degree responsible for the straying of the multitude, should see how far religious feeling is abused by those who ought to know better.⁵⁵

Even in 1864 the impact of *The Coming Struggle* had not been forgotten, and the prospect of a sixth sequel prompted an editorial in the London

⁵³ Pae, *Coming Struggle*, p. 10; cf. Bar-Yosef, ‘Christian Zionism and Victorian Culture’.

⁵⁴ Bar-Yosef, ‘Christian Zionism and Victorian Culture’.

⁵⁵ ‘The War in the East’, *The Athenaeum*, 1375 (4 March 1854), p. 275.

Standard newspaper to fulminate against this kind of writing, and its greedy and fraudulent authors:

The prophets of the present age are surely a degenerate race. . . . They stoop to Grub Street and sell their mystic rolls at sixpence a copy. What is worse than all, when we have paid our money we seem to fail in getting the genuine article. We look into the prophetic peep-show—or what the writer is pleased to call ‘the telescope of divine prediction’—and all we can distinctly make out is a publisher’s shop, with the awful seer in the back parlour ‘a-counting out the money.’⁵⁶

The popularity of tracts like *The Coming Struggle* may have caused mainstream reviewers like these to despair, but there can be no doubt that there was a genuine market for apocalyptic speculation, and that the millenarian writers and preachers did provide a biblical and hence traditional framework through which their numerous readers could make sense of an increasingly threatening and uncertain world. The literary critic Mary Carpenter has written of a prophetic ‘consumer culture’ from the 1820s to the 1870s, in which the Apocalypse ‘was packaged not only in terms of current events in recent history, but as a promotion of British national identity with its religious and racial exclusions.’⁵⁷ If this is true of the interpretation of the book of Revelation, it is most certainly true of Ezekiel as well. It is precisely what we have seen as our millenarian writers move on to draw out the moral and political implications of their exegesis, and use their biblical interpretation to repackage both current fears about Russian expansion and deeply held stereotypes of the nature of Russian imperial power.

In Victorian England it did not take a great stretch of imagination to see Gog as Russia. Where our millenarians are more inventive is in the way they manage to bring the merchants of Tarshish from the margins of Ezekiel’s prophecy into the centre of British imperial discourse. According to David Armitage, by the mid-eighteenth century a conception had taken root in which ‘the British Empire was, above and beyond all such polities, Protestant, commercial, maritime and free.’⁵⁸ These are precisely

⁵⁶ ‘Eleven Years Ago . . .’, *The Standard* (23 August 1864), p. 4.

⁵⁷ M. W. Carpenter, *Imperial Bibles, Domestic Bodies: Women, Sexuality, and Religion in the Victorian Market* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), p. 131.

⁵⁸ D. Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 8.

the characteristics of British Tarshish in these tracts and sermons, and they are given further emphasis by the contrast with Gog and his Empire. Russia/Gog is not Protestant, but exotically Orthodox. Russia's empire is not founded on free trade, but on the desire to seize spoil and carry off plunder, and the Russian Gog requires ever more and more land to conquer. Russia's system of government is not free and Parliamentary; rather the Tsar is 'the Autocrat', feared and worshipped in equal measure by his subjects. In this way, the monstrous Gog is used to underline the 'otherness' of the Russian empire and at the same time the traditional virtues of British rule. And yet there is a deep irony here, since by the 1850s the days when Britain's Empire was 'free and commercial' are long gone (if they ever existed). We are well into the second phase of British imperialism, marked especially in India and Africa by 'military conquest, racial subjugation, economic exploitation and territorial expansion'.⁵⁹ In presenting the disparity between Russian and British power in such stark, even mythological terms, the interpreters of prophecy leave no room for a critique of Britain's empire, whose politics so miraculously align with those of Jehovah. The exegetical creativity and powerful rhetoric of men like Chamberlain, Cumming, and Pae serve to disguise the actual state of affairs. For in reality their beloved 'merchants of Tarshish' may have been standing too close to Block's 'vultures' for comfort, and they could just as well have asked the question 'Art thou come to take spoil?' of their own British nation and its imperial ambitions.

⁵⁹ Armitage, *Ideological Origins*, p. 3.

