

THE PARLEYING NATIONS

MY FRIENDS, we are now moving into the heart and centre of the wonderful and, perhaps, topical prophecies of Ezekiel in the Tenach, the Old Testament, concerning the restored people Israel and the restored land Israel. Let us first take a backward glance over the immediate ground we have already covered so far.

In my penultimate message we viewed, with tranquil eyes, the smiling prophetic picture of a peaceful nation, the nation of Israel, portrayed through the prophetic eyes of Ezekiel as being back in the beloved land in wholesome rest: Israel tending his flocks in the verdant valleys; Israel plying his trades in honest industry; Israel cultivating his fields in sanguine expectation; Israel, liberated from the distorting pressures of the גלות (galut) demonstrating his joyous Jewishness and his national consciousness.

The scented blossoms of Sharon's thriving groves, the lazy lap of the blue-bosomed waters of the Mediterranean, earth's feathered fronds and foliage waving green greetings to the scudding clouds above – this was the tranquil warp upon which the sons and daughters of Israel wove the colourful threads of their manifold activities to produce the picturesque and restful tapestry of restored Israel peacefully minding his own business.

“Peace! And no longer from its brazen portals
The blast of War's great organ shakes the skies!
But beautiful as songs of the immortals,
The holy melodies of love arise.” (Longfellow, Arsenal at Springfield)

But, wait! In my last message we raised our eyes from this blissful scene to behold, with dismay, the Gogian devil of greed and hate already taking his seat at the keyboard of War's great organ and we now await with apprehension the opening blast of invasion's cruel cacophony.

Gog, the leader of the great northern anti-theocratic power, and his Lackeys stand poised to plunge this harmony of hope beneath the drowning discords of dissolution. Invasion, dire and devastating, is imminent! Israel is in peril!

Before we follow the issue and seek to draw from the ancient Biblical names of these predatory nations any possible and permissible identity with nations existing today, let us use this calm before the storm to notice another group of peoples which I have thought fit to distinguish from the Gogian hordes by dubbing them The Parleying Nations.

In the nomenclature of Ezekiel's day these ethnic groups, these parleying nations, are referred to as **“Sheba and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof.”**

Reserving our attempt to identify these national entities to later messages in this particular series, let us now rather address ourselves to an examination of the role they play in this prophetic drama.

We shall be disappointed if we are expecting an exhaustive delineation from the prophet Ezekiel regarding the behaviour of the nations known then as Sheba, Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish **“with all the young lions thereof,”** for we have only one verse to which to turn for our information namely, the thirteenth verse of Ezekiel’s thirty–eighth chapter.

This one verse is a mere spark quite insufficient to afford a total illumination of all the circumstances; yet, my friends, I regret to say some reckless enthusiasts have so stored their minds with materials from which the protective moisture of better judgement has been so evaporated that, from the meagre spark of this one verse, their imagination’s eager storehouse has caught fire and they have provided us with a veritable conflagration of human speculation and conjecture in which they invite us to view Britain and the United States of America locked in smoky battle together with Soviet Russia. All this from one single verse of Scripture!

However true such a picture may actually become – and I’m not denying the possibility – yet surely the meagre context of this one verse does not justify the presentation of such a picture and, if we indulge in such imaginative combustions in misguided quest of the spectacular, we shall be likely to incinerate in reckless calcinations the very truth for which we seek.

Please let us treat this single verse, this little spark of prophetic light, with circumspection. What, then, do we really find in this one verse?

We find that Gog, the leader of the great godless power north of Israel, is being addressed; let me quote the prophetic words for you:

“Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto you: Come you to take the spoil? Have you assembled your company to take the prey? To carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take great spoil?”

It will be apparent to you, my listening friends, that the unstrained context of this single verse suggests an attitude rather than an action for the comments are brief in content and interrogative in character.

Gog leading his Magogians, Rosh, Meshech and Tubal and supported by Paras, Cush, Put, Gomer and Togarmah and **“many peoples”** is bent upon the plunder of restored Israel.

Directed towards this intention Sheba, Dedan, the merchants of Tarshish and all the young lions thereof launch not a quietus but a question, not an immolation but an interrogation, **“Are you come to take . . . ”**

What is behind this question? Is it an invitation to a parley or is it the initiation of a protest? There is little to guide us on this point, you will admit, because we are bereft of the tonal qualities in which the questions are launched. This renders decisions well nigh impossible.

If we utter the questions in bellicose tones we could infer a protest and the more belligerent the intonation the stronger the protest. On the other hand, if the cadence is conciliatory the questions could be intended to assume the nature of an invitation to parley.

Since we all lack the knowledge of the tone and tenor in which the questions are advanced it is not surprising that some commentators have permitted their imaginations to supply this deficiency; hence some give to the enquiries a voice of protest, others a voice of avarice.

The former suggest that Sheba, Dedan, Tarshish and the “**young lions**” are dissentient nations launching a diplomatic or even a military protest against the warlike Gog. This may be so; I don’t know.

The latter suggests that these are parleying nations launching their enquiry because “they hoped to derive personal gain by purchasing the goods plundered by Gog’s armies.”¹ Certainly, the use of the word “**merchants,**” you will agree, lends support to this latter view, for merchants as a class buy and sell; they do not fight or issue international protests.

Probably the interesting point of parley or protest will not be known by us until the time of the future fulfilment of the prophecy; however, the point itself is relatively unimportant because, whether one or the other, whether parley or protest, it is the Eternal God of Israel, blessed be He, Who launches against Gog the really effective protest which packs the scene with drama unsurpassed and demonstrates to the nations of the world that the God who lived in Moses’ time is just the same today.

That great leader David Ben-Gurion uttered words weighted with invincible verity when he said,

“We face the difficulties ahead of us with confidence, for our trust is in the Rock of Israel.”

In my next message we shall venture together into the very scene of the prophesied Gogian invasion and thus prepare ourselves to view the advent of the God-sent intervention!

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(1900-1964)

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This article is an extract from the very popular radio series, “Treasures From Tenach”, which are also transcribed. Both audio (click MP3 tab, then “013parleyingnations.mp3”, and transcriptions are available for free download at www.thevineyard.org.au