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## Ezekiel 38 & 39

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## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part I

by Thomas Ice

The battle of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38 and 39 is one of the most debated items in the area of biblical prophecy. Commentator Ralph Alexander said, "One of the perennial enigmas of Biblical prophecy has been the Gog and Magog event described in Ezekiel 38 and 39."<sup>1</sup> Almost every aspect of this ancient prophecy has been disputed, including whether it was fulfilled in the past or is still a future prophecy. Who are the peoples involved and do they relate to modern nations? How should we understand the weapons that are described? If a future event, when does it take place on the prophetic timeline? This is why I want to attempt an in-depth analysis of this important passage.

### REAL OR ONLY IMAGINED?

One of the first things to handle when dealing with this or any Biblical prophecy is whether or not the God and Ezekiel intended to communicate a message that would be fulfilled in history. Since I believe that all Biblical prophecy intends historical fulfillment, there is nothing in this passage that would suggest differently. However, there is a school of interpretation, primarily among liberal scholars, that does not believe that the Ezekiel passage (or most prophetic Scripture) was meant to give a prophecy that would be fulfilled in history. This view is often known as idealism. The *idealist* does not believe either that the Bible indicates the timing of events or that we can determine their timing in advance. Therefore, idealists see prophetic passages as a teacher of great truths about God to be applied to our present lives. Idealists believe that the Bible uses prophetic passages to present principles between "a message that is universal and abiding. That message is not bound to any particular time or place even though these terms and expressions represent scenes taken from countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea and other places in the Middle East."<sup>2</sup>

One who advocates a non-historical, idealist approach to Bible prophecy is Brent Sandy in his *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks*.<sup>3</sup> Typical of those under the spell of today's postmodern influence, Sandy exalts the interpretative process at the expense of arriving at a definite theology. Sandy's doublespeak is evident in the following:

The limitations of prophecy as a source of information for the future were demonstrated with examples from various prophetic parts of Scripture. It became evident that the predicative element of prophecy is more translucent than transparent. Prophecy is always accurate in what it intends to reveal, but rarely does it reveal information so that we may know the future in advance. Figures of speech function to describe not the details of what is going to happen but the seriousness of what is going to happen.<sup>4</sup>

So typical of those evangelicals who want to assign to biblical prophecy some special category or literary genre they call "apocalyptic," Sandy says, "interpreters must withhold judgment on many particulars of prophecy, unambiguous prophetic themes abound throughout Scripture, centering on the second coming of Jesus the Messiah."<sup>5</sup> Sandy concludes, "if my conclusions about the language of prophecy and apocalyptic are correct, all systems of eschatology are subject to reconsideration."<sup>6</sup> It should not be surprising, since Sandy is beholden to a postmodern mindset that he believes that the

correct understanding of the Bible's eschatological message will be composed of a blend of all the different prophetic views.<sup>7</sup>

One thing is clear about Sandy and the emerging evangelical "scholarly" view is that prophecy should not be taken literally, as has been done by dispensationalists. And they say we know this, primarily, because the prophetic portions of the Bible are apocalyptic, which were not intended to be taken literally. They may not be able to tell you what these sections of Scripture actually mean, but this one thing they know: prophecy should not be interpreted literally (that is according to the historical, grammatical approach) and prophecy is primarily about ideas and principles, not future historical events. "The 'mythical' understanding of these nations and the prophecy that involves them fails to convey to us," notes Jon Ruthven, "the sense of a concrete, literal event that seems justified by what is described in Ezekiel—especially to chapters 38–39."<sup>8</sup>

### VARIOUS TIMING VIEWS

Prophecy expert, Mark Hitchcock notes: "By far, the most controversial issue in Ezekiel 38–39 is the setting or timing of the invasion. The specific time of the invasion in Ezekiel 38 is difficult to determine."<sup>9</sup> There is no doubt that this is the greatest problem to overcome in our understanding of this passage. In fact, the various positions are labeled according to one's view concerning when these events will be fulfilled.

Among those who believe that the Gog-led invasion is historical, some believe that it has already occurred. For example, preterist Gary says, "The battle in Ezekiel 38 and 39 is clearly an ancient one . . ."<sup>10</sup> When does he believe that this battle took place? Amazingly, DeMar and only a handful of commentators insist that Ezekiel 38 and 39 was fulfilled by the events described in Esther 9, occurring in about 473 B.C. in the days of Queen Esther of Persia.<sup>11</sup> The other views that take this invasion as a historical event place its occurrence in a time future to our day.

Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins in their best-selling novel *Left Behind*,<sup>12</sup> place this invasion of Israel right before the rapture of the church. The strength of this position is that it accounts for the burning of the weapons of war for seven years as mentioned in Ezekiel 39:9. However, Tim LaHaye has told me personally that even though they represented a pre-rapture position on Ezekiel 38 and 39 in their novel, he tends to place it after the rapture but before the tribulation.

The next view, which is the one I hold at this time, is that it will happen after the rapture but before the tribulation. It will be during the interval of days, weeks, months or years between the rapture and the start of the seven-year tribulation.<sup>13</sup> This view also accounts for the seven years of Ezekiel 39:9. I have always thought that one of the strengths of this view is the way in which it could set the stage for the Biblical scenario of the tribulation. If the tribulation is closely preceded by a failed regional invasion of Israel, in other words Russia and her Muslim allies, then this would remove much of the Russian and Muslim influence currently in the world today and allow a Euro-centric orientation to arise. So the tribulation is preceded by a failed regional attack on Israel and this is why the tribulation ends with all the peoples of the world attacking Israel at Armageddon. It could also set the stage for the rebuilding of the Temple as a result of Islamic humiliation.

Perhaps the most widely held view put forth within dispensational literature is that this invasion will take place around the middle of the seven-year tribulation. This view often identifies Ezekiel 38 and 39 with an invasion of the king of the north in Daniel

11:40. Another major argument is based upon the statement that Israel will be “living securely, all of them” (Ezek. 38:8), which is the result of the false peace brought by the anti-Christ in the first half of the tribulation. This view has a lot in its favor.

A significant number of Bible teachers believe that the Gog and Magog event is synonymous with what the Book of Revelation calls the Campaign of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16).<sup>14</sup> Since Armageddon is a huge invasion of Israel around the time of the second coming and the invasion of Israel described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 is said to be in “the latter years” (Ezek. 38:8) and “in the last days” (Ezek. 38:16), then they must be the same event. A similar, but slightly different view is that the invasion occurs after the second coming of Christ, during the interlude between the tribulation and the start of the millennium. The main argument for this view is that Israel would be dwelling in peace (Ezek. 38:8).

The last major view is that the battle of Ezekiel 38 and 39 will occur at the end of the millennium. The basis for this view is significant since Revelation 20:7–9 speaks of a conflict at the end of the millennium when Satan is released. Verse 8 says, “(Satan) will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corner of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war . . .” The strength of this view is obvious, Gog and Magog are specifically mentioned in the text.

In our next installment I will begin a systematic study of Ezekiel 38 and 39 as we examine the issue that will help us understand our Lord’s intended meaning of this great prophecy. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph H. Alexander, “A Fresh Look At Ezekiel 38 and 39,” *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society*, vol. 17 (Summer, 1974), p. 157.

<sup>2</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary, Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Sandy, *Plowshares*, p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> Sandy, *Plowshares*, p. 203.

<sup>6</sup> Sandy, *Plowshares*, p. 206.

<sup>7</sup> Sandy, *Plowshares*, p. 250, f.n. 14.

<sup>8</sup> Jon Mark Ruthven, *The Prophecy That Is Shaping History: New Research on Ezekiel’s Vision of the End* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2003), p. 30.

<sup>9</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *Iran The Coming Crisis: Radical Islam, Oil, And The Nuclear Threat* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2006), p. 178.

<sup>10</sup> Gary DeMar, “Ezekiel’s Magog Invasion: Future or Fulfilled?” *Biblical Worldview Magazine*, vol. 22 (December, 2006), p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), pp. 12–15.

<sup>12</sup> Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1995), pp. 9–15.

<sup>13</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum defends this view in *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), pp. 106–25.

<sup>14</sup> This view is held by Dave Hunt, *How Close Are We?* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992).

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part II

by Thomas Ice

*And the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him."*

—Ezekiel 38:1–2

"This was the final message in this series of six night oracles delivered by Ezekiel," notes Ralph Alexander. "A central concern throughout all these night messages had been the possession of the land of Israel." "This series of night oracles was given to encourage the exiles that ultimately God would remove these invaders and restore this land to Israel."<sup>1</sup> A wonderful message indeed to which those who love Israel still look forward to today!

This prophecy is divided into two major sections. In the first section Ezekiel reveals the invasion by Gog with his allies (38:1–16). The second section reveals to us God's judgment that will befall Gog and his associates (38:17—39:16). This great prophecy begins with Ezekiel noting that it was not his idea to deal with the matter of Gog's invasion of Israel instead it was God who initiated and communicated this prophecy through verbal revelation, "the word of the LORD came to me saying."

### SON OF MAN

Ezekiel is called "son of man" throughout the book. "Son of man" is used 93 times in Ezekiel to refer to the prophet, with the first use found in 2:1. Why is Ezekiel so often addressed by God as "son of man" when he is about to receive revelation from the Lord? It appears that "son of man" underscores his humanity in relation to God. In other words, God is the One who is the Revealer while Ezekiel, as a human, is the recipient of the Divine message that he is to pass on to other human beings. Thus, Ezekiel is passing on to us the infallible prophecy of these two chapters, which will surely come to pass.

### SET YOUR FACE TOWARD GOG

Ezekiel is told to set his face "toward" or "against" Gog. The Brown, Driver, and Briggs (BDB) Hebrew Lexicon says, the Hebrew word translated "toward" is a preposition that denotes "motion to or direction towards (whether physical or mental)."<sup>2</sup> BDB also tells us that when "the motion or direction implied appears from the context to be of a hostile character," then it has a negative connotation and would be translated "against." Ezekiel is told to turn his face in the direction of the nation Gog, because the Lord is against him. Later in the sentence the text says for Ezekiel to "prophesy against him," that is Gog. The sense of this passage is that God is initiating the attack by Gog against Israel and the Lord is against or opposed to Gog and his allies. But just who is Gog? The identification of Gog has been a greatly debated issue.

The Hebrew proper noun "Gog" occurs 12 times in the Hebrew Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> All but one use occurs in Ezekiel 38 and 39 (Ezek. 8:2, 3, 14, 16, 18; 39:1 [2x], 11 [3x], 15). The only non-Ezekiel occurrence is in 1 Chronicles 5:4 and says, "The sons of Joel were Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his son." Other than demonstrating it was a real, proper name, the 1 Chronicles reference contributes nothing to our study of its use in Ezekiel and is not related to the Gog of Ezekiel's prophecy. Whoever he is, Gog appears

in this context to be a person, leader and ruler that God has told Ezekiel to prophesy against. Because of the frequent use of Gog in this passage, "we conclude, therefore, that Gog is the most important person or nation in this coalition,"<sup>4</sup> declare Mark Hitchcock.

The passage says that Gog is from the land of Magog. Some have said that Gog is a reference to the Antichrist. Charles Feinberg is right when he says, "but for this there is not a shred of biblical or nonbiblical evidence."<sup>5</sup> Some have suggested that Gog is a name "arbitrarily derived from the name of the country, Magog, but this is not valid because Gog appears in 1 Chronicles 5:4."<sup>6</sup> "The name Gog means 'high, supreme, a height, or a high mountain.'"<sup>7</sup> The only references to the Gog of Ezekiel's prophecy appear in the passage itself and there is virtually no information about Gog outside the Bible in history. However, when Gog leads his invasion of Israel he is said to come "from the remote parts of the north" (Ezek. 38:6). Louis Bauman tells us that "L. Sale-Harrison says in his booklet, *The Coming Great Northern Confederacy*: 'It is interesting to note that the very word 'Caucasus' means 'Gog's Fort.' 'Gog' and 'Chasan' (Fort) are two Oriental words from which it is derived.'"<sup>8</sup> So there does appear to be a faint reference to Gog in the general area of Russia that Gog is likely to be from.

Who then is Gog? Bauman says, "Without doubt, Russia will furnish the man—not *the Antichrist*—who will head up that which is known to most Bible students as 'the great northeastern confederacy' of nations and lead it to its doom upon the hills of Israel's land."<sup>9</sup> Hitchcock believes "the reason Gog is singled out eleven times by God in these two chapters is because God is the general over this coalition of nations in its great military campaign against Israel."<sup>10</sup> Hal Lindsey tells us, "Gog is the symbolic name of the nation's leader and Magog is his land. He is also the prince of the ancient people who were called Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal."<sup>11</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum informs us: "Who Gog will be can only be determined at the time of the invasion, for 'Gog' is not a proper name but a title for the ruler of Magog, just as the terms 'pharaoh,' 'kaiser,' and 'czar' were titles for rulers and not proper names."<sup>12</sup>

#### THE LAND OF MAGOG

Gog the leader of the invasion of the land of Israel is said to be "of the land of Magog." The proper noun Magog is used four times in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament.<sup>13</sup> Magog is used twice in the passage we are investigating (38:2; 39:6) and twice in genealogies (Gen. 10:2; 1 Chron. 1:5). Genesis 10:2 says, "The sons of Japheth were Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras." 1 Chronicles 1:5 is basically a repeat of the genealogical information from Genesis 10:2. The fact that Magog is used in the table of nations (Genesis 10)<sup>14</sup> provides a basis for tracing the movement of one of the earliest post-flood descendants of Noah.

It appears that Ezekiel is using the names of peoples, primarily from the table of nations, and where they lived at the time of the giving of this prophecy in the sixth century B.C. Therefore, if we are able to find out where these people and places were in the sixth century B.C. then we will be able to trace figure out who would be their modern antecedents today. I believe we will be able to accomplish this task and be able to know who will be involved in this battle if it were to come to pass in our own day.

It is probably fair to say that most scholars and experts would trace Magog's descendants to the ancient people that we know as the Scythians. Chuck Missler notes that a wide collection of ancient historians "identified Magog with the Scythians and southern Russia in the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C."<sup>15</sup> These ancients include: Hesiod, Josephus, Philo, and Herodotus.<sup>16</sup> Josephus lived in the first century A.D. and said, "Magog

founded the Magogians, thus named after him but who by the Greeks are called Scythians.”<sup>17</sup> Bauman tells us that Magog and his descendants must have immigrated north after the Flood and that “the Magogites were divided into two distinct races, one Japhetic, or European, and the other Turanian, or Asiatic.”<sup>18</sup>

Who are the Scythians? Edwin Yamauchi tells us that the Scythians were divided into two groups, a narrow and broad grouping. “In the narrow sense, the Scythians were the tribes who lived in the area which Herodotus designated as Scythia (i.e., the territory north of the Black Sea),” notes Yamauchi. “In the broad sense the word Scythian can designate some of the many other tribes in the vast steppes of Russia, stretching from the Ukraine in the west to the region of Siberia in the east.”<sup>19</sup>

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph Alexander, *Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

<sup>3</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 6.4.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 16.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 220.

<sup>6</sup> Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 220.

<sup>7</sup> Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, p. 17

<sup>8</sup> Louis S. Bauman, *Russian Events in the Light of Bible Prophecy* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1942), p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> Bauman, *Russian Events*, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, p. 17

<sup>11</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), p. 63.

<sup>12</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, [1982] 2003), p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 6.4.

<sup>14</sup> The table of nations is a term used for the records of the descendants Noah and his three sons: Ham, Shem and Japheth. Every human being on planet earth is a descendant of Noah and his three sons. If we could trace our genealogies far enough back we would find that we all descend from Noah through either Ham, Shem or Japheth.

<sup>15</sup> Chuck Missler, *The Magog Invasion* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front, 1995), p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Missler, *Magog Invasion*, pp. 29–31.

<sup>17</sup> Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, vol. 1, vi, i as cited in Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, p. 19.

<sup>18</sup> Bauman, *Russian Events*, p. 23.

<sup>19</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Foes from the Northern Frontier* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), p. 62.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part III

by Thomas Ice

*"Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him."*  
—Ezekiel 38:2

We have seen that Magog is a reference to the ancient Scythians, who gave rise to later descendants that settled along the eastern and northern areas of the Black Sea. "The descendants of ancient Magog—the Scythians—were the original inhabitants of the plateau of central Asia, and later some of these people moved into the area north of the Black Sea. The homeland of ancient Scythians is inhabited today by the former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kirghizia, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and the Ukraine."<sup>1</sup> But who is "the prince of Rosh"?

### THE ATTACK ON ROSH

The identification of Rosh is one of the most controversial and debated issues in the entire Gog and Magog prophecy, even though it should not be. I believe when one looks at the evidence it is overwhelming that this is a reference to the modern Russians. However, we need to first look at the evidence for such a conclusion.

Preterist prophecy critic, Gary DeMar contends, "In Ezekiel 38:2 and 39:1, the Hebrew word *rosh* is translated as if it were the name of a nation. That nation is thought to be modern Russia because *rosh* sounds like Russia."<sup>2</sup> He then quotes "Edwin M. Yamauchi, noted Christian historian and archeologist, writes that *rosh* 'can have nothing to do with modern 'Russia.'"<sup>3</sup> On a *Bible Answer Man* radio broadcast in October 2002, the host, Hank Hanegraaff, asked Gary DeMar what he thought about Tim LaHaye identifying Rosh as Russia, since the two words sound so much alike. DeMar responded, "The idea that you can take a word in Hebrew that sounds like the word in English, and then go with that and to create an entire eschatological position based upon that is . . . it's nonsense." As I will show later, identification of the Hebrew word *rosh* with Russia is not based upon similarity of sound. That is a flimsy straw man that DeMar constructs so that he can appear to provide a credible criticism of our view on this matter. DeMar then declares: "The best translation of Ezekiel 38:2 is 'the chief (head) prince of Meshech and Tubal.'"<sup>4</sup>

Concerning the possibility of a Russian/Islamic invasion of Israel in the end times, Marvin Pate and Daniel Hays say categorically, "The biblical term *rosh* has nothing to do with Russia."<sup>5</sup> And later they state dogmatically, "These positions are not biblical. . . a Russian-led Muslim invasion of Israel is not about to take place."<sup>6</sup>

A central issue in whether *rosh* refers to Russia is whether *rosh* is to be understood as a proper noun (the Russia view) or should it be taken as an adjective (the non-Russia view) and be translated in English as "chief." This is a watershed issue for anyone who wants to properly understand this passage.

### REASONS ROSH REFERS TO RUSSIA

Now, I want to deal with reasons why *rosh* should be taken as a noun instead of an adjective and then I will deal with whether it refers to Russia. The word *rosh* in Hebrew simply means "head," "top," or "chief."<sup>7</sup> It is a very common word and is used in all



Semitic languages. It occurs approximately seven hundred and fifty times in the Old Testament, along with its roots and derivatives.<sup>8</sup>

The problem is that the word *rosh* in Ezekiel can be translated as either a proper noun or an adjective. Many translations take *rosh* as an adjective and translate it as the word "chief." The King James Version, The Revised Standard Version, and the New International Version all adopt this translation. However, the New King James, the Jerusalem Bible, New English Bible, American Standard Version, and New American Standard Bible all translate *rosh* as a proper name indicating a geographical location. The weight of the evidence favors taking *rosh* as a proper name. There are five arguments that favor this view.

First, the eminent Hebrew scholars C. F. Keil and Wilhelm Gesenius both hold that the better translation of Rosh in Ezekiel 38:2-3 and 39:1 is as a proper noun referring to a specific geographical location.<sup>9</sup> Gesenius, who died in 1842 and is considered by modern Hebrew scholars as one of the greatest scholars of the Hebrew language, unquestionably believed that Rosh in Ezekiel was a proper noun identifying Russia. He says that *rosh* in Ezekiel 38:2,3; 39:1 is a, "pr. n. of a northern nation, mentioned with Meshech and Tubal; undoubtedly the *Russians*, who are mentioned by the Byzantine writers of the tenth century, under the name *the Ros*, dwelling to the north of Taurus . . . as dwelling on the river Rha (*Volga*)."<sup>10</sup>

This identification by Gesenius cannot be passed off lightly, as DeMar attempts to do. Gesenius, as far as we know, was not even a premillennialist. He had no eschatological, end time ax to grind. Yet, objectively, he says without hesitation that Rosh in Ezekiel 38—39 is Russia. In his original Latin version of the lexicon, Gesenius has nearly one page of notes dealing with the word Rosh and the Rosh people mentioned in Ezekiel 38—39. This page of notes does not appear in any of the English translations of Gesenius' Lexicon. Those who disagree with Gesenius have failed to refute his sizable body of convincing evidence identifying Rosh with Russia.<sup>11</sup> I do not know what DeMar would say about this evidence since he never deals with it.

Second, the *Septuagint*, which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, translates *Rosh* as the proper name *Ros*. This is especially significant since the *Septuagint* was translated only three centuries after Ezekiel was written (obviously much closer to the original than any modern translation).<sup>12</sup> The mistranslation of Rosh in many modern translations as an adjective can be traced to the Latin Vulgate of Jerome, which did not appear until around A.D. 400.<sup>13</sup> James Price, who has a Ph.D. in Hebrew from Dropsie, which is the leading Jewish academic University in America says, "The origin of the translation "chief prince of Meshech and Tubal" is traced to the Latin Vulgate. The early translators of the English Bible were quite dependent on the Latin Version for help in translating difficult passages. They evidently followed Jerome in Ezek 38:2, 3; 39:1."<sup>14</sup> Price further explains the reason for the erroneous translation as follows:

Evidently by the second century A.D. the knowledge of the ancient land of Rosh had diminished. And because the Hebrew word *rosh* was in such common use as "head" or "chief," Aquila was influenced to interpret *rosh* as an adjective, contrary to the LXX [Septuagint] and normal grammatical conventions. Jerome followed the precedent set by Aquila, and so diminished the knowledge of ancient Rosh even further by removing the name from the Latin Bible.

By the sixteenth century A.D. ancient Rosh was completely unknown in the West, so the early English translators of the Bible were influenced by the

Latin Vulgate to violate normal Hebrew grammar in their translation of Ezekiel 38–39. Once the precedent was set in English, it was perpetuated in all subsequent English Versions until this century when some modern versions have taken exception. This ancient erroneous precedent should not be perpetuated.<sup>15</sup>

Clyde Billington explains why Jerome went against most of the evidence and went with a deviant translation:

Jerome himself admits that he did not base his decision on grammatical considerations! Jerome seems to have realized that Hebrew grammar supported the translation of “prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal” and that it did not support his own translation of “chief prince of Moshoch and Thubal.” However, Jerome rejected translating Rosh as a proper noun because, “we could not find the name of this race [i.e. the Rosh people] mentioned either in Genesis or any other place in the Scriptures, or in Josephus. It was this non-grammatical argument that convinced Jerome to adopt Aquila’s rendering of Rosh as an adjective [“chief”] in Ezekiel 38–39.<sup>16</sup>

Third, many Bible dictionaries and encyclopedias, in their articles on Rosh, support taking it as a proper name in Ezekiel 38. Some examples: *New Bible Dictionary*, *Wycliffe Bible Dictionary*, and *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*.

Fourth, Rosh is mentioned the first time in Ezekiel 38:2 and then repeated in Ezekiel 38:3 and 39:1. If Rosh were simply a title, it would probably dropped in these two places because in Hebrew when titles are repeated they are generally abbreviated.

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), p. 363.

<sup>3</sup> DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, p. 363. Quote from Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Foes from the Northern Frontier: Invading Hordes from the Russian Steppes* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, p. 365.

<sup>5</sup> C. Marvin Pate and J. Daniel Hays, *Iraq—Babylon of the End Times?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), p. 69.

<sup>6</sup> Pate and Hays, *Iraq*, p. 136.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

<sup>8</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 6.4.

<sup>9</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 159. Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* (Reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 752.

<sup>10</sup> Gesenius, *Lexicon*, p. 752.

<sup>11</sup> Clyde E. Billington, Jr. “The Rosh People in History and Prophecy (Part One), *Michigan Theological*

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*Journal* 3:1 (Spring 1992), pp. 62-3.

<sup>12</sup> The ancient Greek translations of Symmachus and Theodotian also translated Rosh in Ezekiel 38—39 as a proper noun. Billington, “The Rosh People in History and Prophecy (Part One),” p. 59.

<sup>13</sup> Clyde E. Billington, Jr., “The Rosh People in History and Prophecy (Part Two),” *Michigan Theological Journal* 3:1 (Spring 1992), pp. 54-61.

<sup>14</sup> James D. Price, “Rosh: An Ancient Land Known to Ezekiel,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6:1 (1985), p. 88.

<sup>15</sup> Price, “Rosh: An Ancient Land,” p. 88.

<sup>16</sup> Billington, “The Rosh People in History and Prophecy (Part One),” p. 60.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part IV

by Thomas Ice

*"Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him."*  
—Ezekiel 38:2

Fifth, the most impressive evidence in favor of taking Rosh as a proper name is simply that this translation is the most accurate. G. A. Cooke, a Hebrew scholar, translates Ezekiel 38:2, "the chief of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal." He calls this "the most natural way of rendering the Hebrew."<sup>1</sup> Why is it the most natural way of rendering the Hebrew? *Rosh* appears in construct form in the Hebrew with Meshech and Tubal meaning that the grammar forms a list of three nouns. Some want to say that *rosh* is a noun functioning as an adjective since there should be an "and" if it were intended to be a list of three nouns. The same exact Hebrew construction appears in Ezekiel 38:5, as well as 27:13 and these are clearly recognized as a list of three nouns by grammarians even though "and" does not appear in either list. Normal Hebrew and Arabic grammar supports *rosh* as a noun (see also 38:3 and 39:1). Actually, Hebrew grammar demands that *rosh* be taken as a noun. No example of Hebrew grammar has ever been cited that would support taking *rosh* as an adjective. Instead, in Hebrew grammar one cannot break up the construct chain of the three nouns that have this kind of grammatical arrangement.<sup>2</sup> Hebrew scholar Randall Price says, "on linguistic and historical grounds, the case for taking *Rosh* as a proper noun rather than a noun-adjective is substantial and persuasive."<sup>3</sup>

In light of such overwhelming evidence, it is not surprising that Hebrew scholar James Price concludes the following:

It has been demonstrated that *Rosh* was a well-known place in antiquity as evidenced by numerous and varied references in the ancient literature. It has also been demonstrated that an adjective intervening between a construct noun and its *nomen rectum* is highly improbable, there being no unambiguous example of such in the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that regarding *Rosh* as a name is in harmony with normal Hebrew grammar and syntax. It is concluded that *Rosh* cannot be an adjective in Ezekiel 38–39, but must be a name. Therefore, the only appropriate translation of the phrase in Ezek 38:2, 3, and 39:1 is "prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal."<sup>4</sup>

Clyde Billington says, "the features of Hebrew grammar . . . dictate that Rosh be translated as a proper noun and not as an adjective, . . . It should, however, be noted that the grammatical arguments for the translation of 'Rosh' as a proper noun in Ezekiel 38–39 are conclusive and not really open for serious debate."<sup>5</sup> What would Gary DeMar say about such evidence? I do not know, since I have never seen him address these arguments. DeMar is merely prone to making dogmatic statements to the contrary based upon no real evidence for his position.

Therefore, having established that *Rosh* should be taken as a proper name of a geographical area, the next task is to determine what geographical location is in view.

### **HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SUPPORT FOR ROSH AS RUSSIA**

Clyde Billington has written a series of three scholarly articles in a theological journal presenting extensive historical, geographical and toponymic<sup>6</sup> evidence for why Rosh should be and is traced to the Russian people of today.<sup>7</sup> He interacts with the leading commentaries and authorities of the day in his research and presentation. Billington notes, "it is also clear that Jerome, in deciding to translate Rosh as an adjective rather than a proper noun, based his decision on a nongrammatical argument, i.e. that a people called the Rosh are not mentioned either in the Bible or by Josephus."<sup>8</sup> However, there is considerable historical evidence that a place known as Rosh was very familiar in the ancient world. While the word appears in a multitude of various languages, which have a variety of forms and spellings, it is clear that the same people are in view.

It is very likely that the name Rosh is actually derived from the name Tiras in Genesis 10:2 in the Table of Nations. Billington notes the Akkadian tendency to drop or to change an initial "t" sound in a name especially if the initial "t" was followed by an "r" sound. If you drop the initial "T" from Tiras you are left with "ras."<sup>9</sup> It makes sense for Ras or Rosh to be listed in Genesis 10 since all the other nations in Ezekiel 38:1-6 are also listed there. This means Jerome's claim that Rosh did not appear in the Bible or in Josephus is erroneous. Since Tiras and his descendants apparently are the same as the later Rosh people, then Rosh does appear in both the Table of Nations and Josephus.

Rosh (Rash) is identified as a place that existed as early as 2600 B.C. in Egyptian inscriptions. There is a later Egyptian inscription from about 1500 B.C. that refers to a land called Reshu that was located to the north of Egypt.<sup>10</sup> The place name Rosh (or its equivalent in the respective languages) is found at least twenty times in other ancient documents. It is found three times in the Septuagint (LXX), ten times in Sargon's inscriptions, once in Assurbanipal's cylinder, once in Sennacherib's annals, and five times in Ugaritic tablets.<sup>11</sup> Billington traces the Rosh people from the earliest times in recorded history up to the days of Ezekiel, as they appear multiple times throughout this historical period.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly, Rosh or Tiras was a well-known place in Ezekiel's day. In the sixth century B.C., the time Ezekiel wrote his prophecy, several bands of the Rosh people lived in an area to the north of the Black Sea. As we approach the eighth century, Billington cites a number of historical references showing that "there is solid evidence linking one group of Rosh People to the Caucasus Mountains."<sup>13</sup> From the same general period of time, Billington notes: "There is even one cuneiform document from the reign of the Assyrian King Sargon II (ruled 722-705 B.C.) which actually names all three peoples [Rosh, Meshech, Tubal] mentioned by Ezekiel 38-39."<sup>14</sup> Billington concludes this section of his historical studies as follows:

Therefore, there is irrefutable historical evidence for the existence of a people named Rosh/Rashu in 9th-7th century B.C. Assyrian sources. These same Assyrian sources also mention Meshech and Tubal whose names appear in conjunction with the name Rosh in Ezekiel 38-39. Clearly the Assyrians knew of the Rosh people, and so also did the prophet Ezekiel. It should be noted that Ezekiel wrote the Book of Ezekiel only about a 100 years later than extant Assyrian texts which mention the Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal peoples.<sup>15</sup>

### **DOES THE NAME RUSSIA COME FROM ROSH?**

The ancient Rosh people, who have been traced back to Tiras, a son of Japheth (Gen. 10:2), who migrated to the Caucasus Mountains in Southern Russia, are one of the genetic sources of the modern Russians of today. However, does the name for Russia come from the Biblical word Rosh as used in Ezekiel 38:2? We have seen that Marvin Pate and Daniel Hays have said categorically, "The biblical term rosh has nothing to do with Russia."<sup>16</sup> Their statement is typical of the sentiment of many critics today. But is such a conclusion where the evidence leads? I do not think so! Here's why.

First, we need to know that the Hebrew Old Testament was translated some time in the third century B.C. and it is known as the Septuagint (LXX is the abbreviation). The Septuagint translates the Hebrew word Rosh in all its uses by the Greek word "Ros" or "Rhos." The early church more often than not used the Septuagint as their primary Old Testament. It is still used in the Greek speaking world today as their translation of the Old Testament. Billington tells us: "early Greek Orthodox writers, using the LXX's spelling [Ros] of the name Rosh, identified the Rosh people of Ezekiel chs. 38–39 with the northern Rus people of Russia and the Ukraine."<sup>17</sup> These people would be ones that lived near, but north of the Greek speaking peoples. Such close proximity would mean that they would have been clear in whom they were identifying and they identified them with the Rosh people. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, The International Critical Commentary, ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), pp. 408-09. John B. Taylor agrees. He says, "If a place-name *Rosh* could be vouched for, RV's *prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal* would be the best translation" John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction & Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, gen. ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-varsity Press, 1969), p. 244. Therefore, this is the superior translation. For an extensive, thorough presentation of the grammatical and philological support for taking Rosh as a place name, see, James D. Price, "Rosh: An Ancient Land Known to Ezekiel," *Grace Theological Journal* 6:1 (1985), pp. 67-89.

<sup>2</sup> Grammatical summary derived from Jon Mark Ruthven, *The Prophecy That Is Shaping History: New Research on Ezekiel's Vision of the End* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2003), pp. 21–23.

<sup>3</sup> Randall Price, "Ezekiel" in Tim LaHaye & Ed Hindson, editors, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), p. 190.

<sup>4</sup> Price, "Rosh: An Ancient Land," pp. 88–89.

<sup>5</sup> Clyde E. Billington, Jr. "The Rosh People in History and Prophecy," (Part One), *Michigan Theological Journal* 3:1 (Spring 1992), p. 56.

<sup>6</sup> Toponymic means the study of place names.

<sup>7</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People," (Part One), pp. 55–65; Clyde E. Billington, Jr., "The Rosh People in History and Prophecy (Part Two)," *Michigan Theological Journal* 3:2 (Fall 1992), pp. 144–75; Clyde E. Billington, Jr., "The Rosh People in History and Prophecy (Part Three)," *Michigan Theological Journal* 4:1 (Spring 1993), pp. 36–63.

<sup>8</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People," (Part One), p. 56.

<sup>9</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People," (Part Two), pp. 166-67.

<sup>10</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People," (Part Two), pp. 145-46.

<sup>11</sup> Price, "Rosh: An Ancient Land," pp. 71-73.

<sup>12</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People," (Part Two), pp. 143-59.

<sup>13</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People," (Part Two), p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People," (Part Two), p. 170.

<sup>15</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People," (Part Two), p. 172.

<sup>16</sup> C. Marvin Pate and J. Daniel Hays, *Iraq—Babylon of the End Times?* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2003), p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People," (Part Three), p. 39.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part V

by Thomas Ice

*"Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him."*  
—Ezekiel 38:2

As we have seen previously, the Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew took *Rosh* as a proper noun and identified them with the people of Southern Russian and the Ukraine. Such a translation indicates that the Greek-speaking Jews in North Africa believed that *Rosh* was a proper noun and referred to a known people. After providing an impressive amount of data to support the notion that the Rosh people refer to modern day Russians, Clyde Billington declares:

Therefore, it is almost certain that the ancient people whom the Greeks called Tauroi/Tursenoi were identical to the people known as "Tiras" in the Bible. These same Tiras people of Genesis 10:2 were also called in other languages by a variety of names based upon the name Tiras. For example, note the names: Taruisha [Hittite], Turus/Teresh [Egyptian], Tauroi/Tursenoi [Greek], and Tauri/Etruscan [Latin].<sup>1</sup>

Second, Billington tells us, "From a variety of sources it is known that a people named the Ros or Rus lived in the same area near the Black Sea where the Tauroi people lived."<sup>2</sup> Billington also tells us that "early Byzantine Christian writers identified the Rosh people of Ezekiel 38–39 with an early group of people of southern Russia whom they called the "Ros."<sup>3</sup> We further learn that "the Byzantine Greeks used the LXX spelling [Ros] of the name because they unquestionably identified the Ros/Rus/Russian people of southern Russia with the Rosh people mentioned in Ezekiel 38–39."<sup>4</sup>

Third, "it is well-known that the first Russian state was founded by a people known as the Varangian Rus."<sup>5</sup> Many current scholars like Edwin Yamauchi support the notion that the name Rus, from which the modern name for Russia is derived, is a Finnish word and refers to Swedish invaders from the North, not from the Rosh people in the South. He says that the name Rus did not come to the region until the Middle Ages when it was brought by the Vikings.<sup>6</sup> However, while Yamauchi is a respected scholar, his dogmatic conclusion stands in direct opposition to the substantial historical evidence presented by the Hebrew scholar Gesenius, James Price, and Clyde Billington.

Billington provides six objections to Yamauchi's claim of a Northern origin of Rus instead of a Southern one. First, the Byzantine use of the word Rus for those who became the Russians pre-dates by hundreds of years the later Northern claim. Second, Byzantine sources never speak of these people as having immigrated from the North to the South. They "were long time inhabitants of the Black Sea—Russia—Ukraine—Crimea area, and none of the Byzantine sources states that the original homeland of the Ros was Scandinavia."<sup>7</sup> Third, since various forms of the Rosh people are found in use all the way back to the second century B.C., it is most unlikely that the Finns invented the name Rus. Fourth, "there is no logical reason why the Ros people should have adopted the foreign Finnish name of "Ruotsi" after migrating to southern Russia."<sup>8</sup> Fifth, "all modern scholars agree that the Varangians never called



themselves (and they were never called by others) 'Ros' while they still lived in Scandinavia near the Finns."<sup>9</sup> Finally, Byzantine and Western records indicate that there were people in Southern Russia who were already calling themselves by the name of "Rus" many years before the Northern invasion.<sup>10</sup>

It is clear when one sifts through the evidence that the Varangians who migrated from Scandinavia into Southern Russia were called by the name of "Rus" when they moved into that area which had already been known by that name for many years. Billington summarizes: "As was argued above, the Varangian Rus took their name from the native people named the Ros who had from ancient times lived in the area to the north of the Black Sea. In other words there were two Ros peoples: the original Sarmatian Ros people and the Varangian Rus people."<sup>11</sup>

It should be clear by now that *Rosh* does indeed refer to the modern day Russian people. Both grammatical and historical evidence have been provided. This is why I agree with the overall conclusions of Billington, who says:

1. Ezekiel 38–39 does mention a people called the "Rosh" who will be an allies of Meshech, Tubal, and Gog in the Last Days.
2. There were Rosh peoples who lived to the north of Israel in the Caucasus Mountains and to the north of the Black and Caspian Seas.
3. Some of the Rosh people who lived to the north of Israel came in time to be called "Russians."
4. The name Russian is derived from the name Ros/Rosh which is found in Ezekiel 38–39.
5. And, in conclusion, it is clear that Russian peoples will be involved along with Meshech, Tubal, and Gog in an invasion of Israel in the Last Days.<sup>12</sup>

#### WHO IS MESHECH?

I now move on to the much easier task of identifying to whom Meshech refers. Meshech appears 10 times in the Hebrew Old Testament,<sup>13</sup> including its first usage in the Table of Nations (Gen. 10:2). In Genesis 10 Meshech is listed as a son of Japheth. The genealogical descent from Genesis 10 is repeated twice in 1 Chronicles (1:5, 17). Other than references in Psalm 120:5 and Isaiah 66:19, the other occurrences of Meshech are all found in Ezekiel (27:13; 32:26; 38:2, 3; 39:1). The three references in Ezekiel 38 and 39 all group "Rosh, Meshech and Tubal" together, as does Isaiah 66:19 but in a different order. Mark Hitchcock tells us:

All we know about Meshech from the Old Testament is that Meshech and his partners Javan and Tubal traded with the ancient city of Tyre, exporting slaves and vessels of bronze in exchange for Tyre's merchandise. That's all the Bible tells us about ancient Meshech. However, ancient history has a great deal to say about the location and people of ancient Meshech.<sup>14</sup>

Some Bible teachers in the past have taught that Meshech is a reference to Moscow and thus refers to Russia. This is the view of *The Scofield Reference Bible*, Harry Rimmer<sup>15</sup> and Hal Lindsey.<sup>16</sup> Rimmer says of Meshech: "his descendants came to be called 'Mosche,' from which derived the old term 'Muscovites.' While this later word is and has been applied to all Russians who come from Moscow and its vicinity."<sup>17</sup> The identification of Meshech with Moscow is merely based upon a similarity of sound. There is not real historical basis to support such a view, therefore, it must be rejected.

Allen Ross, based upon historical and biblical information in his dissertation on the table of nations says:

Tubal and Mesek are always found together in the Bible. They represent the northern military states that were exporting slaves and copper (Ezekiel 27:13, 38:2, 39:1, 32:26 and Isaiah 66:19). Herodotus placed their dwelling on the north shore of the Black Sea (III, 94). Josephus identified them as the Cappadocians. . . . Mesek must be located in the Moschian mountains near Armenia. Their movement was from eastern Asia Minor north to the Black Sea.<sup>18</sup>

The area southeast of the Black Sea is modern day Turkey. "At every point in the history" of Meshech, notes Hitchcock "they occupied territory that is presently in the modern nation of Turkey."<sup>19</sup> Such a conclusion is not a controversial one since virtually all scholars agree with this view.

#### WHO IS TUBAL?

"Tubal" appears eight times in the Hebrew Bible<sup>20</sup> (Gen. 10:2; 1 Chron. 1:5; Isa. 66:19; Ezek. 27:13; 32:26; 38:2, 3; 39:1). Tubal is identified as the fifth son of Japheth and the brother of Meshech in the table of nations (Gen. 10:2). As noted above by Ross, Tubal is always grouped together with Meshech in the Bible and Ezekiel 38 is no exception.

Some prophecy teachers have taught that Tubal is the derivative that became the modern Russian city Tobolsk. This view was popularized by *The Scofield Reference Bible* and a number of other teachers. However, as was the case with Meshech, such a view is developed from similarity of the sound of Tubal and Tobolsk. This view lacks a solid historical basis. The historical record, as was the case with Meshech, is that Tubal and his descendants immigrated to the area southeast of the Black Sea in what is modern day Turkey. Meshech and Tubal clearly provide the population base for the country we now call Turkey.

Today Turkey is considered a secular country. However, Turkey has a long history as a Muslim dominated country that for hundreds of years headed up the Muslim empire. Turkey is just a step away from returning to its Islamic political heritage, which would provide a basis for aliening with the other Muslim dominated territories that will one day invade Israel. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Clyde E. Billington, Jr., "The Rosh People in History and Prophecy (Part Three)," *Michigan Theological Journal* 4:1 (Spring 1993), pp. 42-43.

<sup>2</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 48.

<sup>4</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 51.

<sup>6</sup> Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Foes from the Northern Frontier* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 53.

<sup>9</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 53.

<sup>10</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," pp. 52–53.

<sup>11</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 57.

<sup>12</sup> Billington, "The Rosh People (Part Three)," p. 62.

<sup>13</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 6.9.2.

<sup>14</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 56.

<sup>15</sup> Harry Rimmer, *The Coming War and the Rise of Russia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940), pp. 55–56.

<sup>16</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

<sup>17</sup> Rimmer, *The Coming War*, pp. 55–56.

<sup>18</sup> Allen P. Ross, "The Table of Nations in Genesis" (ThD dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1976), pp. 204–05.

<sup>19</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *Iran The Coming Crisis: Radical Islam, Oil, And The Nuclear Threat* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2006), p. 184.

<sup>20</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 6.9.2.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part VI

by Thomas Ice

*"Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. And I will turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords;'"*

—Ezekiel 38:2–4

Now that the participants have been identified in verse 2, I now will look at what the Word of the Lord says about them. We have already seen in the first part of the verse that Ezekiel is told to set his face toward the direction of the coalition nations. Such a statement implies that they are a real, historical group of peoples. We learn at the end of verse 2 that Ezekiel is to "prophecy against him." The "him" refers back to Gog, the leader of the invasion. The Hebrew word for "prophecy" is the usual word and in this context carries the notion that Ezekiel will be telling future history about Gog and the coalition that he will head. The Hebrew preposition "against" tells us that this is not a positive prophecy benefiting to Gog and his associates. Instead, the prophecy is against Gog because God is opposed to him, as we shall see as the passage unfolds.

### GOD AGAINST GOG

The Lord God tells Ezekiel to announce that He (God) is against Gog in verse 3. The preposition "against" in verse 3 is different than the one used in verse 2. Here in verse 3 "against" has the idea of motion, thus, the action of the prophecy by God is against Gog. The two prepositions are very similar and it would appear that the two are used to emphasize the obvious fact that God is against Gog. As we will learn later in the passage, Gog may think that he is getting together the coalition to attack Israel, but it is God who ultimately is the cause of this great event (see verses 4, 8). God's disposition being set against Gog in verses 2 and 3 paves the way nicely for His clear declaration in verse 4.

### HOOKS INTO YOUR JAWS

The first phrase in verse 4 says, "I will turn you about." The Hebrew word for "turn" is *sub*. Its basic meaning is "to move in an opposite direction from that toward which one previously moved. . . . turn around, turn."<sup>1</sup> In theological contexts it is the classic word in the Old Testament for "repent," as used so often by Jeremiah. "The verb, with over 1,050 occurrences, ranks twelfth in frequency among words in the OT."<sup>2</sup> The sense in which this word is used so often in the Old Testament has the notion of repentance, as in Israel repenting and turning from their sin to the Lord. This is the same way in which repentance is used by preachers like John the Baptist in the New Testament. In fact, today in Orthodox Judaism when a non-observant Jew begins to practice their religion, this is called "doing *subah*," or repenting. However, in the context of Ezekiel 38, this use of an intensive form of *sub* (the polel stem) in relation to Gog does not refer to religious repentance, but rather to a change in ones plans. "Here

and in ch. xxxix. 2," notes C. F. Keil, "it means to lead or bring away from his previous attitude, *i.e.* to mislead or seduce, in the sense of enticing to a dangerous enterprise."<sup>3</sup> What more dangerous enterprise could there ever be than warring against God or His people—Israel?

Since the Lord wants to move Gog in the direction of coming down to attack Israel, the verb *natan* is used to explain the means that God will employ. The Lord will "place" or "put" hooks into the jaws of Gog. Keil tells us, "Gog is represented as an unmanageable beast, which is compelled to follow its leader (cf. Isa. xxxvii. 29); and the thought is thereby expressed, that Gog is compelled to obey the power of God against his will."<sup>4</sup> Lawson Younger explains the meaning and use of the Hebrew word for "hook" as follows:

While the literal meaning of *hah* is "thorn," in the OT it is used metaphorically for a hook. In the majority of occurrences, *hah* is employed in military contexts for a hook put through the nose or cheek of captives: of Sennacherib, in whose nose God will put a hook (2 Kgs 19:28; Isa. 37:29); of Jehoahaz taken to Egypt by hook (Ezek 19:4); of Zedekiah taken to Babylon by hook (19:9); of Pharaoh, in whose jaw God will put a hook (29:4; and of Gog, in whose jaw God will also put hooks (28:4).<sup>5</sup>

Just as a whole host of Israel's enemies down through history have not wanted to do what God has asked them to do, so will Gog, like Pharaoh be made to follow His will, even though their intentions are 180 degrees in the opposite direction, which demonstrates the use of the hook imagery by God. "Like a ring in the nose of a captive or a great hook in the jaws of a crocodile, God will pull Gog and his allies out for this invasion when he is ready for them," notes Mark Hitchcock. "God will do God's bidding and will act according to God's timetable."<sup>6</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum summarizes this section by reminding us:

It is God Who is in control; it is He who is bringing the invasion about. Thus, while studying this passage, one should note the sovereignty of God in this invasion. This will be the means by which God will punish Russia for her sins. The key sin is her long history of anti-Semitism, a problem that persists in Russia to this day.<sup>7</sup>

#### STAGE SETTING IN RUSSIA AND IRAN

How are some of the issues from the first few verses of Ezekiel 38 setting the stage today for future fulfillment? While other nations in the Gog coalition have been in the news at one time or another, right now Russia and Iran are making a lot of noise on the geo-political scene. Also, for those who are not watching Turkey, they are on the verge of being taken over by radical wing of Muslims in their Parliament. If they succeed, they will return Turkey to Muslim rule, which will result in their dismissal of democracy.

Mart Zuckerman, editor of *U. S. News & World Report* has said, "Russian President Vladimir Putin, in an interview several years ago, criticized America's decision to go to war against Iraq and told me, 'The real threat is Iran.' He was right. But Russia has become part of the problem, not the solution."<sup>8</sup> It is no secret that Russia has played a role of enabler to Iran, which has risen to the top of the list of rogue states that threaten to bring great destabilization to the current world order. "And Russia has made the

threat more real. It sold the nuclear power plant at Bushehr to Iran and contracted to sell even more to bring cash into its nuclear industry. As one American diplomat put it, this business is a 'giant hook in Russia's jaw.'<sup>9</sup> What? Could you repeat that last statement? The American diplomat said, "this business is a 'giant hook in Russia's jaw.'" That's right, the diplomat used a phrase right out of Bible prophecy to describe Russia's current role with Iran.

Some detractors of our view of Bible prophecy have said that with the fall of the Soviet Empire a Russian led invasion seems very unlikely from a geo-political standpoint. It has always been the case that this prophecy speaks of a Russian led, not a Soviet led, attack against Israel. Ever since the fall of the Soviet Empire Russia has continued to maintain close relations with most of the Islamic nations, especially those in the Middle East. It would not be surprising from a geo-political perspective to see Russia join with Islamic states like Iran in a surprise attack against Israel.

For over fifteen years I have speculated that the "hook in the jaw" of Gog that God could use to bring a reluctant Russia down upon the land of Israel could be some thing like the following scenario that I articulated to Hal Lindsey on a National television show<sup>10</sup> in 1991 on the day the first Gulf War ended: I could see the Muslims approaching the Russians and telling them that America has set a precedent for an outside power coming into the Middle East to right a perceived wrong. (America has done it again in recent years by going into Afghanistan and Iraq.) On that basis, Russia should help her Muslim friends by leading them in an overwhelming invasion of Israel in order to solve the Middle East Conflict in favor of the Islamic nations. Will this be the "hook in the Jaw" of Gog? Only time will tell. But something is up in the Middle East and Russia appears to have her fingerprints all over things. We know that the Bible predicts just such an alignment and invasion to take place "in the latter years" (Ezek. 38:8).

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, & Heinz-Josef Fabry, editors, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. XIV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), p. 464.

<sup>2</sup> Botterweck, Ringgren, & Fabry, *TDOT*, vol. XIV, p. 472.

<sup>3</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 161.

<sup>4</sup> Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel*, p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. editor, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 5 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), vol. 2, p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 104.

<sup>7</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, [1982] 2003), p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> Mortimer B. Zuckerman, "Moscow's Mad Gamble," *U. S. News & World Report*, Internet Edition (Jan. 30, 2006), p. 1.

<sup>9</sup> Zuckerman, "Moscow's Mad Gamble," p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> On "The Praise the Lord" show on Trinity Broadcasting Network.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part VII

by Thomas Ice

*"And I will turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords;"*

—Ezekiel 38:4

As we look deeply at this prophecy we see that God will put hooks into the jaws of Gog, who is the prince of Rosh, which we have seen is a reference to modern day Russia. Thus, Gog appears to be a Russian individual who will lead the Russian nation and her allies in an attack on regathered Israel. This is the basic situation that we see today as we scan the geo-political landscape. The stage is already set for just such an attack.

### A ROD OF DISCIPLINE?

Some might argue that the Gog invasion has already taken place in conjunction with God's discipline of Israel in the sixth century B.C. Randall Price notes the following:

The role of Gog, however, is different than that of past invaders such as the Assyrians and Babylonians who had been called the "rods of God's wrath" (cf. Isaiah 10:5). On the one hand Gog's willful decision to invade (verse 11) is based on his own passions (verses 12-13), but on the other hand he is drawn (as with hooks in his jaw, verse 4) in order to make possible a divine demonstration of God's power and intervention for Israel to the nations (verses 21, 23; 39:27) and Israel itself (39:28).<sup>1</sup>

Thus, it seems unlikely that this prophecy refers to a past disciplinary action by God where He uses other nations to chastise Israel, as He did with Assyrian against the Northern Kingdom (722 B.C.) and against the Southern Kingdom with the Babylonians (586 B.C.). If such were the case then God would not intervene on behalf of Israel as He does in this passage. When God uses a pagan nation to discipline Israel, He never intervenes to protect Israel during such an invasion.

### I WILL BRING YOU OUT

As we continue to look more closely at Ezekiel 38:4 we see that the Lord, after having put hooks in Gog's jaw will bring him out of his place. The Hebrew verb translated "I [God] will bring you [Gog] out" is in a causative stem meaning that God will use the hook in the jaw to bring Gog out of his place.<sup>2</sup> Once again, this is not something that Gog would have instigated had not God intervened to bring him out to their eventual destruction.

### GOG'S MILITARY RESOURCES

When Gog comes down against Israel it will be with "all your army, horses and horsemen." The Hebrew word for "army" (*chayil*) has the basic meaning of "strength or power,"<sup>3</sup> depending upon what is referenced in the context. It is the primary word for army in the Old Testament but has the abstract idea of "strength," "wealth," or more

concretely “military forces,”<sup>4</sup> since it takes great wealth to field a strong military. The word is used again to describe Gog and his allies in 38:15, this time with the adjective “mighty.” In other words, the *chayil* is a term that carries the idea of military might and the semantic range would not be limited to an ancient army. Since the word “all” is used with army, it means that their entire army, not just part of it, will come in this invasion of Israel.

The next textual description is that this invading army will have “horses and horsemen.” It is obvious what horses mean, while horsemen would be those soldiers riding horses for military purposes. Horsemen are often distinguished from those riding chariots in the Old Testament. Charles Feinberg concludes: “The mention of horses and horsemen is not to be taken to mean that the army would consist entirely or primarily of cavalry.”<sup>5</sup> Feinberg’s statement is supported by the fact that previously the text said “all your army,” which would include all aspects of an attacker’s resources. If this is the case, perhaps cavalry is singled out and mentioned specifically since it was the most potent offensive force for an invader in Ezekiel’s day. Also, horses denote a form of military conveyance, while horsemen the military personnel.

The last part of verse 4 describes how the military personnel are outfitted: “all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords.” This is a reference to the horsemen, all of which are splendidly attired. The Hebrew word translated “splendidly” (*miklol*) is an interesting word found only here and in Ezekiel 23:12. It is defined variously as “most gorgeously” or “all sorts of armor.” “There is little agreement over the correct translation of this word,” since it is only used twice. “In both cases it is used in contexts describing the splendid appearance of military men. A literal translation would seem to be ‘clothed fully,’ or ‘all fully equipped.’”<sup>6</sup> In other words, these attackers will all have the best military equipment available in their day. They will not be ill equipped for the task they intend. Not only will the invaders be well equipped, there will be a great number of them who will come down to Israel.

This great company is said to have both “buckler and shield” to protect themselves. The Hebrew word for “shield” (*sinna*) refers to a “large shield covering the whole body.”<sup>7</sup> While the Hebrew word for “buckler” (*magen*) refers to the smaller “shield or buckler carried by a warrior for defense.”<sup>8</sup> This military equipment would be examples of the well-equipped condition of the invaders. “Besides the defensive arms, the greater and smaller shield,” declares Keil, “they carried swords as weapons of offense.”<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew word “sword” (*hereb*) “can designate both (1) the two-edged dagger or short sword (Jgs. 3:16, 21) and (2) the single-edged scimitar or long sword.”<sup>10</sup> Since these soldiers are riding on horses, it would make the most sense to think that the long sword is pictured here, which has historically been the weapon of choice for cavalry. The short sword would not be as practical from atop a horse. “The verse explains that Yahweh is bringing out Gog fully armed.”<sup>11</sup> The greater the opponent then the greater the possibility that Israel will find herself in an impossible situation. An impossible situation calls for Divine intervention. Thus, there will be greater glory for God when He totally destroys the invaders.

#### WHAT ABOUT THE WEAPONS?

Critics of our futurist understanding of this passage point to the fact that the text says that invaders will be horsemen riding on horses and using weapons like swords and spears, “indicators of an ancient battle in a pre-industrial age,”<sup>12</sup> insists preterist Gary DeMar. Without dealing with other textual details, DeMar argues primarily on



the basis of weapons described in the passage that it has already been fulfilled. "The weapons are ancient because the Battle is ancient."<sup>13</sup> When in the past was it fulfilled? DeMar, apparently with a straight face, insists it was fulfilled in the days of Esther.<sup>14</sup>

"These, of course, are antiquated weapons from the standpoint of modern warfare," acknowledges John Walvoord. "This certainly poses a problem."<sup>15</sup> However, without abandoning the principles of literal interpretation, Walvoord believes that there is a solution to this problem. He cites three suggestions that have been made as follows:

One of them is this that Ezekiel is using language with which he was familiar—the weapons that were common in his day—to anticipate modern weapons. What he is saying is that when this army comes, it will be fully equipped with the weapons of war. Such an interpretation, too, has problems. We are told in the passage that they used the wooden shafts of the spears and the bow and arrows for kindling wood. If these are symbols, it would be difficult to burn symbols. . . .

A second solution is that the battle is preceded by a disarmament agreement between nations. If this were the case, it would be necessary to resort to primitive weapons easily and secretly made if a surprise attack were to be achieved. This would allow a literal interpretation of the passage.

A third solution has been suggested based on the premise that modern missile warfare will have been developed in that day to the point where missiles will seek out any considerable amount of metal. Under these circumstances, it would be necessary to abandon the large use of metal weapons and substitute wood such as is indicated in the primitive weapons. Whatever the explanation, the most sensible interpretation is that the passage refers to actual weapons pressed into use because of the peculiar circumstances of that day.<sup>16</sup>

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Randall Price, *Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel*, (2007), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

<sup>3</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck, & Helmer Ringgren, editors, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 349.

<sup>4</sup> Botterweck, & Ringgren, *TDOT*, vol. IV, p. 353.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), pp. 220–21.

<sup>6</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, editors, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), vol. I; p. 442.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition.

<sup>9</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 162.

<sup>10</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck, & Helmer Ringgren, editors, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. V (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 155.

<sup>11</sup> John W. Wevers, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 202.

<sup>12</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), p. 367.

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<sup>13</sup> Gary DeMar, "Ezekiel's Magog Invasion: Future or Fulfilled?" *Biblical Worldview Magazine*, vol. 22 (December, 2006), p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, pp. 368–69; see also Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), pp. 12–15.

<sup>15</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Nations in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), p. 115.

<sup>16</sup> Walvoord, *Nations*, pp. 115–16.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part VIII

by Thomas Ice

*"And I will turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords;"*

—Ezekiel 38:4

As we continue to look at the description of the weapons and mode of transportation that will be used by Gog and his invading force, we must let the text tell us what it means. "A vivid picture is given of the actual attack of the Russian forces," declares William Hull. "Great tanks, mechanized troop carriers, huge guns and all the latest in war equipment move as a mighty wave across the land," he says. Hull concludes: "Ezekiel describes this as: *All of them riding upon horses*. Here again Bible students have been lead astray by placing the emphasis upon what they are to be mounted on, rather than the fact that they are to be mounted."<sup>1</sup> Randall Price notes that some, "see these terms as 'prophetically anachronistic' (or phenomenological), since Ezekiel had no frame of reference to describe the weapons of this future age."<sup>2</sup> This is a view I once held, as I will note later.

Gary DeMar criticizes such an approach when he says, "If someone like Tim LaHaye is true to his claim of literalism, then the Russian attack he and Jerry Jenkins describe in *Left Behind* should be a literal representation of the actual battle events as they are depicted in Ezekiel 38 and 39."<sup>3</sup> DeMar continues, "How do Hitchcock, Ice, and LaHaye *know* that this is what the Holy Spirit really *means* when the text is clear enough without any modern-day embellishment?"<sup>4</sup> This may surprise some, but I think DeMar is basically right in his criticism of us on this point, even though he is demonstrably wrong about so many other items he addresses in the prophecy of Ezekiel 38 and 39.

### LITERAL INTERPRETATION

Bernard Ramm, who would not be sympathetic to our view of Bible prophecy quotes Webster and defines literal as "the natural or usual construction and implication of a writing or expression; following the ordinary and apparent sense of words; not allegorical or metaphorical."<sup>5</sup> Charles Ryrie formulates an extensive definition of literal interpretation when he states the following:

This is sometimes called the principle of *grammatical-historical* interpretation since the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations. The principle might also be called *normal* interpretation since the literal meaning of words is the normal approach to their understanding in all languages. It might also be designated *plain* interpretation so that no one receives the mistaken notion that the literal principle rules out figures of speech. Symbols, figures of speech and types are all interpreted plainly in this method and they are in no way contrary to literal interpretation. After all, the very existence of any meaning for a figure of speech depends on the reality of the literal meaning of the terms involved. Figures often make the meaning plainer, but it is the literal, normal, or plain meaning that they convey to the reader.<sup>6</sup>

"The *literalist* (so called) is not one who denies that *figurative* language, that *symbols*, are used in prophecy," notes commentator E. R. Craven. "Nor does he deny that great *spiritual* truths are set forth therein; his position is, simply, that the prophecies are to be *normally* interpreted (i.e., according to received laws of language) as any other utterances are interpreted—that which is manifestly figurative being so regarded."<sup>7</sup>

David Cooper provides a classic statement of the literal hermeneutical principle in his "Golden Rule of Interpretation," which says: "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise."<sup>8</sup> In other words, there must be a literary basis in the text of any statement that a word or phrase should not be taken literally, unless one can explain that a figure of speech or metaphor makes more sense in a given context than the plain, literal meaning. In other words, Cooper's dictum says that a word or phrase should be taken literally unless there is a reason in the text of the passage to take it as a figure of speech or a metaphor. Matthew Waymeyer provides a helpful rule of thumb when he says: "In order to be considered symbolic, the language in question must possess (a) some degree of *absurdity* when taken literally and (b) some degree of *clarity* when taken symbolically."<sup>9</sup>

### THE LITERAL MEANING

Since there does not appear to be demonstrable figures of speech or symbols in this passage for "army," "horses and horsemen," "buckler and shield," and "swords," then consistency requires that this battle will be fought with these items. These weapons of war cannot be similes for modern weapons since there are not textual indicators such as "like" or "as." There does not appear to be any figures of speech that sometimes occur without using a "like" or "as." For example, Jesus said, "I am the door," "I am the bread of life," etc. While these are not figures of speech in and of themselves, in their contexts it is clear that Jesus was speaking metaphorically. However, there is nothing in the context of Ezekiel 38 which would indicate that Ezekiel is seeing modern weapons yet using known terminology of his day.

As I have thought more critically about literal interpretation and this passage while doing this series, I have come to disagree with a statement made by Mark Hitchcock and I where we said: "Ezekiel spoke in language that the people of his day could understand. If he had spoken of MIG-29s, laser-fired missiles, tanks, and assault rifles, this text would have been nonsensical to everyone until the twentieth century."<sup>10</sup> Instead, I have come to agree with DeMar who says: "A lot has to be read into the Bible in order to make Ezekiel 38 and 39 fit modern-day military realities that include jet planes, 'missiles,' and 'atomic and explosive' weaponry."<sup>11</sup> Even though I think DeMar is right on this one point, it does not mean that his conclusion is correct. He says, "The weapons are ancient because the battle is ancient."<sup>12</sup> True, these were weapons that were used in ancient times, but some are still used today. Also, DeMar either ignores many textual facts or does not take literally timing statements like "after many days" (Ezek. 38:8), but especially "latter years" (Ezek. 38:8) and "last days" (Ezek. 38:16), which I will deal with later.

I think futurist Paul Lee Tan has framed the issue well as follows:

There are some prophecies which, in describing eschatological warfares, predict that the weapons to be used then will be bows and arrows, chariots and horses, spears and shields. Are these to be taken literally? If we adhere strictly to the proper view of prophetic form, we must consider these weapons the same as that which will be used in eschatology. They must not be equated with vastly different modern war devices, as the H-bomb or the supersonic jet fighter. Interestingly, these prophesied military instruments though centuries old have not been made obsolete. The horse, for instance, is still used in warfare on certain kinds of terrain.<sup>13</sup>

Without intending to be dogmatic on this issue, the view I think that makes the most sense is one I heard pastor Charles Clough<sup>14</sup> teach on an audiotape in the late 60s or early 70s. Clough was at the time a trained and experienced meteorologist who thought the events of the tribulation could likely degrade modern weapons systems so as to render them unusable. Later, Clough would go on to work for about 25 years as a meteorologist for the U. S. Army where he studied the impact of weather on weapons systems. He still holds the same view today. Price explains as follows:

However, there is no reason why these basic weapons might not be used in a future battle, if the conditions or the stage of battle prevent the use of the more advanced technology. Wars fought in certain rugged Middle Eastern terrains such as the mountainous region of Afghanistan (cf. 39:2-4) have required modern armies to use horses, and bows and arrows continue to be employed in various combat arenas. In addition, if the battle takes place in the Tribulation period, the conditions predicted for that time, such as seismic activity, meteor showers, increased solar effects, and other cosmic and terrestrial catastrophes (Matthew 24:7; Revelation 6:12-14; 8:7-12; 16:8-9, 18-21) would so disrupt the environment that present technology depending on satellite and computer-guided systems as well as meteorological stability would utterly fail. Under such conditions most of our modern weapons would be useless and more basic weapons would have to be substituted. At any rate, there is no reason to relegate the text to the past on the basis of supposedly anachronistic language.<sup>15</sup>

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> William L. Hull, *Israel: Key to Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), pp. 35–36. (emphasis original)

<sup>2</sup> Randall Price, *Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel*, (2007), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Gary DeMar, "Ezekiel's Magog Invasion: Future or Fulfilled?" *Biblical Worldview Magazine*, vol. 22 (December, 2006), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> DeMar, "Ezekiel's Magog Invasion," p. 6. (italics original)

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, third edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, [1965], 1995), pp. 80–81. (italics original)

<sup>7</sup> E. R. Craven and J. P. Lange, ed., *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Revelation* (New York: Scribner, 1872), p. 98. (italics original)

<sup>8</sup> David L. Cooper, *The World 's Greatest Library Graphically Illustrated* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research

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Society, [1942], 1970), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Matthew Waymeyer, *Revelation 20 and the Millennial Debate* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress Christian Publications, 2004), p. 50. (italics original)

<sup>10</sup> Mark Hitchcock and Thomas Ice, *The Truth Behind Left Behind: A Biblical View of the End Times* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 2004), p. 47.

<sup>11</sup> DeMar, "Ezekiel's Magog Invasion," p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> DeMar, "Ezekiel's Magog Invasion," p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Winona Lake, IN: Assurance Publishers, 1974), p. 223.

<sup>14</sup> At the time, Charles A. Clough was pastor of Lubbock Bible Church in Lubbock, Texas.

<sup>15</sup> Price, *Unpublished Notes on Ezekiel*, p. 42.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part IX

by Thomas Ice

*Persia, Ethiopia, and Put with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer with all its troops; Beth-togarmah from the remote parts of the north with all its troops — many peoples with you.*

—Ezekiel 38:5–6

Verses five and six complete the allies that will attack Israel with their leader Gog. The identity of the first ally appears to be very clear since its ancient name is widely known down through history, even in our own day. Persia refers to the Persian people who make up a majority of the modern country of Iran. There is consensus among futurists that historic Persia clearly refers to modern Iran. “The name Persia, which was written all over the pages of ancient history, was changed to Iran in foreign usage in March 1935,”<sup>1</sup> notes Mark Hitchcock.

### IRAN AND RUSSIA

Anyone following the news headlines the last few years certainly are aware of the warm relationship between Russia and Iran. Russia has been a supplier of many of the elements Iran wants in order to develop a nuclear bomb. It is clear that Iran aspires to control the entire Middle East so that they can spread their view of Islam in order to reunite the Muslim world under a single authority, an Iranian rule. We have all heard that their President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has said on multiple occasions that he aspires to wipe Israel off of the map. For the last fifteen years, every Israeli administration has repeatedly said that Iran is Israel’s greatest threat. Today many wonder if Israel will be moved to act preemptively, perhaps with the help of the United States, to take out Iran’s nuclear capability before it is fully realized. We will certainly know the answer before President George W. Bush leaves office in January 2009, since it is unlikely that a new President would be involved in such an adventure.

Iran very likely could be the key ally in the Russian led invasion of Israel in the last days. Perhaps Iran will take advantage of the new bellicose posture of Russian President Valdimir Putin is reinstalling toward the West, especially the United States. No matter how these future events unfold there is no doubt that Russian and Iran are developing the type of relationship that could easily lead to just such an invasion of Israel as the prophet Ezekiel has foretold.<sup>2</sup>

### ETHIOPIA

The New American Standard translation which I use translates the Hebrew word *Cush* as Ethiopia. Many English translations have transliterated it from the Hebrew into the English word “Cush.” *Cush* occurs 29 times in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>3</sup> Genesis 2:13 refers to an antediluvian land named Cush. Three times in the table of nations it refers to Cush who is a descendant of Ham. Most of the other uses occur in Isaiah and Ezekiel (13 times) and refer to the same region mentioned in Ezekiel 28:5. One Hebrew lexicon says that Cush refers to “the lands of the Nile in southern Egypt, meaning Nubia and Northern Sudan, the country bordering the southern Red Sea.”<sup>4</sup> Another tells us that Cush “refers to the region immediately south and east of Egypt, including modern Nubia, the Sudan, and the Ethiopia of classical writers.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Bible clearly locates Cush just south of Egypt in what is the modern nation of Sudan.

Today Sudan is one of the most militant Islamic nations in the world. Hitchcock notes, "that the modern nation of Sudan is one of only three Muslim nation in the world with a militant Islamic government."<sup>6</sup> I was surprised to also learn that "Sudan is the largest nation in territory on the African continent and has a population of 26 million." It is interesting to realize that Iran and Sudan have become the closest of allies during the last twenty years. They have entered into trade agreements, militaries alliances, and Iran also operates terrorist training bases in Sudan.<sup>7</sup> Sudan also is the place that protected Osama bin Laden from 1991 to 1996 until he went to Afghanistan.<sup>8</sup> Based upon current alignment of nations that we see today it is not at all surprising to think that Sudan will be a Southern ally that descends upon the land of Israel in the last days with Russia, Iran and others.

### PUT

Put is another transliteration from the Hebrew and occurs only seven times in the Old Testament.<sup>9</sup> Twice it is used in a genealogy that says that Put is a descendant of Ham (Gen. 10:6; 1 Chron. 1:8). The other five times it is used in the Prophets to refer to Put as a nation, usually in a military context as we have in Ezekiel 38. A Hebrew lexicon says, "probably not the same as Put but Libya."<sup>10</sup> "From the ancient *Babylon Chronicle* it appears that Putu was the 'distant' land to the west of Egypt, which would be modern day Libya."<sup>11</sup> "In the invasion," notes Randall Price, "these countries will be joined by other nations (38:5) that represent the other three directions of the compass: Persia (modern Iran) from the east, Cush (northern Sudan) from the south, and Put (modern Libya) from the west."<sup>12</sup>

Just like Iran and Sudan, Libya is a radical Islamic nation headed by strong man Colonel Mu'ammr al-Gadhafi. Like Iran, Gadhafi has tried to develop nuclear weapons in the past, but claims to have given up all attempts to produce them. "Ever since the rise of Colonel Mu'ammr al-Gadhafi to power in 1969," notes Hitchcock. "The nation of Libya has been a constant source of trouble and terrorism for both the West and Israel. Libya would certainly jump at the chance to join forces with the Sudan, Iran, Turkey, and the former Muslim republics of the Soviet Union to crush the Jewish state."<sup>13</sup>

### DRESSED TO KILL

Verse five ends with the statement: "all of them with shield and helmet." We saw in verse four that the Hebrew word for "shield" (*sinna*) refers to a "large shield covering the whole body."<sup>14</sup> In verse four it said, "a great company with buckler and shield," however, in verse five it says, "with shield and helmet." The Hebrew word for helmet is (*koba'*) and refers to a "helmet," usually made of bronze.<sup>15</sup> All six uses<sup>16</sup> of this word in the Hebrew Old Testament refer to a metal helmet worn by a soldier for military conflict. Thus, this passage emphasizes the fact that "all" of the invaders are well outfitted in military attire for their invasion into the land of Israel. Price says that this passage paints a picture where, "Israel will be defenseless and 'surrounded' on all sides by its enemies."<sup>17</sup>

### GOMER

The transliterated name Gomer occurs five times in the Hebrew Old Testament,<sup>18</sup> not counting those that refer to the wayward wife of Hosea. Every use except the one in Ezekiel occurs in a genealogy (Gen. 10:2, 3; 1 Chron. 1:5, 6). Gomer is said to be a son of Japheth in the table of nations (Gen. 10:2; 1 Chron. 1:5). The issue is where do the



modern day descendants of Gomer now reside? "His descendants are usually identified as the Cimmerians who moved onto the stage of history from the area north of the Black Sea in the eighth century B.C."<sup>19</sup> Jon Ruthven has a map in which he places Gomer and his descendants as having settled in the area north of the Black and Caspian Seas.<sup>20</sup> However, the descendants of Gomer were pushed out of that area and into "the area of Cappadocia, which today is in central and north-central Turkey. Josephus identified the people of Galatia with Gomer. He says that the people the Greeks called the Galatians were the Gomerites."<sup>21</sup> Today these "Gomerites" live in the west-central part of Turkey. Therefore, the descendants of Gomer along with some other peoples we have yet to consider indicate that modern Turkey will be part of those who invade the land of Israel.

The passage says, "Gomer with all its troops." It is already clear from prior statements in this prophecy that many nations will be coming down on Israel and the descendants of Gomer will be with them. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 72.

<sup>2</sup> For a couple of more recent books that focus on the current events of the Gog and Magog invasion see Mark Hitchcock, *Iran The Coming Crisis: Radical Islam, Oil, And The Nuclear Threat* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2006), and Joel C. Rosenberg, *Epicenter: Why The Current Rumbles in The Middle East Will Change Your Future* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.3.

<sup>4</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, editors, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), vol. 1, p. 435.

<sup>6</sup> Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, p. 79. At least that was the case in 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, pp. 79–83.

<sup>8</sup> Hitchcock, *Iran The Coming Crisis*, p. 185.

<sup>9</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.3.

<sup>10</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>11</sup> Hitchcock, *Iran The Coming Crisis*, p. 185.

<sup>12</sup> Randall Price, "Ezekiel," in Tim LaHaye & Ed Hindson, editors, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary: Understanding the Meaning of Every Prophetic Passage* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2006), p. 191.

<sup>13</sup> Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, pp. 85–86.

<sup>14</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition.

<sup>16</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.3.

<sup>17</sup> Price, "Ezekiel," p. 191.

<sup>18</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.3.

<sup>19</sup> Harris, Archer, and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook*, vol. 1, p. 168.

<sup>20</sup> Jon Mark Ruthven, *The Prophecy That Is Shaping History: New Research on Ezekiel's Vision of the End* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2003), p. 81.

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<sup>21</sup> Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, p. 62.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part X

by Thomas Ice

*Gomer with all its troops; Beth-togarmah from the remote parts of the north with all its troops—many peoples with you.*

—Ezekiel 38:6

There is one final entity listed as among those going down to attack Israel with Gog. Beth-togarmah is the last nation listed.

### BETH-TOGARMAH

Beth-togarmah is the English transliteration of two words from the Hebrew text. Beth is the common Hebrew word for “house” or “place of” that is used over two thousand times in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>1</sup> Togarmah is a noun used four times in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup> Twice it is used in a genealogy in which Togarmah is said to be a son of Gomer (Gen. 10:3; 1 Chron. 1:6). The final two occurrences are in Ezekiel (27:14; 38:6). The prefix “Beth” occurs only in the two uses in Ezekiel, thus rendering the compound as “house of Togarmah.” Ezekiel 27:14 refers to their trade and says: “Those from Beth-togarmah gave horses and war horses and mules for your wares.” In fact, “Herodotus mentions [Togarmah] as famed for its horses and mules.”<sup>3</sup>

“Most Bible scholars and scholars of ancient history relate biblical Togarmah to the ancient Hittite city of Tegarma,” notes Mark Hitchcock, “an important city in eastern Cappadocia (modern Turkey).”<sup>4</sup> Jon Mark Ruthven agrees: “elements of the ‘house of Togarmah’ may have been part of the great 2<sup>nd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE Japhetic movements far to the north, and assimilated into modern Russia and Turkey.”<sup>5</sup> Hitchcock traces the migration of Togarmah as follows:

Togarmah was both the name of a district and a city in the border of Tubal in eastern Cappadocia. Togarmah was known variously in history as Tegarma, Tagarma, and Takarama. The ancient Assyrians referred to this city as Til-garimmu. One of the maps of the Cambridge Ancient History locates Til-garimmu on the northeast border of Tubal in the northeast part of modern Turkey. Gesenius, the Hebrew scholar, identified Togarmah as a northern nation abounding in horses and mules, located in ancient Armenia. The ancient area of Armenia is located in the modern nation of Turkey.<sup>6</sup>

“But while scholars have differed slightly on the exact location of ancient Togarmah,” concludes Hitchcock, “it is always associated with a city or district within the boundaries of the modern nation of Turkey.”<sup>7</sup>

It is interesting to note that none of the nations that will go down into Israel with Russia are Arab nations. However, all of the Russian allies are Islamic nations. Iran is not an Arab nation, but instead they are Persian.

### THE REMOTE PARTS OF THE NORTH

In this passage Beth-togarmah is said to come from “the remote parts of the north.” This Hebrew phrase is composed of two words. The word for north means what it says, while the word for “remote parts” has the sense of the extreme, “far part,” or most distant part of whatever is being referred to in the context.<sup>8</sup> When these two words are

combined in a phrase, it is used five times in the Hebrew Bible (Psa. 48:3; Isa. 14:13; Ezek. 38:6, 15; 39:2). The Isaiah use is found in one of the five “I wills” uttered by Satan in his revolt against God. “But you said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount of assembly in the recesses of the north.” The Psalmist says of Jerusalem: “Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great King.” Mount Zion was on the Northern edge of ancient Jerusalem. The other three uses are found in Ezekiel 38 and 39. The other two references in Ezekiel 38 and 39 refer to Gog and say: “And you will come from your place out of the remote parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great assembly and a mighty army” (Ezek. 38:15). “And I shall turn you around, drive you on, take you up from the remotest parts of the north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel” (Ezek. 39:2). Therefore, Beth-togarmah is said to come from the remote parts of the north as will Gog who is Russia.

“Doesn’t this statement mean that Togarmah must come from the former Soviet Union since Russia is the farthest geographical point north of Israel,” asks Hitchcock? He says in his answer: “The answer to this question is no. Forcing a geographical location upon Togarmah that is totally inconsistent with the clear witness of ancient history would be grossly twisting the evidence. Moreover, modern Turkey fits the description given because it is clearly to the far north parts of the Promised Land.”<sup>9</sup>

#### WITH ALL ITS TROOPS

The last part of verse 6 says that Beth-togarmah will come from the north parts “with all its troops—many peoples with you.” The Hebrew word for “troops” is only used six times in the Hebrew Old Testament and all of them are found in Ezekiel (12:14; 17:21; 38:6, 9, 22; 39:4).<sup>10</sup> All but two uses appear in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Some scholars say that this word is related to a “wing” or “parameter,”<sup>11</sup> but it clearly is a reference military troops in these contexts. Some suggest that it may connote the troops on the flank or wings of a military unit and would be a Hebrew idem for all of one’s forces. The point would be that if one brings his troops on the wing,<sup>12</sup> then those would include all the forces one could muster. The translation of troops (i.e., military) is the clear meaning of this word.

The final phrase in verse six is clear that the sum total of the house of Togarmah will include many peoples with him. This phrase is found two other times in the Hebrew Bible, both of them in Ezekiel 38 (verses 9 and 15). Verse 9 refers to the entire coalition that will attack Israel, while verse 15 the many peoples refers to the coalition members that are led by Gog. The use of “many peoples with you” in verses 9 and 15 differ slightly from verse 6 since their constructions are prefaced with the use of the “and” conjunction. The use of the phrase in verse 6 does not have a conjunction, which means that the phrase “many peoples with you” is in apposition to the preceding phrase “with all its troops.” Thus, the text is saying that the “many peoples with you” is descriptive of the troops that Beth-togarmah will bring with them in their attack on Israel.

#### TALKING TURKEY

Having now completed a study of the list of nations that will join the Russian led attack against Israel, we see that four of those names refer to descendants that make up the modern nation of Turkey. Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, and Beth-togarmah all strongly point to modern Turkey as a member of the diabolical coalition. But, does Turkey’s involvement seem possible given the alignment of the nations today?

Currently Turkey is not alienated with Russia and Iran since it technically became a secular state with a Muslim heritage after the breakup of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I. Turkey has long been a member of NATO and has desired to identify with Europe rather than Asia, most likely for economic reasons. Turkey is a nation in which a small part of it is in Europe while most of it is in Asia. Turkey has applied for membership in the European Union, however, since membership in the EU would mean that anyone within the Union are able to move freely to any other part of it. The rest of the EU is concerned that if they admit Turkey then it will be a conduit through which Muslims would be able to flood into the rest of Europe. Even though they are still going through the motions of application, it is certain that the EU will eventually reject Turkey's admittance. Once they are rejected, Turkey will seek alignment with Russia and their Islamic brethren.

The last few years has seen an Islamic majority emerge in Turkey's Parliament and an Islamic Prime Minister is now in place. The breakup of the former Soviet Union included the independence of five Islamic republics: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. Hitchcock notes that "Turkey has clearly been drawn to these former Soviet republics for economic reasons, Turkey also shares strong linguistic and ethnic ties with these nations. All of these nations speak Turkic languages with the exception of Tajikistan, where the language is similar to Iranian Farsi."<sup>13</sup> Turkey sees itself as the economic developer of the vast natural resources like gold, silver, uranium, oil, coal, and natural gas that are found in these five new states. Once Turkey is spurned by Europe, she will have motive enough to enter into league with Russia and their Islamic brethren which will set the stage for the fulfillment of this prophecy. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> 2,047 times according to a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.3.

<sup>2</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.3.

<sup>3</sup> S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text & English translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), p. 182.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Jon Mark Ruthven, *The Prophecy That Is Shaping History: New Research on Ezekiel's Vision of the End* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2003), p. 102.

<sup>6</sup> Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>7</sup> Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, pp. 64-65.

<sup>10</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.3.

<sup>11</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*.

<sup>12</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 161.

<sup>13</sup> Hitchcock, *After The Empire*, p. 66.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part XI

by Thomas Ice

*Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your companies that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them. After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them.*

—Ezekiel 38:7–8

The first six verses of Ezekiel's prophecy in chapter 38 outlined "who" would be involved in an invasion of Israel, while verses 7–9 tell us "where" and "when" these events will take place. This new section (verses 7–9) begins with a taunt from God for Gog and his coalition to make sure that they are really ready for their invasion of Israel.

### GOD TAUNTS GOG

Verse 7 begins with the same verb used two times, back-to-back. The reason why the verb "prepare" is arranged this way is to intensify their meaning. In other words, God is telling Gog and his allies that they better make sure that they are prepared to the utmost for their attack on Israel, because in essence it is an attack on God, which is something that humans can never really prepare for. "With consummate and telling irony," notes Charles Feinberg, "Ezekiel urged Gog to be fully prepared for the encounter, and to see to it that all was in readiness as far as his confederates were concerned."<sup>1</sup>

The final phrase of verse 7 says, "be a guard for them." The Hebrew noun for "guard" means "watch" or "lookout" and in this context has the connotation of "to maintain vigilance, post a strong watch" and "to stand at the ready."<sup>2</sup> The Lord is further taunting Gog as He challenges him, as the leader of the coalition, to make sure that he guards or watches over this assembled company so that he may protect them against any evil that could befall them. This is a sarcastic warning to Gog and his group that even though their gathering is for the purpose of wiping out Israel, it is their company that will be destroyed.

### AFTER MANY DAYS

The sovereignty of God continues to be a major theme of this prophecy as Ezekiel begins verse 8 by saying, "After many days you will be summoned." This entire operation is ultimately God's idea and He will "put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out," (verse 4) against Israel. Now Ezekiel says that God is summoning Gog and his coalition to attack Israel to accomplish the Lord's purpose. "The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps" (Prov. 16:9).

The exact Hebrew phrase "after many days" is found only one other place in the Old Testament. "Now it came about after many days, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies on every side, and Joshua was old, advanced in years," (Josh. 23:1). Since context governs the length of time intended for a temporal phrase, it is clear in Joshua that many days referred to a few years because "many days" all took

place within the lifetime of Joshua. A similar Hebrew phrase is used four times in the Old Testament (1 Kings 18:1; Eccl. 11:1; Isa. 24:22; Jer. 13:6). Three of these four occurrences are similar to the Joshua 23:1 uses, however, Isaiah 24:22 is used in an eschatological context. "So it will happen in that day, that the LORD will punish the host of heaven, on high, and the kings of the earth, on earth. And they will be gathered together like prisoners in the dungeon, and will be confined in prison; and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and His glory will be before His elders" (Isa. 24:21–23). C. F. Keil, writing in the nineteenth century says, "The first clause reminds so strongly of Isa. xxiv. 22, that the play upon this passage cannot possibly be mistaken; so that Ezekiel uses the words in the same sense as Isaiah."<sup>3</sup> This context is clearly referencing something that is future and has not yet occurred. "After many days" in verse 22 is likely a reference to the thousand-year time period revealed in Revelation 20:2–7.

The length of time indicated by the phrase "after many days" is determined by factors in the context, which are clearly longer than the lifespan of a human. We will soon see as I examine the other time statements in this context that "the text is emphatic that the invasion and its consequences have been foreseen long before."<sup>4</sup> Keil says, "after many days, i.e., after a long time . . . signifies merely the lapse of a lengthened period; . . . is the end of day, the last time, not the future generally, but the final future, the Messianic time of the completing of the kingdom of God."<sup>5</sup> Feinberg declares, "the notion of time indicated that the attack of the enemy would not take place for a long time. The events here predicted were not to be expected in the lifetime of Ezekiel or his contemporaries."<sup>6</sup>

#### IN THE LATTER YEARS

"After many days" is not the only time indicator of when this invasion will take place. "After many days" is immediately followed in the Hebrew text by the phrase "in the latter years." These two phrases must refer to the same time period. Like the previous phrase, since it is not qualified by something like the latter years of a person's life, etc., it is an absolute phrase referring to the span of history. An almost identical phrase is used in verse 16 and says, "It will come about in the last day that I shall bring you against My land." The term "latter years" is only used in this passage in the entire Old Testament, however, since "last days" is used in verse 16 describing the same event, it is safe to conclude that the more frequently used phrase "last days" is synonymous with "latter years." Such a conclusion is supported by the fact that "after many days" and "in the latter years" are used in tandem in verse 8. Feinberg says, "the time element was distinctly stated as 'in the latter years,' which is equivalent to 'the latter days' of verse 16."<sup>7</sup>

When we search the Old Testament for the use of terminology similar to "the latter years" of Ezekiel 38:8 we find three other phrases that are parallel.<sup>8</sup> I have selected only the uses of these three phrases that have a future, prophetic meaning. The first term is "latter days" (Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Jer. 30:24; 48:47; Dan. 2:28; 10:14), the second is "last days" (Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 49:39; Eze. 38:16; Hosea 3:5; Mic. 4:1), while the final phrase is "the time of the end" (Dan. 8:17, 19; 11:27, 35, 40; 12:4, 9, 13). The fact that Ezekiel uses three phrases ("after many days," "in the latter years," and "in the last days") provides strong support that this battle will take place during a yet future time. Randall Price tells us, "while the expression 'latter days' may refer to the Tribulation period, it is not a technical term for such, since its contextual settings and varieties of usages allow it to

be employed in different ways.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, references to the latter days phrases include the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel or the tribulation period, the millennial kingdom and could also include some events that might take place shortly before the tribulation, like the Gog and Magog invasion. Mark Hitchcock notes, “These phrases are used a total of fifteen times in the Old Testament. They are always used to refer to either the Tribulation period (Deut. 4:30; 31:29) or the Millennium (Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1). While these phrases do not specifically identify the time of the invasion, they do clearly indicate that the general time period is future even from our day.”<sup>10</sup>

### RESTORED FROM THE SWORD

The next phrase tells us, “you will come into the land that is restored from the sword.” The land into which Gog will lead his coalition of invaders is without a doubt the land of Israel. Interestingly the land of Israel is described as a land that has been restored from the sword. The Hebrew word for “restored” is the common word meaning “to turn around” or “repent.”<sup>11</sup> Therefore, the sense in which “repent” is used here is of a people who once were in the land of Israel, then they were removed from the land, and now they have been brought back to the land from which they originated. Thus, they were turned or returned to the land of Israel. The Jews are said to be the only group of people in the known history of the world who were removed from their homeland, dispersed among most all of the nations, and have returned to their original homeland. This explains why my English translation (NASB) renders this Hebrew word with a meaning of restore. In other words, the Jews are returning to their land when this event happened. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 221.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 162.

<sup>4</sup> Jon Mark Ruthven, *The Prophecy That Is Shaping History: New Research on Ezekiel's Vision of the End* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2003), p. 123.

<sup>5</sup> Keil, *Ezekiel*, p. 163.

<sup>6</sup> Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 221.

<sup>7</sup> Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 221.

<sup>8</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.3.

<sup>9</sup> Randall Price, *Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel*, (2007), p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 126.

<sup>11</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.



**EZEKIEL 38 AND 39**  
**Part XII**  
by Thomas Ice

*After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years  
you will come into the land that is restored from the sword,  
whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations  
to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual  
waste; but its people were brought out from the nations,  
and they are living securely, all of them.*  
—Ezekiel 38:8

Verse 8 is one of the longest verses in Ezekiel 38—39 and describes when this invasion of the land of Israel will take place. There are a total of seven descriptive phrases used in verse 8 to tell us when this event will occur. We have already examined the first three and have seen that the invasion will take place “after many days,” “in the latter years,” and when the land of Israel “is restored from the sword.” We must keep in mind that this event will unfold when all seven indicators are in place at the same time.

**FULFILLED IN THE DAYS OF ESTHER?**

Preterist Gary DeMar proposes a bizarre interpretation of when the invasion of Gog would be take place. He contends that the battle described in Ezekiel 38—39 has already been fulfilled through the events of Esther 9 in about 473 B.C. in the days of Queen Esther of Persia.<sup>1</sup> DeMar states that the parallels between the battles in Ezekiel 38—39 and Esther are “unmistakable.”<sup>2</sup> There are a multitude of problems with such a view, the least of which is not the seven phrases provided in Ezekiel 38:8. It is not the couple of similarities that are determinative when comparing the prophecy with Esther but the multitude of differences that render DeMar’s view as impossible. The only possible motive for advocating such a view appears to be DeMar’s obsessive desire to avoid any future prophecy relating to the nation of Israel. Such an obsession blinds him to the clear meaning of the text.

Here are a few of the more apparent and problematic inconsistencies.

<b>EZEKIEL 38—39</b>	<b>ESTHER 9</b>
The land of Israel is invaded (38:16) by multiple armies. The enemies fall on the mountains of Israel (39:4). Gog, the leader of the invasion, is buried in Israel (39:11).	Jews are attacked in cities throughout the Persian empire (127 provinces, 9:30) by apparent gangs of people, not armies, and defend themselves (9:2). The enemies die throughout the Persian empire.
The Jews bury the dead bodies over a period of seven months to cleanse the land of Israel (39:12).	No need to cleanse the land because the dead bodies aren’t in Israel.
The invaders are destroyed by a massive earthquake in the land of Israel, infighting, plagues, and fire from heaven (38:19–22). God destroys the enemies supernaturally.	Attackers are killed by the Jewish people themselves, assisted by local government leaders (9:3-5).

Invaders are from as far west as ancient Put (modern Libya) (Ezek. 38:5) and as far north as Magog, the land of the Scythians.	The Persian empire did not include these areas. It only extended as far west as Cush (modern Sudan) (Esther 8:9) and as far north as the bottom part of the Black and Caspian Seas.
God even sends fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands (39:6).	There is nothing even close to this in Esther 9.

One important question we might ask at this point is the following: If Ezekiel 38—39 was literally fulfilled in the events of Esther 9, why did this escape the notice of everyone in Esther’s day? Why isn’t there any mention in Esther of this great fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy? The answer is quite clear. Esther 9 did not fulfill Ezekiel 38—39. In fact, an important Jewish holiday developed out of the Esther event called Purim (9:20-32). This is a joyous annual holiday to celebrate God’s deliverance from the hand of Israel’s enemies. Purim’s celebration includes the public reading of the book of Esther, but no tradition has developed or even been heard of in which the Jews read Ezekiel 38—39 in connection with this observance. If Ezekiel 38—39 had been a fulfillment of Esther, then no doubt a tradition of reading that passage would have arisen in conjunction with the celebration.

Further, why aren’t there any Jewish scholars down through history that have recognized this fulfillment? The consensus of Jewish commentators has always seen the Gog prophecy as an end of days event. In fact, this battle is the focus of their view of end-times prophecy that will be fulfilled right before the coming of Messiah. Contemporary Rabbi Rafael Eisenberg summarizes Jewish tradition on the battle of Ezekiel’s Gog as follows:

Our prophets and sages have foretold that prior to the arrival of the Messiah, the Wicked Empire, Rome (which as we have already shown, is modern Russia), will regain its former greatness. In those pre-Messianic days, Russia will expand over and conquer the entire globe, and her ruler, “who will be as wicked as Haman,” will arise and lead the nations of the world to Jerusalem in order to exterminate Yisrael. . . . At that time, the overt miracles which will bring about the great retribution against Yisrael’s enemies and the final destruction of the Wicked Empire, will convince the world that God, alone, is the Judge and Ruler of the Universe.<sup>3</sup>

Another simple reason we can know that this invasion is still future is because nothing even remotely similar to the events in Ezekiel 38—39 have ever occurred in the past. Just think about it! When has Israel ever been invaded by all these nations listed in Ezekiel 38:1–6? Or when did God ever destroy an invading army like this with fire and brimstone from heaven, plagues, earthquakes, and infighting among the invaders (Ezek. 38:19–22)?

The answer? Never. That’s because Ezekiel is describing an invasion that is still future even in our day. Now we will investigate the final four indicators of verse 8.

## GATHERED FROM MANY NATIONS

The fourth phrase says, “whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel.” The phrase “whose inhabitants have been gathered” is a rendering of the single Hebrew verb for “gather.” This verb is the common word for collecting something like agricultural products at harvest time. “Gather” is used in this passage as a pual<sup>4</sup> participle, which implies by ellipsis in this context that the ones gathered are the “inhabitants” of the mountains of Israel. The implication of the pual participle in this context is that God is the One who has gathered the inhabitants back to the land of Israel. From where has He gathered them?

God has gathered them from many nations. The word translated “nations” is simply the common Hebrew word *am* that is used almost 3,000 times<sup>5</sup> in the Old Testament and simply means “people, peoples, nation, or nations.”<sup>6</sup> This gathering is not from just a few nations, but said to be from “many” nations. “This cannot refer to the Babylonian captivity but to worldwide dispersion,”<sup>7</sup> notes Charles Feinberg. C. F. Keil agrees and says, “gathered out of many peoples, points also beyond the Babylonian captivity to the dispersion of Israel in all the world, which did not take place till the second destruction of Jerusalem.”<sup>8</sup> These returnees will come “to the mountains of Israel.” Jerusalem is a city set within the mountains of Israel. Thus, since 1967 the modern state of Israel has been in control of the old city known as Jerusalem.

#### A CONTINUAL WASTE

The fifth phrase says, “which had been a continual waste.” What had been a continual waste? This phrase speaks of the land of Israel which had been a continual waste.” The Hebrew noun for “waste” is used 50 times in the Old Testament,<sup>9</sup> primarily in the prophets to speak of the ruins of Jerusalem, Israel and sometimes Egypt as a result of God’s judgment. The adverbial participle “continual” modifies the noun “waste,” and speaks “of going on without interruption, continuously.”<sup>10</sup> Rabbi Fisch says that “continual” “here signifies ‘for a long time,’ meaning the period of the exile.”<sup>11</sup> But which exile? Does it refer to the 70 year Babylonian exile or the almost 2,000 year global exile that much of modern Jewry is still experiencing? Feinberg says, “This had in view a period of time longer than that of the seventy year in Babylon.”<sup>12</sup> Keil also notes that “continual” in this text “denotes a much long devastation of the land than the Chaldean devastation was.”<sup>13</sup>

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

#### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of The Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), pp. 12-15.

<sup>2</sup> DeMar, *End Times Fiction*, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> Rafael Eisenberg, *A Matter of Return: A Penetrating Analysis of Yisrael’s Afflictions and Their Alternatives* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1980), p. 155, as cited in Randall Price, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy: A Definitive Look at Its Past, Present, and Future* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2005), p. 459. For an overview of Jewish beliefs about the Gog’s invasion of Israel in Ezekiel 38—39 see Price, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy*, pp. 458–61.

<sup>4</sup> The pual verb stem in Hebrew denotes an intensive passive form of a verb.

<sup>5</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

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<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 222.

<sup>8</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 164.

<sup>9</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

<sup>11</sup> Rabbi Dr. S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text & English Translation With An Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), p. 254.

<sup>12</sup> Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 222.

<sup>13</sup> Keil, *Ezekiel*, p. 164.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part XIII

by Thomas Ice

*After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them. And you will go up, you will come like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you.*

—Ezekiel 38:8–9

The final two of seven descriptive phrases in verse 8 will now be examined. These phrases provide a framework for determining when this invasion will take place.

#### GATHERED FROM THE NATIONS

The sixth descriptive phrase of verse 8 says, “but its people were brought out from the nations.” The disjunctive *waw* at the beginning of this construction indicates that this phrase stands in contrast and is related to the previous phrase: “whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste.” The subject “it” “is feminine in the Hebrew, can only refer to *the land*.”<sup>1</sup> The sense is as follows: the land of Israel’s people (i.e., the Jews). Such a sense provides a strong polemic that the people God believes belong in the land of Israel are the Jews.

The Hebrew verb *yasah* is used over a thousand times in the Old Testament and means to “come out” or “go forth.”<sup>2</sup> However, in this instance it is in the hophal stem, which gives it a causative passive sense and means that the Jewish people “were brought out” from the nations by someone other than themselves. Who would that “someone” reference? The implication can only refer to God as the One who will cause the Jews to be brought back to the land of Israel. The verb “brought out” in this instance serves to support the overall notion of God’s sovereign control over all nations—Israel and the Gentiles. The Gentiles were noted at the beginning of verse 8 as they are “summoned” to invade Israel. Israel is emphasized in this phrase since it is God who is in reality bringing them back to their Promised Land.

There are only three Hebrew words in this phrase and it literally says, “but it is brought forth out of the peoples.”<sup>3</sup> Reading this in context, as should always be done with any passage, the “it” refers to the last half of the preceding phrase “the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste.” Thus, how can the land of Israel be brought back from the peoples or nations? This can only occur if the people are brought back to the land, which explains why most translators add “people” in an effort to clarify the sense of the Hebrew.

#### LIVING SECURELY

The final construct says, “and they are living securely, all of them.” This phrase is also composed of three Hebrew words and completes this long sentence. The verb *jasab* is used over a thousand times in the Old Testament and has the general meaning of “sit,

remain, or dwell.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is translated “living” in many English translations since that is the nuance of what one does when they stay for a period of time on a certain piece of land, as opposed to one who is just visiting.

The next Hebrew word is the noun *betah* that is translated “securely.” There has been a lot of discussion about just what this word means in this context. The Hebrew lexicons tell us that the general meaning is “security” or “confidence” and is similar to our English word “trust” in range of meaning.<sup>5</sup> It is often used in construct form with the verb “to dwell,” as is the case here and occurs 160 times in the Hebrew Bible.<sup>6</sup> It is used in Leviticus and Deuteronomy as a promise from the Lord that He will cause the nation to dwell securely in the Land if they obey his law (Lev. 25:18, 19; 26:5; Deut. 12:10). This term is used throughout the historical and prophetic Old Testament books as a comment whether or not Israel is dwelling securely in the land. In fact, this phrase is used in Jeremiah 49:31 in a similar invasion context as we see in Ezekiel 38. It says: “‘Arise, go up against a nation which is at ease, which lives securely,’ declares the LORD. ‘It has no gates or bars; they dwell alone.’” This is how it is used in Ezekiel 38:8. “However, quite often this general meaning has a negative ring . . . to indicate a false security.”<sup>7</sup> The context supports the false security connotation in this instance, because of the impending invasion. On the other hand, since God miraculously delivers the nation, maybe it is not misplaced after all.

Some have tried to equate the notion of “living securely” with the “living peacefully.” It is said that what is described in this passage is a situation where Israel is at peace with all their neighbors and no one is a treat to them. This is not supported by the word *betah* or the context. “Nowhere in the entire text does it speak of Israel as living in peace. Rather, Israel is merely living in security, which means ‘confidence,’ regardless of whether it is during a state of war or peace,” notes Arnold Fruchtenbaum. “There is nothing in the various descriptions of Israel given in this passage that is not true of Israel today.”<sup>8</sup>

The final Hebrew word is translated by the English phrase “all of them.” To whom does this refer? It can only refer to all of those living securely in the land of Israel. All of those who have returned to the mountains of Israel are dwelling in security. Charles Feinberg concludes, “Finally, they were viewed as living securely, all of them, without fear of invasion or deportation.”<sup>9</sup> This sets the stage for the comments in the next verse where God again addresses God and his invading force.

### GOG GOES UP

We see that the action of verse 9 will take place when the conditions of verse 8 are all in place. “Just when least expected and without the slightest warning, the enemy will swoop down on the returned exiles, as an unheralded storm.”<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew verb “go up” is very common and becomes idiomatic when used in a military context where one goes up to battle or in reference to the land of Israel, one goes up, regardless of the direction of one’s movement.

### A CLOUDY STORM

A couple of similes are used to describe how Gog’s invasion will take place. The first one “will come like a storm.” One Hebrew lexicon said that the use of “storm” in this passage “really means ‘a storm that breaks out violently and suddenly.’”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the Gog invasion of Israel will be suddenly and unexpected like a thunderstorm that gathers quickly and then unleashes its fury with an outburst that catches many unprepared.

The second simile describes the extent and vastness of the size of the invading army. The Hebrew verb *kassot* is only used eleven times in the Hebrew Bible and has the connotation of not just “to cover,” but to cover some thing for the purpose of concealing it.<sup>12</sup> So we see that the Gog invading forces will be so massive in number that their troops will cover the land so completely that one will not be able to see the land upon which they move.

The final phrase of the verse says, “you and all your troops, and many peoples with you.” “You” is a reference to Gog himself. Gog will be coming with all of his troops as described earlier in the chapter. Gog will not be alone, he will with him the many different people groups as mentioned above as their alliance invades God’s land of Israel. Rabbi Fisch notes that the same description is used in Jeremiah 4:13, which says, “Behold, he goes up like clouds, and his chariots like the whirlwind; His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are ruined!” Fisch concludes that the Ezekiel passage is “a figure for the strength and terrifying appearance of Gog’s approaching armies.”<sup>13</sup> “The land will be covered and smothered by the vast multitude of Gog’s followers, just as a cloud blankets a land below it,” says Feinberg. “Gog will see to it that he has plenty of allies and enough mercenaries to carry through his satanic scheme.”<sup>14</sup> Israel may be caught off guard but not the Lord God of Israel Who never sleeps nor slumbers. He is standing guard and will fight for Israel when this great northern invasion suddenly breaks forth in history. After all, the Lord God of Israel is the one who initiates these yet future events. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> (italics original) Rabbi Dr. S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text & English Translation With An Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), pp. 254–55.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> Fisch, *Ezekiel*, p. 254.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition; and Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>6</sup> From a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

<sup>7</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck, & Helmer Ringgren, editors, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, [1982] 2003), p. 117.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 222.

<sup>10</sup> Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 222.

<sup>11</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition; and Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>13</sup> Fisch, *Ezekiel*, p. 255.

<sup>14</sup> Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 222.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part XIV

by Thomas Ice

*Thus says the Lord GOD, "It will come about on that day, that thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil plan, and you will say, 'I will go up against the land of unwalled villages. I will go against those who are at rest, that live securely, all of them living without walls, and having no bars or gates, to capture spoil and to seize plunder, to turn your hand against the waste places which are now inhabited, and against the people who are gathered from the nations, who have acquired cattle and goods, who live at the center of the world.'"*

—Ezekiel 38:10–12

Verses 10 through 13 records the intentions of the invaders. It is no problem for the God of the Bible to know the thoughts and intentions of one's mind and heart (Heb. 4:12–13) and thus reveal to us what one's motives are. Even though the Lord "put hooks in their jaws" (38:4) in order to bring the invaders down, the human thought process is revealed in this section.

#### BAD INTENTIONS

"The Lord God" is a term that denotes "the sovereign Lord of the nations,"<sup>1</sup> which is certainly on display in this passage. "On that day" is a reference to the preceding section when Israel is again settled in the land and the time when the invasion will take place. It is on that day that "thoughts will come into your mind." The Hebrew word translated "thoughts" is a common noun *dabar*, which is usually translated "word," "speech" or "thing"<sup>2</sup> depending on the context. In this context, the best rendering is "not words, but things which come into his mind. What things these are, we learn from verses 11 and 12."<sup>3</sup> The Hebrew language does not have a word for "mind," even though it is used in the New American Standard translation from which I have quoted throughout this series. That is surely the sense of the word, but it is translated "mind" and is the Hebrew *labeib* that has the basic meaning of "inner man" or "heart."<sup>4</sup> Thus, inner activity like thinking was assigned to the "heart." In this context, the passage speaks of the things that will take place in the inner man, which would be "thoughts."

Verse 10 concludes with the line, "you will devise an evil plan." This phrase is made up of three Hebrew words. "You will devise" is the Hebrew verb *hasabat*, which has the idea of "to weave," and in relation to the heart or mind it would convey the idea of weaving, scheming or devising a plan.<sup>5</sup> The noun is from the same exact root as the verb. Thus, a literal translation would convey the idea of thinking thoughts. But since the third word is an adjective meaning "evil,"<sup>6</sup> it is clear that the sense of this passage refers to an evil plan against God's chosen people, Israel. Therefore, this verse appears to be telling us that even though the general idea to attack Israel is the result of God's sovereign plan (38:4), the details are conceived and developed within the mind of Rosh and his band of invaders. Because it is characterized as a manmade scheme or plan, Rosh and his fellow attackers are held responsible.

#### THE PLAN REVEALED



The evil scheme is disclosed in verse eleven. The evil thoughts are those of Rosh and say, "I will go up against the land of unwallled villages." Verse 11 describes Rosh's perception of a regathered Israel at this time in history. There is no reason to think that Rosh's description is inaccurate. The verb "go up" is a very common Hebrew expression that means "to ascend, go up." It is commonly used of anyone going to the land of Israel or Jerusalem from outside the country. There is no military overtone in this verb.<sup>7</sup> The land of Israel is described in this passage in the following four ways: 1) the land of unwallled villages; 2) those who are at rest; 3) that live securely; and 4) all of them living without walls, and having no bars or gates.

The first characterization of Israel as a land of unwallled villages means that they will not build walls around their villages for protection as in ancient times. Randall Price notes: "only the Old City of Jerusalem has a wall and the modern city since the late 1800's has existed outside these walls."<sup>8</sup> This probably means that the nation will lack protection from invasion since that was the purpose of building walls in ancient times. Rabbi Fisch says, "Israel will have made no preparations against attack by building walls around his cities."<sup>9</sup>

The second phrase tells of a people who are at rest. The Hebrew participle *saqat* describes a people who are "quiet, undisturbed, and at rest."<sup>10</sup> This verb is used frequently in Joshua and Judges to note the quiet or rest that resulted from Israel's military victories over the Canaanites as they conquered the Land under Joshua.<sup>11</sup> This term refers to quiet or rest from military conflict. The third term is *betah* and was used in verse 8. We saw that it refers to Israel living in security, which means confidence.<sup>12</sup>

The fourth characterization is all of them living without walls, and having no bars or gates. We have seen earlier that living without walls would literally mean that none of their cities or towns will have walls that the ancients had in order to hold off an invading army. This picture is reinforced by the note that they will not have bars or gates, presumably in walls that they do not have. Bars and gates were important points of defense in ancient city walls.

What does this mean in relation to the invasion? First, this passage is the perspective of Gog, who thinks that Israel is not properly defended and thus vulnerable to a surprise attack. Second, Price points out that, "Israel's security is based on the strength of its military, which is acknowledged as one of the best in the world and which has defended the country against overwhelming odds in numerous past invasions."<sup>13</sup> Third, these conditions were never true at any time in Israel's past, thus it must refer to a future time as already noted by the phrases "after many days" and "in the latter years" (38:8). Keil says, "This description of Israel's mode of life also points beyond the times succeeding the Babylonian captivity."<sup>14</sup>

### FOLLOW THE MONEY

Two reasons are revealed by God in verse 12 as Gog's motive for the future invasion of Israel. These reasons are indicated by a pair of infinitival phrases and are first, "to capture spoil" and second, "to seize plunder." In both instances the Hebrew text uses the same word twice, a verb as an infinitive followed by the noun in construct to the verb to describe Gog's motive for the invasion.

The first phrase, "to capture spoil," comes from the Hebrew root word *shalal* and means "to congregate, assemble together in order to rob."<sup>15</sup> Thus, since both the verb and the noun are from the same Hebrew root, it would mean something like "to spoil spoil." However, that is not good English. The Hebrew idem is better rendered "to

capture spoil,” even though the fact that both words are from the same root is lost in translation.

The second idem, “to size plunder” comes from the Hebrew root *baz* and means “to plunder, spoil, take booty, rob.”<sup>16</sup> Thus, it would have the sense in Hebrew of “spoiling spoil.” This word carries with it the idea of dividing up the spoil or bounty captured in a raid or military conquest. Thus, the clear motive for invasion is to gain material wealth. Charles Feinberg notes, “The enemy, greedy of Israel’s wealth, will embark on a campaign of conquest for gain.”<sup>17</sup>

The rest of verse 12 reinforces the two opening declarations concerning Gog’s motive for invasion. A third infinitive declares that Gog desires “to turn your hand against the waste places which are now inhabited, and against the people who are gathered from the nations, who have acquired cattle and goods.” The notion of “turning one’s hand against” pictures one doing a 180 degree turn around from the direction they were headed in order to attack another. This is described in verse 10 as Gog devising an evil plan, but must be seen as the human means to an overall process originally initiated by God Himself (38:2–4). To make matters worse concerning Gog’s evil thoughts is the picture painted by the last part of verse 12, which speaks of Israel returning to her land which had become a waste place in her absence, then turning it into a wealth producing land, that Gog and his attackers now want to invade in order to take this wealth for themselves. Israel has survived over 2,000 years of dispersion among the nations and God brings them back to her land in which they become highly productive and wealthy, only to have Gog and his allies attack them to take away her newly gained wealth. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *Unger’s Commentary on The Old Testament* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, [1981] 2002), p. 1578.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

<sup>3</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 164.

<sup>4</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition.

<sup>5</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition.

<sup>7</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>8</sup> Randall Price, *Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel*, (2007), p. 40.

<sup>9</sup> S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text & English translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), p. 255.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition.

<sup>11</sup> See Joshua 11:23; 14:15; Judges 3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:28.

<sup>12</sup> See Thomas Ice, “Ezekiel 38 and 39, Part XIII,” *Pre-Trib Perspectives* (Feb. 2008), pp. 6–7.

<sup>13</sup> Price, *Ezekiel*, pp. 40–41.

<sup>14</sup> Keil, *Ezekiel*, p. 165.

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<sup>15</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>16</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition.

<sup>17</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 222.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part XV

by Thomas Ice

*“to capture spoil and to seize plunder, to turn your hand against the waste places which are now inhabited, and against the people who are gathered from the nations, who have acquired cattle and goods, who live at the center of the world.’ Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all its villages, will say to you, ‘Have you come to capture spoil? Have you assembled your company to seize plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to capture great spoil?’”*

—Ezekiel 38:12–13

Twice Israel and Jerusalem are said in Ezekiel to dwell at the center of the earth. “Thus says the Lord GOD, ‘This is Jerusalem; I have set her at the center of the nations, with lands around her’” (Ezek. 5:5). Rabbi Fisch says, “Following Ezekiel, Dante places Jerusalem at the centre of the world, with the Ganges as the extreme east and the pillars of Hercules as the extreme west.”<sup>1</sup> Israel and its chief city Jerusalem was created by God and placed in the center of the earth so that she could be a light to the nations as the Lord desired to use her to spread His message across the globe. Rabbi Fisch notes, “Jerusalem intended to be the radiating centre of the knowledge of God for all peoples.”<sup>2</sup> It is within such a context that Ezekiel 38:12 notes that the nation of Israel is “at the center of the world.”

### ISRAEL: CENTER OF THE WORLD

The Hebrew word translated “world” in the New American Standard translation that I use is really the Hebrew term for “earth.” *Ha’aretz* is used over 2,500 times in the Hebrew Old Testament<sup>3</sup> and is used in five basic ways: 1) ground, earth; 2) a specific piece of ground; 3) a territory or country; 4) the whole of the land, the earth; 5) depths of the earth or the underworld.<sup>4</sup> In this context it clearly is a reference to the entire earth. It is important to note that “earth” instead of “world” is used in the original, since world could denote the people and not the land. The emphasis here is upon being in the center of the earth’s land—the geographical navel. The Hebrew word for “center” is literally “the navel,”<sup>5</sup> “as the navel is in the centre of the body.”<sup>6</sup>

Why is Israel’s location mentioned at this point in the passage? I agree with Rabbi Fisch’s opinion: “This is mentioned to stress the viciousness of Gog’s plan. He dwelt in the far north, a great distance from the Land of Israel; so the people of the latter could have had no aggressive designs upon him.”<sup>7</sup> C. F. Keil echoes Rabbi Fisch’s view and describes it as one of their two motives for invasion in the following:

This figurative expression is to be explained from ch. v. 5; “Jerusalem in the midst of the nations.” The navel is not a figure denoting the high land, but signifies the land situated in the middle of the earth, and therefore the land most glorious and most richly blessed; so that they who dwell there occupy the most exalted position among the nations. A covetous desire for the possessions of the people of God, and envy at his exalted position in the centre of the world, are therefore the motives by which Gog is impelled to

enter upon his predatory expedition against the people living in the depth of peace.<sup>8</sup>

Belief in Israel's special status and global location explains the famous rabbinical statement derived from these two passages in Ezekiel:

As the navel is set in the centre of the human body, so is the land of Israel the navel of the world . . . situated in the centre of the world, and Jerusalem in the centre of the land of Israel, and the sanctuary in the centre of Jerusalem, and the holy place in the centre of the sanctuary, and the ark in the centre of the holy place, and the foundation stone before the holy place, because from it the world was founded.<sup>9</sup>

Many commentators on this passage only stress the economic gain as the single motive for Gog's invasion from the human perspective. However, this final phrase in verse 12 makes it clear that they also invade out of envy of Israel's special status with God and her resulting geographic location.

#### **SHEBA AND DEDAN**

Who are Sheba and Dedan? "Sheba and Dedan are not difficult to identify. They are located in the modern country of Saudi Arabia."<sup>10</sup> "*Sheba and Dedan* are counties in northern Arabia," notes Arnold Fruchtenbaum.<sup>11</sup> As indicated in the context, they were known for their commercial trading, thus, their interest in the Gog invasion of nearby Israel in order to take spoil. Randall Price locates Sheba as modern Yemen in the southern part of the Arabian peninsula and Dedan as Saudi Arabia.<sup>12</sup> Regardless of their precise location on the Arabian peninsula, there appears to be no doubt that it is a reference to Saudi Arabia and perhaps some of the other Arab nations currently occupying that peninsula.

#### **TARSHISH**

Sheba and Dedan are said to be in alignment with "the merchants of Tarshish, with all its villages." What does the phrase "the merchants of Tarshish" mean? Like those in Sheba and Dedan, they are said to be merchants or traders. But where is Tarshish located?

Tarshish appears to be a wealthy trading community on the extremity of the Mediterranean world. "Tarshish is ancient Tartessus in the present-day nation of Spain."<sup>13</sup> This view is supported by standard Hebrew language reference books.<sup>14</sup> For example, Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner in their Hebrew Lexicon say, "these point to Spain with its rich mineral resources. [Tarshish] could be a town the territory of which is in the region of the mouth of the Guadalquivir. With some variation this is probably the most widely accepted view today"<sup>15</sup> "We read often in the OT of 'ships of Tarshish' which were large, oceangoing vessels (Ezk 27:25) that carried all sorts of precious cargo, especially metals such as silver and gold (I Kgs 10:22; 22:48; II Chr 9:21; Isa 60:9; Jer 10:9; Ezk 38:13) as well as iron, tin, and lead (Ezk 27:12)."<sup>16</sup>

Harvard Professor, Barry Fell, has done extensive study on these matters and their relation to activities in pre-Columbus America. Dr. Barry Fell says:

From the Bible we learn that the ships of Tarshish were the largest seagoing vessels known to the Semitic world, and the name was eventually

applied to any large ocean-going vessel. . . . the ships of Tarshish became proverbial as an expression of sea power. . . .

it is not unlikely that the merchants of Tarshish may have been associated with the trans-Atlantic migration of the Celts who came to America. Indeed James Whittall, with whom I have discussed the decipherment of Tartessian inscriptions here in America, thinks that the American Celts were deliberately brought here by Phoenicians, who wanted mining communities to exploit American natural resources, and with whom they could then trade. If this hypothesis is correct, then Tartessian vessels would surely have played a major role in the Celtic migration to New England.<sup>17</sup>

There does appear to be a significant basis to support the notion that the merchants of Tarshish are connected with the seafaring Phoenicians of 3,000 years ago. These merchants naturally established trading posts scattered along their various routes. Dr. Stuart McBirnie may well be right when he concludes:

Only in the past half-dozen years has much light been thrown on the historic location of ancient Tarshish. Books and articles in learned archaeological journals written before that time now seem to have rather limited value. In some instances, they are more confusing than helpful, despite the prestige of their authors. The reasons for certainty of identification are found in recent archaeological discoveries which confirm that ancient authorities were right all along in their identification of Tarshish as a Western European colonizing power based in Spain.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the merchants of Tarshish appear to refer to the Phoenician maritime and trading community located in Spain during the general time of King Solomon, 3,000 years ago. The merchants of Tarshish, during the last 500 years, developed into the modern mercantile nations of Western Europe like Spain, Holland, and Britain. Hitchcock concludes: "Tarshish, or modern Spain, could be used by Ezekiel to represent all of the western nations which Saudi Arabia will join with in denouncing this invasion. . . . It is highly probable that Ezekiel used the far western colony of Tarshish to represent the end-time empire of the Antichrist."<sup>19</sup> Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text & English translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Fisch, *Ezekiel*, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup> From a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

<sup>4</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>6</sup> Fisch, *Ezekiel*, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Fisch, *Ezekiel*, p. 25.

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<sup>8</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 166.

<sup>9</sup> Midrash Tanchuma, *Qedosim*.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers 1994), p. 100.

<sup>11</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, [1982] 2003), p. 111.

<sup>12</sup> Randall Price, "Ezekiel" in Tim LaHaye & Ed Hindson, editors, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), p. 191.

<sup>13</sup> Hitchcock, *After the Empire*, pp. 100–101.

<sup>14</sup> See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, eds., *The New Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew—Lexicon of the Old Testament*, (New York: Oxford University Press, rev. ed, 1977) p. 1076-77; Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew & Chaldee Lexicon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1949), p. 875.

<sup>15</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>16</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason J. Archer, Jr., Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 Vols., (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), II:981.

<sup>17</sup> Barry Fell, *America B. C.*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1976, [1989]), pp. 93-94.

<sup>18</sup> W. S. McBirnie, *Antichrist* (Dallas: Acclaimed Books, 1978), p. 62.

<sup>19</sup> Hitchcock, *After the Empire*, p. 101.

**EZEKIEL 38 AND 39**  
**Part XVI**  
by Thomas Ice

*“Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all its villages, will say to you, ‘Have you come to capture spoil? Have you assembled your company to seize plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to capture great spoil?’ Therefore, prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD, “On that day when My people Israel are living securely, will you not know it? And you will come from your place out of the remote parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great assembly and a mighty army; and you will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land. It will come about in the last days that I shall bring you against My land, in order that the nations may know Me when I shall be sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog.”’*

—Ezekiel 38:13–16

It appears that Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish are clearly a trading community that is not involved in the invasion and from the sidelines ask the motives of the invaders. “Have you come to capture spoil?” “Have you assembled your company to seize plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to capture great spoil?” Even though these are questions, they also clearly reveal in them the intent of the invaders, which were also stated in verse 12.

**PURPOSE OF THE INVADERS**

Since most of the terminology of the invaders is stated in verse 12, it is clear that the human motive of the invaders is to steal the wealth of Israel. Many expositors have speculated over the years what it is about Israel that the invaders have their eye on. Some have said that it is the mineral wealth of the Dead Sea, which is the richest on earth. However, as Arnold Fruchtenbaum notes, “Russia could also obtain the Dead Sea by invading Jordan.”<sup>1</sup> Whatever the specifics, the cumulative description of verses 12 and 13 make it clear that Israel has wealth and they invade her in order to gain that wealth.

There is no doubt that Israel is by far the richest country in the region. Today she has developed a productive economy via research and development in the area of technology. Also, she is perhaps the most productive country per capita in the world agriculturally. Israel has long controlled the diamond business and is the world leader in generic pharmaceuticals. Wikipedia says, “Israel is considered one of the most advanced countries in the Southwest Asia in economic and industrial development. . . . It has the second-largest number of startup companies in the world (after the United States) and the largest number of NASDAQ-listed companies outside North America.”<sup>2</sup> Regardless of the specific enticements, this passage is clear that Israel is invaded for the purpose of stealing her wealth.

**PROPHECY AGAINST GOG**



A new section begins with verses 14–16. “Son of man” is a common term used 93 times by God in this book to refer to Ezekiel.<sup>3</sup> As C. F. Keil says, it “denotes man according to his natural condition . . . denoting the weakness and fragility of man in opposition to God.”<sup>4</sup> The rest of this verse is a repeat of phrases already analyzed, except the last one: “will you not know it?” This phrase in the English translates two Hebrew words. The word for “not” appears at the beginning of the phrase “On that day when My people . . .” Even though “not” appears in the middle of the passage, it relates grammatically to and negates the final word in the verse, which is the Hebrew verb “to know.” Keil rightly explains: “thou wilt know, or perceive, *sc.* that Israel dwells securely, not expecting any hostile invasion.”<sup>5</sup> Rabbi Fisch echoes Keil and says, “the state of Israel’s peace and confidence which has led to his unpreparedness, so that thou wilt choose him for thy victim.”<sup>6</sup> Charles Feinberg notes Israel’s “imagined security” and says, “The question is doubtless a rhetorical one. The Lord knew full well that Gog will have already acquainted himself with the fact of Israel’s political condition in order to be sure of his attack.”<sup>7</sup>

The Lord continues to speak to Gog and says, “you will come from your place.” Where is Gog’s place? Gog’s place is said, as in verse 6, to be “the remote parts of the north.” This phrase was dealt with in verse 6 and is the exact same Hebrew expression in both places, except verse 15 has the prepositional stem “from,” while it is implied in verse 6. This phrase will also be used again in 39:2. So three times the text emphasizes that Gog will come from the remotest parts of the North. “It is intriguing that a tribe of ‘Mescherians,’ whose territory included the area of the modern city of Moscow,” observes Jon Ruthven, “the capital of the traditional ‘Rus,’ lies due north of Israel.”<sup>8</sup> If one draws a line from Jerusalem north to the North Pole, it will come very close to modern Moscow. In fact, the only possible country that is to the extreme north of Israel is Russia. The country of Russia begins north of the Black Sea in Southern Russia and is the only country north of the Black Sea. Since we do not have many choices, one out of one, it is clear that Gog is Russia, which fits the other information gleaned thus far from Ezekiel 38.

The rest of verse 15 speaks of the fact that Gog will come with a huge army, including many allies with her. I have dealt with this terminology already in earlier verses in the passage.

### WHY ME LORD?

Verse 16 concludes the section in which God explains “why” He will sovereignly work in history to bring about Gog’s invasion of Israel. This verse makes it clear that the Lord God of Israel sees the Gog lead invasion as a direct attack upon Him. Gog will “come up against *My people* Israel;” “I shall bring you against *My land*,” and “that the nations may *know Me*” (italics added). Gog will descend upon God’s real estate “like a cloud to cover the land.” Charles Dyer suggests, “This awesome army will overrun all obstacles as effortlessly as a cloud sailing across the sky.”<sup>9</sup> This is true, until God decides to intervene on behalf of His people and land.

Regardless of what the world thinks and the news media will say about Israel in that day, the Lord God says that the people who will be invaded are “My people Israel.” As Paul says of Israel in the New Testament, “God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew” (Rom. 11:2). On what basis can Paul say this? He can say it because “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom. 11:28). Yet, too many in our day suffer under the false illusion of replacement theology that God has replace “My people Israel” with the church. It is true that the church made up of elect Jews and

Gentiles during the current age are also the people of God. However, God is not finished with national or ethnic Israel and will focus upon them after the rapture.

The Lord also calls the land of Israel "My land." In other words, His people Israel are living in His land, which is also called Israel, in the last days when Gog and his hordes come down to attack them. Thus, this passage makes it very clear that an attack on God's people and land is an attack upon God Himself. This is why, even though Israel is not ready for this attack God will step in to defend her. Why will He defend His people and land? He will defend them "in order that the nations may know Me when I shall be sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog" (38:16).

This section concludes with God's purpose, which is the ultimate and overriding purpose, for bringing Gog against His people "in the last days" (38:14). Gog's purpose from the human perspective was noted earlier (38:10–13), but the utmost purpose is to teach the nations to acknowledge the Lord. They would do this when God used Gog to demonstrate His holiness before them as the whole world watches. God will mobilize Gog as He had raised up Pharaoh at the Exodus to demonstrate His power and holiness when He subsequently puts him down. "Though the purpose of Gog's campaign is said to be lust for destruction and spoil," declares Fisch, "it is an act designed in God's wisdom to bring mankind to the realization that He is King of the universe."<sup>10</sup> Thus, God's intent through all of this is to demonstrate who He is and what He values in this world. He is a holy God who has given Israel her land and He knows how to protect His people. O, that we would all learn this lesson. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, [1982] 2003), p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Wikipedia, accessed May 13, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> From a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

<sup>4</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Keil, *Ezekiel*, p. 167.

<sup>6</sup> S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text & English translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), p. 256.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 224.

<sup>8</sup> Jon Mark Ruthven, *The Prophecy That Is Shaping History: New Research on Ezekiel's Vision of the End* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2003), p. 39.

<sup>9</sup> Charles H. Dyer, "Ezekiel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor Books, 1985), p. 1301.

<sup>10</sup> Fisch, *Ezekiel*, p. 257.

**EZEKIEL 38 AND 39**  
**Part XVII**  
by Thomas Ice

*Thus says the Lord GOD, "Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days through My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you against them? And it will come about on that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel," declares the Lord GOD, "that My fury will mount up in My anger. And in My zeal and in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel."*

—Ezekiel 38:17–19

As we move into a new section in the prophecy, the Lord once again speaks to Ezekiel about God's future victory over Gog and his allies (38:17–23). For the fifth and final time in chapter 38, the prophecy is said to be the word of the Lord. "Seven times in Ezekiel 38—39 we read the same words, 'Thus says the Lord God' (38:2, 10, 14, 17; 39:1, 17, 25)," notes Mark Hitchcock. "Another eight times the refrain, 'declares the Lord God,' appears. Obviously, God doesn't want us to miss the point—this is His Word."<sup>1</sup> This prophecy begins with the Lord asking a question to Gog. This question stems from the previous verse (38:16) and is about how God will sanctify Himself in the eyes of Gog and the nations.

**WHAT'S THE QUESTION?**

It is as if God is taunting Gog with this question that reveals God's absolute confidence in the outcome of this encounter. In this section (38:17–23), God answers the questions of "what" and "how." First, the question "what" is answered in verses 17 and 18, while the question of "how" in verses 19 through 23. The question that God confronts Gog with is as follows: "Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days through My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you against them?" The Hebrew grammar causes the reader to expect an affirmative answer.<sup>2</sup> So where are the other Old Testament prophecies that the Lord is referring to in this passage? Randall Price answers that question as follows:

The opening statement of this defeat (verse 17) seems to imply a there has been prior prediction in other prophets of Gog's invasion. However, the ambiguity in the expression "are you the one" (even though Gog is understood from verse 16) spoken of by God in the distant past reveals that the reference is open to representative "Gogs" whose actions against Israel have invited a divine demonstration. Gog's army will be a multi-national force and some of these nations have had prophecies specifically directed against them by former Israelite prophets: Cush/Ethiopia (Isaiah 18:1-7), Arabia (Isaiah 21:13-17). However, no direct reference to Gog in any of the former prophets is necessary, since all previous invaders have been types leading to Gog and his allies as the antitype.<sup>3</sup>

The Lord continues the "what" in verse 18 in relation to Gog's invasion of the land of Israel, by noting that His "fury will mount up in My anger." The Lord uses three

Hebrew words to describe His reaction to Gog's invasion of the land of Israel. In the order in which they appear in the Hebrew text, the first word is the common verb '*alah*, which occurs over 1,200 times in the Hebrew Old Testament<sup>4</sup> and means to "go up, ascend, or climb,"<sup>5</sup> is translated "will mount up."

Second, the Hebrew noun *chemah*, which means "heat, poison or venom (of animals), rage, wrath,"<sup>6</sup> is translated "fury" in this passage. This word is used 120 times in the Hebrew Bible and most of the usage relates to human or Divine wrath (110 times).<sup>7</sup> The use of *chemah* to refer to human wrath only occurs 25 times, while it is used 85 times to reference Divine wrath with the most occurrences found in Ezekiel (31 times).<sup>8</sup> Thus, we see the righteous anger of the Lord that builds up and is released as His wrath in history.

Third, the final Hebrew word is the noun '*af*, which means "nose, anger, nostrils"<sup>9</sup> is used 155 times in the Hebrew Old Testament<sup>10</sup> and is translated in the passage as "My anger." Hebrew nouns not only occur in the singular and plural modes, but also have a dual use. "When the reference is to the nose, the singular form is used, while the dual form is used for either the face or nostrils."<sup>11</sup> Here the Lord's anger is expressed with in the dual mode, thus, emphasizing the nostrils, which is seen in some animals when they get upset they start breathing through the nostrils like a snorting anger. Then *chemah* and '*af* are grouped together in reference to God, as occurs here, the expression denotes the strongest kind of anger by God that leads to action. Keil describes this as an "anthropopathic expression, 'my wrath ascends in my nose,' . . . The outburst of wrath shows itself in the vehement breath which the wrathful man inhales and exhales through his nose."<sup>12</sup> The clear message of the passage is that God has reached the limit of His patience and He will now spring forth in wrathful action against Gog and his allies.

### HOW IT WILL HAPPEN?

The final section in chapter 38 (verses 19–23) begins with the Lord revealing His attitude with which He will defend His people Israel. The first part of verse 19 says, "And in My zeal and in My blazing wrath . . ." Once again, this phrase contains three important Hebrew words demonstrating that the lexicon was not exhausted in the previous verse when it comes to describing God's great anger toward Gog and the other invaders. First, the noun translated "zeal" is *qinah*, which occurs 17 times in the Hebrew Old Testament and it is found the most times in Ezekiel (7 times).<sup>13</sup> The basic meaning is that of "zeal" for something (in this case God's zeal for His prized earthly possession Israel) and the "jealousy" and "wrath" that is exhibited when another attempts to move in and take away that possession.<sup>14</sup> We gain insight into the Lord's attitude toward His people and His land—the land of Israel—two chapters earlier in Ezekiel that reads as follows:

Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "Surely in the fire of My *jealousy* I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who appropriated My land for themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and with scorn of soul, to drive it out for a prey." Therefore, prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I have spoken in My *jealousy* and in My wrath because you have endured the insults of the nations.'" (Ezek. 36:5–6, italics added)

The same jealousy that God expressed in chapter 36 is carried into 38:19 concerning the wife of Jehovah—Israel. “God’s patience would be exhausted with the repeated attempts of Israel’s enemies to annihilate her,” declares Charles Feinberg. “The Lord Himself will undertake the destruction of Israel’s enemies, choosing to use no secondary agent, for this is to be a final and irrecoverable judgment.”<sup>15</sup>

The second noun we find in this passage is the Hebrew word *‘esh*, which means “fire” and in this verse is translated as “blazing.”<sup>16</sup> The third word in the Hebrew text is *‘evra*, which is translated “wrath”<sup>17</sup> in verse 19 and in construct relationship to blazing. Taken together they produce the strongest possible statement about the wrath of God—it is blazing, it is on fire. “These words express the intensity of God’s display of vengeance against the invaders of His Land (‘My mountains,’ 38:21).”<sup>18</sup>

So what does the burning zeal of the Lord cause Him to declare? God will “declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel.” “That day” refers to the day in which Gog and his gang will invade the land of Israel. Then God will counterstrike the outsiders by inflicting a great earthquake upon the land of Israel. Price tells us:

According to verses 19b-21 a divinely appointed earthquake will be so severe as to disorient Gog’s multi-national forces and cause them in the confusion to fight each other. The earthquake will apparently set off volcanic deposits in the region, bringing down on Gog’s army a hail of molten rock and burning sulfur (volcanic ash) with the result that the enemy troops are utterly destroyed before they can strike a blow against Israel (verse 22).<sup>19</sup>

Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers 1994), p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> Randall Price, *Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel*, (2007), p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck, & Helmer Ringgren, editors, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 462.

<sup>8</sup> Botterweck & Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary*, vol. IV, p. 464.

<sup>9</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>10</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

<sup>11</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. editor, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 5 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), vol. 1, p. 463.

<sup>12</sup> Keil, *Ezekiel*, p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

<sup>14</sup> Definition derived from Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 225.

<sup>16</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>17</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>18</sup> Randall Price, "Ezekiel" in Tim LaHaye & Ed Hindson, editors, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> Price, *Unpublished Notes on Ezekiel*, p. 42.

**EZEKIEL 38 AND 39**  
**Part XVIII**  
by Thomas Ice

*“And the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all the creeping things that creep on the earth, and all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence; the mountains also will be thrown down, the steep pathways will collapse, and every wall will fall to the ground. And I shall call for a sword against him on all My mountains,” declares the Lord GOD. “Every man’s sword will be against his brother. And with pestilence and with blood I shall enter into judgment with him; and I shall rain on him, and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire, and brimstone. And I shall magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD.”*

—Ezekiel 38:20–23

As a result of the earthquake within the land of Israel in verse 19, verse 20 reflects the corresponding realization of the Lord’s greatness throughout heaven and earth. In all three spheres—land, sea and air—creatures within God’s creation will reverence the Lord’s display of His power on behalf of His elect nation Israel.

**SHAKE, RATTLE AND ROLL**

The normal order of things within the sea, land and heavens will be greatly disturbed by the tremendous display within Israel by the Lord. The text characterizes human reaction to God’s display in Israel when it says, “all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence.” “The order will be, first, earthquake, then anarchy, pestilence and natural disasters,” notes Charles Feinberg. “God’s violent shaking of the earth will affect every area of nature, both animate and inanimate.”<sup>1</sup> Gog attacks Israel armed to the hilt but God merely shakes the earth a little and they are totally wiped out. It is clear from this passage that Israel and their excellent, modern military (including nuclear weapons) have nothing to do with the destruction of Gog and his allies.

The last three phrases in verse 20 describe in more detail the “earthquake in the land of Israel.” As a result of that quake, “the mountains also will be thrown down, the steep pathways will collapse, and every wall will fall to the ground.” Earlier Gog’s invasion is noted as taking place on “the mountains of Israel” (verse 8). A passage way or path is needed for an army to make it past the mountains of Israel in order to gain entrance into the heartland. In the modern state of Israel’s wars, this has been a stumbling stone for the Syrians and other Arab armies in their attacks on Israel. They have had great difficulty getting through those mountains. However, in this invasion, it is God, not the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) that will completely destroy the enemy, as the Lord’s earthquake will literally pull the rug out from under the invaders. This will no doubt destroy a great portion of the invaders.

**FRIENDLY FIRE**

In modern warfare when someone accidentally kills someone on your own side it is called "friendly fire." I recently read that on the modern battlefield of today, because of the great firepower of modern armies, that about 20% of deaths are due to friendly fire. Verse 21 clearly says that the only killing to be done by Gog's invaders of Israel will be that of massacring their fellow troops. "'And I shall call for a sword against him on all My mountains,' declares the Lord GOD. 'Every man's sword will be against his brother.'" Apparently in the confusion generated by the Lord's earthquake and great shaking of the mountains of Israel, Gog's armies will experience a whole lot of friendly fire as the Lord confuses them and they turn upon one another.

Imagine the great embarrassment and humiliation that Gog's constituents back home experience when they learn that the IDF did not even engage this great army, they did not have to since many of them killed each other. Upon further examination Gog's allies will learn that it was really the God of Israel that they went up against. They did not have a chance! But that is not the only means the Lord will use to defeat the invaders.

### **GOD BUGS GOG**

This year (2008) the father of so-called "Jesus Rock" or "Contemporary Christian Music," Larry Norman died. I used to listen to him in the early 1970s and one of my favorite songs that he did was one simply called "Moses." The song is about Moses leading the children of Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. There is a verse in that song that goes as follows:

Moses knew that God was taking to him,  
so he set off to Egypt with a vigor and vim,  
and Moses bugged the Pharaoh—he bugged him,  
and he bugged him,  
till he got his people free.  
He used real bugs!<sup>2</sup>

Just as God used real bugs to bug the Pharaoh at the Exodus, once again, He will use real bugs and pestilence to bug Gog and his armies, but this time to keep His people free from invasion. In addition to the earthquake and friendly fire, the Lord will use other means of defeating Israel enemy as indicated in verse 22. "And with pestilence and with blood I shall enter into judgment with him; and I shall rain on him, and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire, and brimstone."

The Hebrew noun for "pestilence" is used of a plague, like the bubonic plague which can be caused by something like an insect sting.<sup>3</sup> However, in this case, it is not bugs causing the sickness but it is God who bugs them. Used in conjunction with pestilence is the Hebrew noun for "blood," which in this context refers to "blood shed violently,"<sup>4</sup> as the judgment of God. The main verb governing all of the actions of verse 22 is the Hebrew word for "judgment." Thus, all of the pestilence, torrential rain, hailstones, fire, and brimstone are said to be the judgment of God upon Gog and his company of invaders. The first half of the verse tells us that the Lord will enter into judgment with the invaders by using the means of pestilence that will cause the bloodshed or death of Gog's army. The second half of the verse appears to be the different types of pestilence that will cause death to the enemies of God and Israel. As in the Exodus, the Lord miraculously sends down the torrential rain, hailstones, fire,



and brimstone upon the invaders as they attack Israel. Likely the hailstones will target specific individuals of the enemy as in Revelation 16:21. Also, not just brimstone, but fire also will fall from heaven and target individuals. Fire and brimstone was said to be the only items used to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24), but here we have fire mixed with torrential rain. This will be an amazing combination of pestilence that causes the death of Israel invaders. I wonder if there will be a vote in the United Nations or a similar body to condemn God because of this event?

### GOD'S GLORY

Gog will arrogantly attack Israel with visions of his own glory. However, it will be God who will obtain great notoriety from the event. Verse 23 says, "And I shall magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD."

There will be three specific things accomplished by the Lord as a result of His defeat of this company of armies attacking His land Israel. The three lessons are taught by the use of three Hebrew verbs. First, God shall "magnify" Himself through these events, as express by the hithpael or reflexive-intensive use of *gadel*. The root word *gadel* means, "to become great." In the hithpael stem it has the sense of "to make oneself great" or "to prove to be great."<sup>5</sup> This is exactly what the Lord God of Israel will do when He will defeat, all by Himself, this vast army descending upon Israel. He will add this proof to a long list of other items from the past (for example, creation, the flood, the exodus, etc.) in which He has proven Himself great in time-space history.

Second, *qadosh*, another hithpael stem verb is used. The root word *qadosh* is believed to mean, "to cut" and thus carries the basic meaning of "to set apart" for special use. The term "holy" is associated with *qadosh* and conveys the idea of setting apart something from common use in order to use it on special occasions. The hithpael stem as used in this passage would mean, "to show or demonstrate One as holy."<sup>6</sup> In the context of this passage it is saying that the Lord God has demonstrated to the world that He is Holy, separated from everyone else in a special way, and that He is the unique and only God since no one else can do what He just did to Israel's enemies.

Third, *yadah* is a widely used Hebrew verb that means "to know" or "to come to know," usually through experience or interaction with someone or something. In this instance, *yadah* occurs in the niphal stem, which is the simple passive or reflexive sense.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in this context it conveys the sense that God wants the world to come to know or realize that He is the Lord God of Israel as a result of these events. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), pp. 225–26.

<sup>2</sup> Larry Norman, "Moses," *Upon This Rock* (New York: Capitol Records, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>5</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>6</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

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<sup>7</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part XIX

by Thomas Ice

*"And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD,' Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal; and I shall turn you around, drive you on, take you up from the remotest parts of the north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel. And I shall strike your bow from your left hand, and dash down your arrows from your right hand."*

—Ezekiel 39:1–3

As I write this installment of the future campaign of Gog against Israel, we have just seen Russia attack Georgia in order to gain control of South Ossetia, a province within Georgia. Russia has also bombed a number of important cities throughout Georgia and sent her mechanized infantry in to occupy certain territories within Georgia. This is the first invasion of another country by Russia since the Soviet Union went into Afghanistan in the 1970s. Why did they do it now? *Stratfor Intelligence Report* provides the following analysis:

The war in Georgia, therefore, is Russia's public return to great power status. This is not something that just happened—it has been unfolding ever since Putin took power, and with growing intensity in the past five years. Part of it has to do with the increase of Russian power, but a great deal of it has to do with the fact that the Middle Eastern wars have left the United States off-balance and short on resources. As we have written, this conflict created a window of opportunity. The Russian goal is to use that window to assert a new reality throughout the region while the Americans are tied down elsewhere and dependent on the Russians. The war was far from a surprise; it has been building for months. But the geopolitical foundations of the war have been building since 1992. Russia has been an empire for centuries. The last 15 years or so were not the new reality, but simply an aberration that would be rectified. And now it is being rectified.<sup>1</sup>

I am not saying that this recent event fits directly into the Gog invasion of Israel, but it does appear to be an important event indicating that the Russian bear is back on the prowl. When you couple this invasion with the fact that Russia has resumed flying her Bear bombers along our border near Alaska<sup>2</sup> and the fact that Putin has threatened to put missiles in Cuba again,<sup>3</sup> it makes one realize that Russia is much more aggressive and anti-Western than she has been the last fifteen years. This could signal that Russia is interested in military aggression after a period of dormancy.

Critics of a future fulfillment of the Gog and Magog prophecy often mocked the possibility of this because of the collapse of the Soviet Union. (I never saw the connection between Russia having to head up the Soviet Union for this prophecy to be possible. The fact that Russia continued to exist is all the prophecy requires.) Gary North said, "Russia was a prime candidate. But, after 1991, this has become difficult to defend, for obvious reasons. The collapse of the Soviet Union has created a major problem for dispensationalism's theologians and its popular authors."<sup>4</sup> Clearly,

Russia's current attempt at hegemony over Georgia does not mean that Putin is trying to recreate the old Soviet Empire. It does signal that Russia, who has gained a lot of oil wealth in the last few years, is trying to rearm itself so that she can be the greatest power in the region. Friedman explains:

Putin did not want to re-establish the Soviet Union, but he did want to re-establish the Russian sphere of influence in the former Soviet Union region. To accomplish that, he had to do two things. First, he had to re-establish the credibility of the Russian army as a fighting force, at least in the context of its region. Second, he had to establish that Western guarantees, including NATO membership, meant nothing in the face of Russian power. He did not want to confront NATO directly, but he did want to confront and defeat a power that was closely aligned with the United States, had U.S. support, aid and advisers and was widely seen as being under American protection. Georgia was the perfect choice.

### EZEKIEL 39

Having completed our commentary on Ezekiel 38, we now turn the page to chapter 39 of this great prophecy. Arnold Fruchtenbaum notes that the interpretative principle he calls *The Law of Recurrence* occurs in chapter 39.<sup>5</sup> He describes it as follows:

This law describes the fact that in some passages of Scripture there exists the recording of an event followed by a second recording of the same event giving more details to the first. Hence, it often involves two blocks of Scripture. The first block presents a description of an event as it transpires in chronological sequence. This is followed by a second block of Scripture dealing with the same event and the same period of time, but giving further details as to what transpires in the course of the event.<sup>6</sup>

Fruchtenbaum says that Ezekiel 39 "repeats some of the account given in the first block and gives some added details regarding the destruction of the invading army."<sup>7</sup> Perhaps the reason the Lord repeats some prophecies is in order to really drive home the importance of what He is saying. Thus, this would make the Gog prophecy doubly important because of this emphasis. The second giving of the Gog invasion prophecy is concluded in 39:16. Ezekiel 39:1-6 is the first section in this chapter that reiterates the place of destruction.

### SECOND VERSE, SAME AS THE FIRST

Ezekiel, who is called "son of man" in verse one is told to "prophecy against Gog, and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.'" This passage is an exact repeat of what was spoken in 38:3, which I have already commented on in that section. Why is it repeated? I think the first verse is exactly the same as that which is found in chapter 38 in order to show that it is a prophecy about the same entities and events already prophesied in the preceding section. That is why, having established their linkage to the previous chapter in 39:1, the Lord then begins to expand upon this event in 39:3-6.

Verse two says, "I shall turn you around, drive you on, take you up from the remotest parts of the north, and bring you against the mountains of Israel." This verse appears to be a summary statement of 38:4, 6, 8, and 15, which I have already

commented on. "The principle contents of ch. xxxviii. 4-15," notes C. F. Keil, "are then briefly summed up in verse 2."<sup>8</sup> Charles Feinberg says, "The statement concerning turning Gog about (v. 2) carries with it the idea of compulsion."<sup>9</sup> However, the phrase "drive you on" is not used in the previous chapter. In fact, Ezekiel 39:2 is the only place in the entire Hebrew Old Testament that this verb is used.<sup>10</sup> It has the basic idea of "to walk along,"<sup>11</sup> as one would walk along side an animal, like leading a dog on leash. This verb is in the piel stem, which indicates the intensive active form of the word. So the picture being painted is that of the Lord leading Gog and his allies down to the mountains of Israel like one would lead an animal on a leash. The clear point being made in this verse is that the ultimate cause for this invasion, regardless of human action, is the sovereign will of God.

### DISARMING GOG

Verse three says, "And I shall strike your bow from your left hand, and dash down your arrows from your right hand." Both of these phrases are Hebrew idioms that picture the Lord, not Israel, disarming Gog by knocking out of his hand his bow, which refers to Gog's weapons or weapons systems (whatever the case may be). The Lord will also take away the ammunition used by Gog during this future invasion, when He will "dash down your arrows from your right hand." Put simply, the Lord will disarm Gog on behalf of the nation of Israel. Keil explains, "In the land of Israel, God will strike his weapons out of his hands, i.e. make him incapable of fighting, . . . and give him up with all his army as a prey to death."<sup>12</sup> Thus, chapter 39 begins with a shorter overview and summary of many things that were already revealed in the previous chapter. The Lord drives home the point of His intense oversight of this future battle in which He will protect His people. Further, we could be witnessing today some of the positioning of the players who will participate in this great invasion as Russia and Iran manifest their belligerence. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> George Friedman, "The Russo-Georgian War and the Balance of Power," *Stratfor Geopolitical Intelligence Report* (Aug. 12, 2008), [www.stratfor.com](http://www.stratfor.com).

<sup>2</sup> "Russia's Bear bomber returns" (Sept. 10, 2007) [www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6984320.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6984320.stm).

<sup>3</sup> "Putin eyes renewed Russian ties with Cuba," (Aug. 4, 2008) [www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/08/04/russia.cuba.ap/](http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/08/04/russia.cuba.ap/).

<sup>4</sup> Gary North, "The Unannounced Reason Behind American Fundamentalism's [ & Virtually All Evangelicalism] Support for the State of Israel" (July 19, 2000), [www.tks.org/GaryNorth.htm](http://www.tks.org/GaryNorth.htm).

<sup>5</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, [1982] 2003), p. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 6. Fruchtenbaum classifies the following passages as examples of The Law of Recurrence: Genesis 1 & 2; Isaiah 30 & 31; Ezekiel 38 & 39; Revelation 17 & 18.

<sup>7</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 171.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 228.

<sup>10</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, 7.4.2.

<sup>11</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Keil, *Ezekiel*, p. 171.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part XX

by Thomas Ice

*"You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops, and the peoples who are with you; I shall give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and beast of the field. You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken," declares the Lord GOD. And I shall send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the LORD.*"  
—Ezekiel 39:4–6

Ezekiel 38:8 says Gog and his invaders "will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to *the mountains of Israel* which had been a continual waste." Instead, in 39:4 God will cause Gog to "fall on the mountains of Israel." Gog intends one thing, but God causes a totally different outcome in His defense of His people Israel.

#### FALLEN PREY

The Hebrew verb for "fall" is a common word that in this context means to fall in battle. Since it is used corporately of the entire invading force, i.e., "you and all your troops, and the peoples who are with you," it speaks of their defeat.<sup>1</sup> "Troops" and "peoples" were used earlier in 38:6. It is clear from the previous context that this fall is the result of God's miraculous intervention on behalf of Israel. Arnold Fruchtenbaum describes the mountains of Israel as follows:

They extend the length of the center of the country, beginning at the southern point of the Valley of Jezreel at the town of Jenin in Galilee (biblical Ein Ganim), and continuing south until they peter out at a point north of Beersheva in the Negev. These mountains contain the famous biblical cities of Dothan, Shechem, Samaria, Shiloh, Bethel, Ai, Ramah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Debir, and most importantly, Jerusalem, which seems to be the goal of the invading army.

Here is another example where the Six Day War has set the stage for the fulfillment of prophecy. Up to the Six Day War in 1967 all of the mountains of Israel, except for a small corridor of West Jerusalem, were entirely in the hands of the Jordanian Arabs. Only since 1967 have the mountains *of* Israel been *in* Israel, thus setting the stage for the fulfillment of this prophecy.<sup>2</sup>

Since God is the one who will bring down the invading force, He will also use this occasion to feed His creation with their flesh. "I shall give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and beast of the field." The verb "give" is used here in the sense of to "set, lay, or place" before one.<sup>3</sup> Here we have "the prophetic perfect" tense of the verb,<sup>4</sup> which means that even though the text speaks of a future event, it is best translated as having already taken place, i.e., "I have given you." The reason for the prophetic perfect is because when the Lord prophesizes something, it is so certain to take place that it is spoken of as having already taken place, though still in the future. Thus, the Lord will provide Israel's enemies as a meal for the animals and birds as a waiter would set a feast upon a table to one to eat. The references to birds and beast describe those

who will eat dead meat. The phrase “every kind” modifies specifically the reference to birds.<sup>5</sup> Charles Feinberg notes:

Because of the amount of carnage, burial will not be the order of the day. The Lord has determined that the carcasses will fall to the ravenous birds and beasts. Such absence of burial was especially abhorrent in the Near East. This picture in verse 4 anticipates what is stated at greater length in verses 17–20.<sup>6</sup>

Verse 5 expands upon verse 4 and employs a play-on-words with the use of “field.” It is the field where the beasts are said to roam and that is where the Lord God destroys Gog’s armies—in the open field. The invaders never make into the population centers in which to mount an attack, instead, they die literally “on the face of the field.” This is a Hebrew idiom for the “open” field. They fall on the open field simply because the Lord God of Israel says they will. As in creation, God speaks a word and whatever He commands occurs. So it is with the Lord God’s word of judgment.

#### **FIRE UPON THE COASTLANDS**

Verse 6 says, “And I shall send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the LORD.” The Hebrew word for “fire” is the most common noun for “fire,” used 376 times in the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup> The verb “send” is in the piel stem, noting intensive action by God. The word “fire” is used in a near context along with “torrential rain, with hailstones, . . . and brimstone” (38:22). Since “fire and brimstone” are used in a similar description in 38:22, it follows that the Lord will use fire and brimstone as He did with Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24).

Some interpreters see a nuclear exchange occurring as a means to the fulfillment of this prophecy. For example, Bible teacher Chuck Missler commenting on this verse says, “Some analysts see an intercontinental nuclear exchange possible suggested. With the proliferation of nuclear weapons throughout the world today, such a prospect is disturbingly likely.”<sup>8</sup> The problem I have with seeing a nuclear exchange in this passage is that the biblical text clearly emphasizes that it is God Himself that is bringing the fire from heaven. The passage says, “I shall send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety.” The passage before us clearly presents God Himself as the one sending down fire upon judged invaders. Nowhere does the passage indicate that the Lord will use segregates as agents to carry out His judgments. Instead, God has demonstrated throughout history that He is quite capable of implementing this prophecy by Himself.

I believe that when the Bible says that God or an angel is the one implementing a judgment, then it must be taken as an indication that indeed God is the one directly performing the feat. I think that such statements in the Bible would not allow for us to interpret them as possible reference to human activity like a nuclear war, which would be man vs. man. The first five seal judgments in Revelation 6 would be an example of God using human agents to carry out a judgment. However, all of the rest of the seal, trumpet and bowl judgments are said by the biblical text to be implemented directly by God, often using angels to carry out these supernatural events. This is an important biblical point: that God is the one doing these things since God is clearly using supernatural means to achieve these ends, just as He did with Sodom and Gomorrah, at the Exodus, and will do many times during the tribulation (Rev. 4–19). The passage says, “I [God] shall send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in



safety.” Therefore, the text clearly says that God is doing this directly and it does not mention human agents. Notice the overall emphasis in the passage as a whole that the Lord is the one acting against Gog and on behalf of Israel (Ezek. 39:1–7). Verse one: “Behold, I am against you, O Gog.” Verse two: “I shall turn you around.” Verse three: “I shall strike your bow from your left hand.” Verse four: “I shall give you as food.” Verse five: “‘for it is I who have spoken,’ declares the Lord GOD.” Verse six: “I shall send fire upon Magog” and “they will know that I am the LORD.” Verse seven: “My holy name I shall make known in the midst of My people Israel; and I shall not let My holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.” In other words, God performs it so that God will get the notoriety and glory.

The fire of judgment that the Lord will send upon the coastlands most likely refers to the destruction of Gog's homeland, Magog, and the remote homelands of his allies (the coastlands, cf. 26:15, 18; 27:3, 6-7, 15, 35), who dwell in safety in these places. The overall lesson will be to teach them that He is God. Some think that this refers to a destruction of all of the coastlands or all nations in the world that dwell in safety. This is unlikely since the entire focus of the passage is upon Gog and his confederacy of invaders. The logic of the Lord in this instance is that Gog and his allies attack Israel who is “living securely” (38:8), so the Lord responds with an attack on the invaders homeland where they are said to be dwelling “in safety,” (39:6) or so they thought in their arrogance. Fruchtenbaum says, that the defeat of Gog “will cause Russia to cease being a political force in world affairs.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, Israel appeared destined for destruction in the eyes of the world as a result of a powerful coalition, but the Lord stepped in and defended Israel and turned the table on the invaders by destroying their homelands, which they thought to be secure. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> (italics original) Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, [1982] 2003), p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Dr. S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text & English Translation With An Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), p. 259.

<sup>5</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 171.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 229.

<sup>7</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, 7.4.2.

<sup>8</sup> Chuck Missler, *The Magog Invasion* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front, 1995), p. 179.

<sup>9</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 115.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part XXI

by Thomas Ice

*And My holy name I shall make known in the midst of My people Israel; and I shall not let My holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. Behold, it is coming and it shall be done," declares the Lord GOD. "That is the day of which I have spoken. Then those who inhabit the cities of Israel will go out, and make fires with the weapons and burn them, both shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, war clubs and spears and for seven years they will make fires of them. And they will not take wood from the field or gather firewood from the forests, for they will make fires with the weapons; and they will take the spoil of those who despoiled them, and seize the plunder of those who plundered them," declares the Lord GOD.*  
—Ezekiel 39:7–10

Why is the Lord God of Israel going to bring Gog and his overwhelming army down to attack Israel at this point in history? The broadest purpose statement for this entire passage is given in verses seven and eight. "My holy name I shall make known in the midst of My people Israel," with the result that "I shall not let My holy name be profaned anymore" (39:7). That God is holy is important to God Himself, even though it is greatly undervalued today, even in Christian circles. Most likely, there is a relationship between national Israel's change of behavior and the restoration and conversion of the nation as described earlier in chapter 37. "These verses restate the divine initiative in the invasion and elaborate upon the fall of Gog and God's purposes."<sup>1</sup>

### HOLY, HOLY, HOLY

Three times in verse seven the Hebrew word for "holy" is used (*qadosh*). Twice "My holy name" and once "the Holy One of Israel." This word means, "set apart for special use; treated with respect, removed from common usage."<sup>2</sup> It appears that the Gog and Magog event will take place at that time in history when the Lord is going to intervene in history in order to sanctify His reputation and that of Israel as well among the nations of this world. E. W. Hengstenburg has noted:

The holy name of God (ver. 7) is His character, arising from His former historical manifestations, as God in the full sense, the absolute, the transcendently glorious, unconditionally separate from all untruth and impotence. God makes known His name among His people when He verifies His historical character anew, when He gives His people the victory over the heathen world that rages against them. He would profane His name if He were to abandon His people continually to the heathen world, as He had done in the time of the prophet on account of their apostasy.<sup>3</sup>

It is through the Lord's obvious, miraculous intervention on behalf of His people that God restores the strained relationship with Israel. The Lord says, "I shall not let My holy name be profaned anymore" (39:7). The Hebrew verb *'ahel* is translated "profaned" in this passage and has the basic meaning of "to pollute, defile, or profane."<sup>4</sup>

In this context, the verb appears in the hiphil stem, which denotes causative action. Thus, it means to “allow to be profaned” or defiled.<sup>5</sup> God is no longer going to allow His holy name or reputation to be profaned, either by His own people or the nations throughout the world. Charles Feinberg explains:

His true character will appear in its proper light as both righteous and mighty. Such emphasis is made of this thought throughout the book of Ezekiel because this is the design of God in all history, and there is no more important concept in all the universe. That which gives stability and worth to life on earth is the determining truth that a God of holiness, wisdom, love and truth is working out His blessed will throughout the universe and among created intelligences.<sup>6</sup>

If there was any doubt in anyone’s mind about the certainty of these events coming to pass, verse 8 reiterates the inevitability that God will see this through. “Behold, it is coming and it shall be done,” declares the Lord GOD. “That is the day of which I have spoken.” In fact, there is probably not another passage in the entire Bible that emphasizes the certitude of a prophetic event as we find here in Ezekiel 38—39. “There may, indeed, be some who think that matters may be altered or fashioned to their liking,” declares Feinberg. “To them the word comes that there is no escape from what has been predicted, for it is as good as done. When God predicts, He makes it manifest that He can also perform that which is foretold.”<sup>7</sup> Men may think of themselves as the primary actors in history, but when the truth is told, it is God who is seen to be the Prime Mover.

What is the impact of God’s glorification upon the nation of Israel? It is clear that “a revival occurs in Israel, causing many Jews to turn to the Lord.”<sup>8</sup>

#### SEVEN-YEAR BURNING

What is the point being emphasized in verses 9 and 10 about burning the spoils of war in this passage? “Rather than simply destroy the weapons, they will be used for fuel and thereby benefit the Israelis.”<sup>9</sup> Why would they burn the weapons instead of just disposing of them? Randall Price suggests the following: “This ironic disposition of weapons designed to kill the people will be considered a “plunder of those who [intended to] plunder them” (verse 10b).”<sup>10</sup> Verse 10 indicates that during this seven-year period, Israelis will not have to use natural resources from the land for fires. “And they will not take wood from the field or gather firewood from the forests, for they will make fires with the weapons; and they will take the spoil of those who despoiled them, and seize the plunder of those who plundered them,” declares the Lord GOD” (39:10).

The fact that these weapons will be burnt for seven years provides a time indicator that could help us discern when this battle will take place on God’s prophetic timeline. “These seven months of burying seven years of burning are crucial in determining *when* this invasion occurs,” declares Fruchtenbaum. “For any view to be correct, it must satisfy the requirements of these seven months and seven years.”<sup>11</sup>

I believe that the invasion of Gog will likely take place after the rapture of the church, but before the start of the tribulation. One of the primary factors is the seven-year period that is mentioned in this section of the passage. It seems unlikely that the seven-year burning could lapse into the thousand-year kingdom period after our Lord’s second coming. Dr. Price expounds upon these issues as follows:

If this battle takes place after the Rapture but before the seventieth week begins, there would be ample time and the freedom of movement even through the first half of the Tribulation (the time of pseudo-peace for Israel under the Antichrist's covenant) to accomplish this job. Moreover, the statement about not needing to gather firewood from the forests (verse 10) would make more sense than after the first trumpet judgment when one-third of the trees were burned up (Revelation 8:7). If this battle were to take place at any point in the Tribulation the people would run out of time to complete this task, before the intensified persecution of the final 42 months (Matthew 24:16-22) that drives the Jewish Remnant into the wilderness to escape the Satanic onslaught (Revelation 12:6). While there is no reason why the burning of weapons for firewood could not continue into the Millennial Kingdom, since during this time other weapons will be converted to peaceful and productive uses (Isaiah 2:4), the renewal of nature and increased productivity of this age (Isaiah 27:6; Zechariah 8:12; Micah 4:4) could argue against this necessity.<sup>12</sup>

When contemplating the timing of the fulfillment of this battle, we must notice four key observations.<sup>13</sup> First, Israel must be back in her land and a nation again, which is the situation today. Second, within the land of Israel itself, the places that were laid waste must be inhabited, which is the exact situation today in Israel. Third, "Israel is dwelling in unwallled villages, a good description of present-day *kibbutzim*."<sup>14</sup> Fourth, Israel will be dwelling securely. Fruchtenbaum says, "nowhere in the entire text does it speak of Israel as living in peace. Rather, Israel is merely living in security, which means 'confidence,' regardless of whether it is during a state of war or peace."<sup>15</sup>

It appears that even though I believe that this battle will take place after the rapture but before the start of the tribulation, nevertheless, the stage is already set in our own day for these events to take place. Russia is on the prowl again and one of her closest allies is Persia (Iran). The world is moving closer each day to this impending showdown. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr., *The New American Commentary, Ezekiel* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Pubs., 1994), p. 341.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>3</sup> E. W. Hengstenburg, *The Prophecies of The Prophet Ezekiel Elucidated* (Minneapolis: James Publications [1869] 1976), p. 341.

<sup>4</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

<sup>5</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>6</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 229.

<sup>7</sup> Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 229.

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<sup>8</sup> Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, [1982] 2003), p. 115.

<sup>9</sup> Randall Price, "Ezekiel" in Tim LaHaye & Ed Hindson, editors, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), p. 194.

<sup>10</sup> Randall Price, "Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel," (2007), p. 43.

<sup>11</sup> (*Italics original*) Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 117.

<sup>12</sup> Price, "Unpublished Notes," p. 43.

<sup>13</sup> These observations are made by Fruchtenbaum in *Footsteps*, p. 117.

<sup>14</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 117.

<sup>15</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 117.

## EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

### Part XXII

by Thomas Ice

*“And it will come about on that day that I shall give Gog a burial ground there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea, and it will block off the passers-by. So they will bury Gog there with all his multitude, and they will call it the valley of Hamon-gog. For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land. Even all the people of the land will bury them; and it will be to their renown on the day that I glorify Myself,” declares the Lord GOD.*

—Ezekiel 39:11–13

The slaughter by the Lord as He defends Israel against Gog and his hoards will be so great and significant that the biblical text spends ten verses talking about the clean up and burial process following the battle (Ezek. 39:11–20). What was meant to result in the physical death of the nation of Israel by Gog is turned around by God in such a way that it will provide an opportunity for spiritual life for Israel (Ezek. 39:25–39).

### GOG’S GRAVE

Our family lived for five years in Fredericksburg, Virginia in the mid-90s. One of the first things one notices as one becomes familiar with the town is the hill that has almost 10,000 Union soldiers buried there as a memorial to their efforts in the Battle of Fredericksburg during the Civil War. At first I wondered why those Northern soldiers were buried in the South. I eventually learned that the reason for their burial down South is because the carnage was so great in that battle there was no way to reasonably transfer them to their various homes up North. A similar fate awaits those invaders of Israel during the future Gog invasion.

Just as those invading Northern soldiers were buried where they had fallen in the Battle of Fredericksburg, so will Gog and his hordes. “And it will come about on that day that I shall give Gog a burial ground there in Israel” (Ezek. 39:11a). Remember the context of the overall Gog and Magog event: It is the Lord who puts hooks into the jaw of Gog and his allies that brings them down to the land of Israel in the first place (38:4). At the human level, Gog’s motive was to take plunder from Israel (38:12), but the Divine purpose is to glorify God and sanctify the Lord’s name (38:23). Therefore, God’s purpose is fulfilled while Gog’s intent is foiled and they end up being spoiled to the glory of God. Just as the burial site in Fredericksburg is a memorial to the fallen Union soldiers, so also will Gog’s grave be a testimony to what God will have done.

The location of this memorial is said to be “the valley of those who pass by east of the sea.” “So vast were to be the masses that nothing but a deep valley would suffice for their corpses.”<sup>1</sup> Where in Israel is this valley located? “The burial place will be in one of the valleys east of the Mediterranean Sea,” according to Arnold Fruchtenbaum, “which would put it in the Jordan Valley above the Dead Sea, and will be renamed accordingly.”<sup>2</sup> Charles Dyer adds the following:

The valley where Gog’s army will be buried is “on the east side of” the Dead Sea in what is today Jordan. The phrase “those who travel east” could be taken as a proper name. It might refer to the “mountains of Abarim” east of

the Dead Sea that Israel traversed on her way to the Promised Land (cf. Num. 33:48). If so, Gog's burial will be in the Valley of Abarim just across the Dead Sea from Israel proper in the land of Moab. Yet the burial will be **in Israel** because Israel controlled that area during some periods of her history (cf. 2 Sam. 8:2; Ps. 60:8).<sup>3</sup>

After this battle and burial the passage says, "and it will block off the passers-by." This means that the passage way will be blocked off with so many bodies of the dead soldiers clogging the way that it will be difficult for travelers to make it past the scene.<sup>4</sup> Randall Price says, "The slaughter will have been so great that the dead bodies of Gog's army will fill an entire valley blocking passage for travelers through this area."<sup>5</sup> The location of this burial site indicates that the invaders route will likely come down from the north, continue south down the Jordan valley with intent to move west to Jerusalem when they reach the northern edge of the Dead Sea. The Lord will strike down the invaders as they begin to move west toward His city, Jerusalem.

"So they will bury Gog there with all his multitude, and they will call it the valley of Hamon-gog." Since the multitude of invaders will meet their end in a valley that will likely enable the burying teams to simply cover them over with dirt in a mass burial graveyard. The word "Hamon" in Hebrew means "multitude" or "crowd."<sup>6</sup> Thus, "overlooking the cemetery a new city will be built"<sup>7</sup> by the name of "Multitude of Gog" to commemorate this event in history.

#### SEVEN-MONTH BURIAL

"For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land." The "house of Israel" refers to the Jewish people who have returned to their homeland (38:8) and now live in the Promised Land. The Jewish people will need to bury the corpses "in order to cleanse the land." What is the Jewish requirement that necessitates such a cleansing? Price points out contemporary practices in Israel relating to this passage as follows:

On the basis of this verse the rabbis inferred the legal ruling (*halakha*) that *all* graves must be marked. In the modern State of Israel a group of non-governmental Orthodox Jews known as ZAKA (Hebrew acronym for "Identification of Disaster Victims") is appointed to carefully remove all human remains after suicide bombings in order to restore order and prevent ritual impurity in the Land. The reason, according to Jewish law (*halakha*) is that the dead must be buried immediately because exposed corpses (or even single bones) are a source of ritual contamination to the Land (cf. Num. 19:11-22; Deut. 21:1-9). Ezekiel 36:17-21 has already connected ritual purity and divine holiness, and the text here mentions the need to "cleanse the Land" three times (verses 12, 14, 16).<sup>8</sup>

The text says that this burial process will take seven months. Why will it take so long to accomplish this task? First, the vast number of invaders who are killed will simply make for a daunting burial task in itself. Second, Fruchtenbaum is no doubt correct when he says, "Since the armies are destroyed in the mountains of Israel, many of the bodies will fall in crevices where they will not be easily found, and so special details will be employed by the government for the seven months to search out these bodies for burial in the special valley."<sup>9</sup>

### BURIAL PARTY

“Even all the people of the land will bury them.” This statement supports the fact that the slaughter of the invading force is so large that it takes all the people of the land to bury the dead. Apparently the general population of Israel will have to leave their normal jobs in order to accomplish this task (see 39:14–16). Perhaps the general population will be involved in the initial cleanup before specialists take over to complete the task.<sup>10</sup> Since the cleanup is such a huge task, it could account for why a town will be developed overlooking the valley. Just as when an oil boom or a gold rush occurs in the United States and boomtowns spring up nearby, so it could be that the initial motivation for Hamon-gog is the need for a base camp for the burial workers.

The burial project for all the people of Israel is said to be “to their renown on the day that I glorify Myself,” declares the Lord GOD.” The Hebrew phrase “to their renown” is in construct form linking “to them” to “renown.” The word for “renown” is a common one<sup>11</sup> that is usually translated in English by “name.” But in this context, the meaning clearly carries the notion of “making a name” or “becoming famous.”<sup>12</sup> This is why “renown” is an excellent translation of the word “name” in this context. Thus, the burial party conducted by the people of Israel will become famous in that day as a result of this burial process. Even further than that, the passage says that it is because of His people’s fame or renown that the Lord GOD will be glorified through these events. Why will this be seen from God’s viewpoint as a glorious event honoring Him? It will be seen as glorious because through this event God will demonstrate to Israel and all the nations of the world that He, the Lord GOD of Israel is able to keep His promises to His covenant people Israel. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset et al., *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Eze 39:11.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> (emphasis original) Charles H. Dyer, “Ezekiel” in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), p. 1302.

<sup>4</sup> Dyer, “Ezekiel,” p. 1302.

<sup>5</sup> Randall Price, “Ezekiel” in Tim LaHaye & Ed Hindson, editors, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), p. 194.

<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 117.

<sup>8</sup> Randall Price, *Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel*, (2007), p. 44.

<sup>9</sup> Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 116.

<sup>10</sup> Dyer, “Ezekiel,” p. 1302.

<sup>11</sup> 864 times according to a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

<sup>12</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.



**EZEKIEL 38 AND 39**  
**Part XXIII**  
by Thomas Ice

And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, "Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of mighty men, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as though they were rams, lambs, goats, and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. So you will eat fat until you are glutted, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. And you will be glutted at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of war," declares the Lord GOD.  
—Ezekiel 39:17–20

This passage spends an inordinate amount of verbiage on the clean up aspects following the battle where God wipes out Gog (Ezek. 39:9–20). "The first instructions deal with the disposal of the weapons (verses 9–10), which are to be burned. . . . The next instructions (Ezekiel 39:11–20) deal with the proper disposal of the slain soldiers of the Gog army."<sup>1</sup>

**MY SACRIFICE**

Dr. Randall Price notes that, "it may be that two phases of disposal are in view. The first phase of disposal is that performed by the wild animals assembled to reduce the corpses to skeletons (verses 18–20)." This would be the section that is now under consideration. "Then the bones of the enemy will be properly buried by 'all of the people of the land' (verse 13)."<sup>2</sup>

In verse 17 the Lord God tells the prophet Ezekiel to speak to every kind of bird and beast of the field to gather themselves from all directions to partake of "My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel." Thus, it is the Lord, through the word of the prophet that rounds up this great herd of animals for them to feast upon. There appears to be a polemical purpose intended by the Lord in this passage. The irony is that earlier Gog and his armies attacked Israel for the stated purpose "to capture spoil and to size plunder" (38:12). Yet, because of the Lord's intervention, they become spoil for the wild animals and birds to feast upon. "With the gathering of the weapons for burning there is associated the plundering of the fallen foe (v. 10b)," notes Keil, "by which the Israelites do to the enemy what he intended to do to them (Ezek. 38:12), and the people of God obtain possession of the wealth of their foes (cf. Jer. 30:16)."<sup>3</sup>

The Lord calls the massacre of the invaders "My sacrifice" to the animals and birds. The Lord says He will sacrifice this meal and then calls it a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. So the Hebrew word for "sacrifice" is used three times in verse 17. Jewish rabbi Fisch indicates that the Jewish translation is "feast," but that it literally means "sacrifice." "The two ideas are interconnected, since one was usually the

occasion of the other. To an Israelite, the sacrifice here described is a grim parody of the true sacrifice, since the 'guests' drink the blood, a rite absolutely forbidden in Israel."<sup>4</sup>

### THE MENU

The Lord enumerates the menu that will be on hand for scavenger animals and birds attending this feast. Those whom the Lord describes includes "mighty men" and "the princes of the earth" (39:18). The Hebrew term "mighty men" is the plural of the word for mighty and means "mighty, powerful, i.e., pertaining to being strong, i.e., pertaining to having political or military force."<sup>5</sup> Therefore, these would be top of the line military soldiers like the ones in our special forces units. The other Hebrew term denoting a human leader means "leader, ruler, chief, prince, i.e., one who governs or rules a group either selected by ability or blood relation."<sup>6</sup> Not only were the top fighting men destroyed, but also their leadership. The Hebrew text could have just spoken of the princes and it would have been understood that they were from the earth. However, "of the earth" is included to likely indicate that the best from the earth were destroyed by the ruler of heaven and earth—the Lord Himself.

Since the Lord is describing the slaughter of His enemies using the language of a sacrificial feast, He equates the human carnage in terms of sacrificial animals often used in Israel's temple worship. This time the actual sacrifice are the enemies of Israel who are served to animals and birds. "Usually people slaughtered and ate sacrificed animals. Here, however, the men of Gog's armies will be sacrifices; they will be eaten by animals."<sup>7</sup> "The animals mentioned are figurative of the different ranks of the slain men."<sup>8</sup> "To give due prominence to this thought, the birds and beasts of prey are summoned by God to gather together to the meal prepared for them. The picture given of it as a sacrificial meal is based upon Isa. 34:6 and Jer. 46:10. In harmony with this picture the slaughtered foes are designated as fattened sacrificial beasts, rams, lambs, he-goats, bullocks; on which Grotius has correctly remarked, that "these names of animals, which were generally employed in the sacrifices, are to be understood as signifying different orders of men, chiefs, generals, soldiers, as the Chaldee also observes."<sup>9</sup>

The phrase "all of them fatlings of Bashan," refers first to a "fattened animal, i.e., a relatively young mammal (usually of the bovine species), weaned animal choice for consumption."<sup>10</sup> Secondly, Bashan refers to "the fertile country bounded by the Jabbok River on the south, the Sea of Galilee on the west, a line from Mount Hermon eastward on the north and the Hauran range on the east."<sup>11</sup> As Charles Feinberg notes, "Bashan was famous for its fine pastures and well-fed cattle."<sup>12</sup> If you go to the Golan Heights in Israel today you will see that it is the primary area where cattle graze in pastures and livestock is raised.

Once again verse 19 is a polemic which notes that Gog and his hoards came down to Israel for the purpose of plundering the land, instead, she was the one plundered. In this instance, Gog and his armies will provide the fat and blood by which the animals and birds will be gluttoned and drunk. In order for them to be gluttoned and drunk, there would have to be an excess to eat and drink. Such will be the case in this instance of Gog's defeat upon the hills of Israel.

Verse 20 says, "And you will be gluttoned at My table." "The sacrificial feast mentioned in verse 19 is referred to as 'my table' (v. 20) because it is the Lord who will hold the feast," notes Feinberg. "It is a vivid figure to bring out the idea of vast carnage, deserved judgment and irrevocable doom."<sup>13</sup> Thus, verse 20 restates literally: "you will be gluttoned at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of

war," what was said in verse 18 symbolically: "You shall eat the flesh of mighty men, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as though they were rams, lambs, goats, and bulls." Once again, the clear focus of this passage is upon the fact that our Sovereign Lord is the One who is in control of history and is the One superintending this entire event, even though Gog and his allies had their reasons for the invasion. This entire message is said to be a declaration from the Lord GOD, who reigns over heaven and earth.

### CONCLUSION

Even though Ezekiel 39 still has nine verses until it ends, the prophecy of the battle of Gog and Magog ends with verse 20. Dr. Price explains as follows:

Allusions to the Gog War cease with verse 22 and the focus turns exclusively to God's past deliverance of His people and their devotion to Him at the time of their future restoration. Verses 21-22 are transitional verses that restate the divine purpose of Gog's defeat—to bring revelatory information concerning God to the nations (verse 21) and to Israel (verse 22).<sup>14</sup>

In coming installments, this writer will take the information gleaned from the prior installments in order to apply to the contemporary or a future world various possibilities that flow inductively from the text. Some of the issues that will need to be addressed are as follows: when, where, why and what will happen in order for a future occurrence of this prophecy to be fulfilled in history. Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Randall Price, "Ezekiel" in Tim LaHaye & Ed Hindson, editors, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), p. 194.

<sup>2</sup> Price, "Ezekiel," p. 194.

<sup>3</sup> Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), Vol. 9, p. 338.

<sup>4</sup> Rabbi Dr. S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text & English Translation With An Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), p. 262.

<sup>5</sup> James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), DBLH 1475, #1.

<sup>6</sup> Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, DBLH 5954, #1.

<sup>7</sup> John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), Vol. 1, p. 1302.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 231.

<sup>9</sup> Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, Vol. 9, p. 339.

<sup>10</sup> Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, DBLH 5309.

<sup>11</sup> R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980), p. 137.

<sup>12</sup> Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 231.

<sup>13</sup> Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 231.

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<sup>14</sup> Price, "Ezekiel," p. 194.

**EZEKIEL 38 AND 39**  
**Part XXIV**  
by Thomas Ice

Having completed an examination and overview of Ezekiel 38—39:20, I now turn to the issue of when this event will or has taken place in history. What are the various views relating to the timing of when this campaign takes place? There are at least seven different views concerning the time of the fulfillment of the battle of Gog and Magog.

**VARIOUS VIEWS**

The seven views do not even take into account additional possibilities that arise within the historicist and idealist interpretative approach. I will not consider these perspectives since the historicist system is largely dead, except for advocacy by some cults, while the idealist method is by definition opposed to examining the timing of prophetic events. This leaves the student of the Bible with two broad options—a past or future fulfillment.

Those who believe that this prophecy has been fulfilled in the past are the preterists and they advocate two views. First, Gary DeMar and only a couple of other preterists believe that this battle was fulfilled in events of Esther 9.<sup>1</sup> Thus, he believes it was fulfilled in the fifth century B.C. during the reign of the Persian King Xerxes I (486–465). While there are other sub-views within preterism, the second view is that “most preterists have understood this vision as a prophecy which was fulfilled in the 2nd century B.C. at the defeat of the Assyrian invaders of Palestine by Judas Maccabeus.”<sup>2</sup>

The other major group are those who believe these prophecies will be fulfilled in the future. The first view believes that the Gog prophecy will take place before the tribulation (could occur before the rapture, but not likely).<sup>3</sup> A second view sees it taking place in the first half, towards the middle of the tribulation.<sup>4</sup> The third view equates Armageddon and the Gog invasion as the same event in conjunction with the second coming.<sup>5</sup> Fourth, is the view that these things will occur at the beginning of the millennium.<sup>6</sup> The final view believes that the invasion takes place at the end of the millennium.<sup>7</sup>

**PAST FULFILLMENT?**

As I examine the two past fulfillment views, I must confess that the least likely of all seven views is DeMar’s contention that the Gog invasion was fulfilled in the days of Esther 9. DeMar says that Ezekiel 38—39 was “literally” fulfilled by the events described in Esther 9 that occurred in about 473 B.C. in the days of Queen Esther of Persia. DeMar declares that the parallels between the battles in Ezekiel 38—39 and Esther are “unmistakable.”<sup>8</sup> However, in his “literal” interpretation DeMar fails to account for a number of clear differences between Ezekiel 38—39 and Esther 9. A simple reading of the two passages reveals that they cannot be describing the same event.

Here are a few of the more apparent and problematic inconsistencies in the following comparisons that render DeMar’s view as an impossibility.

<b>EZEKIEL 38—39</b>	<b>ESTHER 9</b>
The land of Israel is invaded (38:16). The enemies fall on the mountains of Israel (39:4). Gog, the leader of the invasion, is	Jews are attacked in cities throughout the Persian empire (127 provinces, 9:30) and defend themselves (9:2) The enemies die

<p>buried in Israel (39:11).</p> <p>The Jews bury the dead bodies over a period of seven months to cleanse the land of Israel (39:12).</p> <p>The invaders are destroyed by an earthquake in the land of Israel, infighting, plagues, and fire from heaven (38:19-22). God destroys the enemies supernaturally.</p> <p>Invaders are from as far west as ancient Put (modern Libya) (Ezekiel 38:5) and as far north as Magog, the land of the Scythians.</p> <p>God even sends fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands (39:6).</p>	<p>throughout the Persian empire.</p> <p>No need to cleanse the land because the dead bodies are not in Israel.</p> <p>Attackers are killed by the Jewish people themselves assisted by local government leaders (9:3-5).</p> <p>The Persian empire did not include these areas. It only extended as far west as Cush (modern Sudan) (Esther 8:9) and as far north as the bottom part of the Black and Caspian Seas.</p> <p>There is nothing even close to this in Esther 9.</p>
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Clearly Ezekiel describes a surprise invasion involving only the land of Israel, while Esther 9 speaks of the Jews scattered throughout 127 provinces of the Persian Empire (Esther 9:30) who knew the exact day (Adir 13 according to Esther 9:1) when the king's edict would be executed. No one in Ezekiel's prophecy was killed by hanging on a gallows, as were Haman and his ten sons (Esther 9:13). Why is the land of Israel not even mentioned in Esther 9 while the Persian capital of Susa and many other place names in the empire are referenced? In Ezekiel Persia is one of the invaders that is wiped out by the Lord, while in Esther 9 the Persian king and many Persians aid the Jews in defeating the anti-Semites while this all takes place in Persia. Further, the Jews living in Persia in Esther 9 could not be said to have been regathered from the nations and living at ease in the land of Israel as Ezekiel describes, instead, the Jews in Esther were embroiled in the struggle involving the bravery of Queen Esther. Clearly, these differences are like day and night.

One important question we might ask at this point is this: If Ezekiel 38—39 was literally fulfilled in the events of Esther 9, why did this escape the notice of everyone in Esther's day? Why isn't there any mention in Esther of this great fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy? And why aren't there any Jewish scholars in that day (or subsequently) who recognized this fulfillment?

The answer is quite clear. Esther 9 did not fulfill Ezekiel 38—39. In fact, an important Jewish holiday called Purim developed out of the Esther event (9:20-32). This is a joyous annual holiday to celebrate God's deliverance from the hand of Israel's enemies. Purim's celebration includes the public reading of the book of Esther, but no tradition has developed or even been heard of in which the Jews read Ezekiel 38—39 in connection with this observance. If Ezekiel 38—39 had been a fulfillment of Esther, then no doubt a tradition of reading that passage would have arisen in conjunction with the celebration.

Fortunately, Ezekiel actually tells us when this invasion will occur. In Ezekiel 38:8, he says specifically that this invasion will occur in the "latter years." This is the only occurrence of this exact phrase in the Old Testament.

Another similar phrase occurs later in this chapter in verse 16: “It will come about in *the last days* that I shall bring you against My land” (italics added). This phrase is used in the Old Testament in reference to Israel’s final time of distress or to Israel’s final restoration to the messianic kingdom (see Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 30:24; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1). Likewise, in Ezekiel 38:16, the phrase “in the last days” is a technical term that refers to the end of times, according to Hebrew scholar Horst Seebass. He says it refers to “how history will culminate, thus its outcome.”<sup>9</sup> Therefore, Ezekiel is telling us that this invasion will occur in the final time of history in preparation for the establishment of the messianic kingdom of Christ.

Another very simple reason we can know that this invasion is still future is that nothing even remotely similar to the events in Ezekiel 38–39 has ever occurred in the past. Just think about it. When has Israel ever been invaded by all these nations listed in Ezekiel 38:1–6? Or when did God ever destroy an invading army like this with fire and brimstone from heaven, plagues, earthquakes, and infighting among the invaders (38:19–22)?

The answer? Never. That’s because Ezekiel is describing an invasion that is still future even in our day. The only possible motive for relating Esther 9 with Ezekiel 38–39 is because DeMar and other preterists desperately want to avoid the possibility that this is a future prophecy since it would undermine their past fulfillment views.

### CONCLUSION

The view of a massive invasion of Israel in the end times has not yet occurred in history in spite of claims to the contrary. No event in Israel’s past history since the time of Ezekiel’s prophecy even comes close to fitting the details of Ezekiel 38–39 (especially Esther 9). Therefore, since the prophecy must be literally fulfilled, it must still be future even in our day. Ezekiel 38–39 describes a future end-time invasion of Israel by Russia, Iran and many allies (all of whom are Islamic nations today that despise Israel). Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> See Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), pp. 12–15; also DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), pp. 368–69. DeMar follows fellow preterist James Jordan and his view in *Esther: In the Midst of Covenant History* (Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Jay Rogers, “Does the Bible predict a Russian invasion of Israel?” an article published April 1997 on the internet at [www.forerunner.com/predvestnik/X0058\\_Russia\\_Israel.html](http://www.forerunner.com/predvestnik/X0058_Russia_Israel.html), accessed March 12, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> See Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), pp. 117–125. See also, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins as depicted in *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> See Mark Hitchcock, *Iran The Coming Crisis: Radical Islam, Oil, and The Nuclear Threat* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2006), pp. 17789.

<sup>5</sup> See Louis S. Bauman, *Russian Events in the Light of Bible Prophecy* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1942), pp. 174–75.

<sup>6</sup> See Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Prophet Ezekiel* (New York: Our Hope, 1918), pp. 252–55.

<sup>7</sup> See Ralph Alexander, *Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 127–29.

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<sup>8</sup> DeMar, *End Times Fiction*, p. 13

<sup>9</sup> Horst Seebass, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translator John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), vol. I, pp. 211–12.