

# THE ASSAULT AND ANNIHILATION OF GOG AND MAGOG: Ezekiel 38-39

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The twentieth century has witnessed the rise and demise of the Soviet Union, a superpower that will yet again reach a prominent position in the end-times. A revived Russia will seek world dominance, as predicted in Ezekiel 38:1-39:24. The emergence of Russia is seen in the context of the physical and spiritual restoration of Israel. Ezekiel 36-37 speaks of the return of Israel to their land from which they will never again be scattered.

Ezekiel prophesies of the physical restoration of Israel when he explains the symbolism of the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37:21, "and say unto them, Thus saith the Lord GOD; behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land:" Ezekiel further foretells the spiritual regeneration of Israel. He writes, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them" (36:26, 27). This restoration and regeneration of Israel are seen as events closely related to the context of the tribulation period.

## THE CONFLICTS OF THE END TIMES

Three major geopolitical conflicts are predicted for the tribulation period. In the prophecies of Daniel 2 and Daniel 7 a revived Roman empire is envisioned. A political ruler will arise who will subdue ten nations which were part of the old Roman empire (Dan. 7:23-24). His kingdom will eventually be worldwide, yet he will be destroyed at the Second Advent of Christ (Rev. 13:7; 19:20).

This reign by the Roman ruler cannot extend worldwide until the second phase of the end-time struggle is complete. Russia moves against Israel and is totally decimated, allowing the Roman ruler, also referred to as Antichrist (1 Jn. 2:18), to extend his reign of terror over the entire earth.

The third geopolitical battle extends over the last three and a half years of the tribulation. This is the campaign of Armageddon, when according to Daniel 11 and Revelation 16, all the armies of the nations will converge on Israel, only to be destroyed at the Second Advent of Christ, who returns to set up His Messianic kingdom.

Many commentators see the invasion of Israel by Gog and Magog as part of the Campaign of Armageddon. The invasion of Gog and Magog would thus correspond to the attack of the king of the north of Daniel 11:40. There are enough differences between these two events, that it is best to see them as separate phases of the end-time drama, setting the stage for Christ's return.

Walvoord says that Gog and Magog "will be distinct, both in its objectives, character and outcome . . . The war centering in Armageddon is one which involves all the nations of the world. The Russian war is predominantly Russia with six allies. The Armageddon struggle covers all the Holy Land but the war with Russia is settled on the northern mountains of Israel. Armageddon is the climax of the Great Tribulation, a time of persecution for Israel. Ezekiel 38 describes Israel at peace and in prosperity. For these reasons Ezekiel 38-39 do not fit Armageddon."<sup>1</sup>

## THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE BATTLE OF GOG AND MAGOG

At least seven different times have been suggested for the events of the battle, spanning the period from before the rapture through the end of the Millennium.

For example, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, in their widely read *Left Behind* series, place the invasion prior to the rapture. They write in the first volume about this pre-tribulational event, "Determined to dominate and occupy the Holy Land, the Russians had launched an attack in the middle of the night. . . The attack became known as the Russian Pearl Harbor." Soon thereafter the rapture occurs.<sup>2</sup> Others identify the event with the battle of Gog and Magog, predicted in Revelation 20:7 for the end of the Millennium. It seems best, however, to see these as two different battles, separated by at least 1,000 years. A good hermeneutical maxim to keep in mind is that similarity does not prove identity. The invasion of Israel in Ezekiel 38-39 ends with a seven-year burial of the dead in a predetermined mass grave. The battle of Revelation 20 is directed

against Christ and His church in Jerusalem. The invaders will be consumed by fire, making burial obsolete. The Northern confederacy in Ezekiel is headed by Gog. The rebellion against Christ in Revelation, comprised of a worldwide conspiracy, is spearheaded by Satan.

The similarity in the term “Gog and Magog” in Revelation 20 may be indicative of the fact that the battle of the tribulation period will have become a byword for a massive invasion of Israel in which the invader is totally and supernaturally destroyed. The situation is similar to that of the Battle of Waterloo, a term which is sometimes applied to other battles. One can say that Hitler met his Waterloo at Stalingrad, meaning that he was as completely defeated by the resistance of the Russians and the bitter Russian winter, as Napoleon’s forces were when routed by the Duke of Wellington on the fields of Waterloo.

In view of the scenario of end time events, it is best to see the battle of Gog and Magog as taking place toward the end of the first half of the tribulation. Several factors point in that direction.

1) First, the battle follows the regathering of Israel to the land. The prophecy of Ezekiel 36-37 relates to God’s dealings with Israel primarily after the church age which is concluded by the rapture. It is true that there is a partial regathering of Israel today, which began primarily with the establishment of the modern state of Israel in 1948, but its complete fulfillment awaits the tribulation period. Every single Jew on this planet will return to Israel in fulfillment of Ezekiel 39:28, “Then shall they know that I am the LORD their God, which caused them to be led into captivity among the heathen; but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there.” The probable cause of this total return is the vicious worldwide anti-Semitism predicted by Christ for the time immediately after the rapture. Christ warned the Jews in that period, “Ye shall be hated of all nations for my name’s sake” (Mt. 24:9).

2) A second factor indicating the chronology of the battle is the time reference to “latter years” (Ez. 38:8) and “latter days” (38:16), which are best understood as God’s final dealings with His people Israel, prior to Christ’s glorious return.

3) Thirdly, the invasion takes place at the time when Israel is dwelling securely in their land: Ezekiel 38:11 “And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates.”

This period of security is probably ushered in by a covenant of peace which Antichrist, the Roman ruler, will make with Israel (Dan. 9:26), but which he will break after three and a half years, perhaps because his main opponent, the king of the North, has been destroyed. Russia’s divine destruction enables him to be world ruler during the latter half of the tribulation period.

Certainly in its present state Israel does not live safely and securely. Since its establishment as a nation it has been attacked five times by its Arab neighbors, who were, for the most part, armed and encouraged by the Soviet leaders.

The volatile situation in the Middle East forces Israel to be in constant military preparedness. Not just is Israel protecting itself against enemies from without but frequent terror attacks from within. This is why at the time of this writing, after four years of violence, Israel is constructing a 425-mile long barrier between the Palestinian West Bank and Israel proper.

The present conditions seem to preclude a fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy before the rapture, though some capable scholars argue otherwise. Fruchtenbaum understands the reference to unwalled villages as “a good description of present-day *kibbutzim* . . . Israel is merely living in security, which means ‘confidence,’ regardless of whether it is during a state of war or peace.”<sup>3</sup> He postulates that the actual attack will occur before the tribulation but not necessarily before the rapture.

Visitors to Israel notice that with the present and constant threat of terrorism, especially the *kibbutzim* are protected by barriers. The entire country is one gigantic armed camp. All settlements along the Lebanese border are equipped with air raid shelters. Israel today is in a state of war against the enemies without and terrorists within. After the rapture, Antichrist ratifies his covenant with Israel, making the nation feel secure. It is at this time that Gog and Magog make their move.

## THE BATTLE OF GOG AND MAGOG: EZEKIEL 38-39

**1. The Armies: 38:1-3****The revelation:**

The message of Ezekiel 38-39 is the last in a series of prophecies given by God to Ezekiel in Babylon and delivered by the prophet the night before the news came of Jerusalem's fall (Ez. 33:21-22). Like the other messages, the revelation of Ezekiel 38-39 concerns the land of Israel. This final end-time vision concludes with the salvation of the people of God and the glorification of the name of God.

**The ruler:**

The prophecy commences with five names, which have led to lengthy discussions and a wide variety of interpretations. God commanded Ezekiel: "Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him" (Ez. 38:2). Gog appears to be the name of a person. The derivation of the name is possibly from a word which means "darkness" or a root word meaning "to be high." Both terms would be descriptive of the northern invader as a high or proud ruler over a kingdom of spiritual darkness. In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament), made about 250 B. C., Gog is used as a title for kings, much like the term pharaoh, czar, Kaiser, or Caesar.

**The realm:**

The realm ruled by Gog is Magog. Magog is mentioned in Genesis 10:2 as one of the sons of Japheth, as are Meshech and Tubal: "The sons of Japheth; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras."

Magog is identified by the Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities* I,123 [vi.1]) as the land of the Scythians, a mountainous region around the Black and Caspian Seas. Commentators are generally in agreement with this first century verdict. The names Meshech and Tubal have been assigned by many Bible students to areas in Russia. Fruchtenbaum, for instance, follows Hal Lindsey,<sup>4</sup> Zola Levitt and Thomas McCall<sup>5</sup> in suggesting that "the tribes of Meshech and Tubal later gave their names to cities that today bear the names of Moscow, the capital, and Tobolsk, a major city in the Urals of Siberia."<sup>6</sup>

While the identity of Meshech and Tubal has not been clearly established, the fact that they, along with Magog and Gog, were Japhethites, is significant.

Pentecost's observations are worth noting: "Ethnologists tell us that the Japhethites, after the flood, migrated from Asia Minor to the north beyond the Caspian and Black Seas . . . in the area of Rosh, that we know today as modern Russia."<sup>7</sup>

Ezekiel's prophecy mentions "the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal" (Ez. 38:2). The normal meaning of the Hebrew word *rosh* is "head" or "chief," but *Rosh* can also be a proper name with a geographical location or country. Gesenius, the authoritative German lexicographer, has the following entry under *Rosh* in his Hebrew lexicon, "Rosh Ezekiel 38:2,3; 39:1; proper noun of a northern nation, mentioned with Tubal and Meshech; undoubtedly *the Russians*, who are mentioned by Byzantine writers of the tenth century, under the name *Ros*."<sup>8</sup> It is rare to find lexicographers make such dogmatic statements as does Gesenius, unless they feel they have cogent evidence. Interestingly, Gesenius began work on his lexicon in 1810, at a time when virtually no one saw any prophetic significance in Russia.

The name *Rosh* is rendered as a proper name by the Jerusalem Bible, the New English Bible and the NASV. Yamauchi strongly disagrees with this rendering, saying the identification of *Rosh* with Russia "would be a gross anachronism, for the modern name is based on the name *Rus*, which was brought into the region of Kiev, north of the Black Sea, by the Vikings early in the Middle Ages."<sup>9</sup>

Does the absence of the name *Rosh* in antiquity really prove the absence of such a people? Absence of proof is no proof of absence. Very little is known about the ancient nations and tribes populating the vast expanse of Russia. Then too, why would it be anachronistic for the prophet of God to refer to a yet future nation by name? Could not the same be said of the reference to someone named Cyrus by Isaiah in 700 B.

C. (44:28; 45:1), when Cyrus, the temporal deliverer of God's people, did not come on the scene until 150 years later? It is a small thing for a sovereign God to mention persons or places by name long before they feature in fulfilled prophecy. Perhaps the most intensive study of the identity of *Rosh* was done by Jon Ruthven in a 1968 *Bibliotheca Sacra* article, "Ezekiel's Rosh And Russia: A Connection?" Regrettably, this article has received virtually no attention by prophecy scholars, nor is there even a passing reference to his study in *Foes from the Northern Frontier*, which was published 14 years later, in 1982.

Ruthven asks whether the dispensationalist-fundamentalist approach with its facile identification of *Rosh* with Russia has any merit. Rather than identifying the name Rus with a Scandinavian migration in the ninth century, derived from "ruotsi," a Finnish word meaning "oarsman," Ruthven refers to research demonstrating "the name of Rus as coming from one of the Sarmatians, a group of tribes which had gained complete control of the Crimean area (i.e., what is now southern Russia) by 200 B. C., having by this time, gone farther west than the Dnieper River."<sup>10</sup> If Ruthven's research is correct, the appearance of the Rus would be a thousand years earlier than commonly thought.

Ruthven concludes that despite some residual uncertainty on his part, "indications, such as geographical location, ethnography, and the general descriptions of culture, provide us with some confidence that there is a direct connection between the Rosh of Ezekiel and the tribal Rus from which the modern Russia derives its name."<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps an even stronger case can be made for the identification of Gog, the land of Magog, Rosh, Meshech and Tubal with modern Russia with a geographical argument.

Three times Ezekiel refers to the invaders as coming from "the north part" (KJV, Ez. 38:6, 15; 39:2). The literal rendering of the phrase is "the uttermost parts of the north." Walvoord is correct in his assessment, "The only nation that the description of 'far north' would fit would be Russia which, of course, is immediately to the north of Israel, with Moscow being directly north of Jerusalem."<sup>12</sup>

A line drawn north of Jerusalem on a globe, following the curvature of the earth, will pass directly through the city of Moscow. No other nation qualifies. Generally, when nations are mentioned in relation to Israel, the reference is to countries in the vicinity of Israel. The invaders of Ezekiel 38-39 do not come from Lebanon, Syria, nor even primarily from Turkey but beyond, unquestionably from Russia.

A number of Bible scholars find difficulty projecting Russia into this end-time scenario. With the demise of Communism, the entire Soviet Union collapsed. While it is true that presently Russia seems to be economically bankrupt, her military might is virtually undiminished. America's former Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, cautions the world: "The many welcome changes in the USSR still do not guarantee that the threat from that quarter has vanished, particularly when we see the size of the Soviet's military and the quality of their weapons and equipment."<sup>13</sup>

After a brief flirt with democracy, Russia is returning to autocracy. The current Russian President, Vladimir Putin, a former KGB officer, is consolidating his power by all but eliminating a free press and, in violation of Russia's constitution, is stifling political opposition. Mikhail Zardov, an independent legislator, ominously predicts, "All these measures mean we are coming back to the U.S.S.R."<sup>14</sup>

## 2. The Armaments: 38:4

Ezekiel graphically describes the invading army and its weapons: "And I will turn thee back, and put hooks into thy jaws, and I will bring thee forth, and all thine army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed with all sorts of armour, even a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords:" (Ez. 38:4). The invaders come with a dazzling array of horses and horsemen. Ezekiel's description is that of "horses and cavalry, clothed in gorgeous attire all of them lit. clothed in perfection."<sup>15</sup>

The Russian invaders "are not just well dressed but well armed. They will sweep through the land mounted on steeds . . . and driving teams of chariots . . . armed with defensive (buckler and shield) and offensive weapons (swords) . . . The portrait is that of a superbly equipped force, fearfully efficient against unsuspecting targets."<sup>16</sup>

The reference to horsemen and ancient weapons employed in a future tribulation battle has occasioned endless discussion and numerous suggestions. Many expositors have interpreted these weapons in a non-literal way. In a very real sense, this passage is a litmus test of one's hermeneutical procedure. Does one practice consistent literal interpretation even when the passage, though clear in its teaching, seems to go against reason or common sense?

Walvoord opts for a measured literal response: "Some have attempted to explain this terminology by saying that Ezekiel described war in terms that he understood and we have to substitute modern arms. As the account unfolds, additional weapons of bows, arrows, war clubs, and spears are also mentioned (Ez. 39:9). The fact that later on these weapons are regarded as providing fuel for fire (V. 9) makes it difficult to imagine them as merely figures of speech that could not be used for fuel, and most modern weapons are made of metal rather than wood."<sup>17</sup>

Walvoord suggests a genuine disarmament of the world by that time. Russia would be able to manufacture quickly large quantities of weapons this way for her army.

By way of contrast, Missler sees modern weapons systems referred to by Ezekiel. Horses "may simply be idiomatic for motorized infantry." The bows and arrows "suggest any form of arms . . . these terms could easily be idiomatic for 'launchers' and 'missiles' . . . The weapons left over from the battle provide all the energy needs of Israel for seven years. This doesn't sound like conventional weapons, does it? Ezekiel seems to have anticipated our nuclear age 2,500 years ago."<sup>18</sup>

It is common among dispensational commentators to modernize Ezekiel's weapons. Nonetheless, it should be remembered that if God had wanted to refer to modern weapons, He could have used general terminology, disclosing to Ezekiel that the invaders would carry deadly weapons with which they could terrify and destroy everything in their way. This terminology would allow for laser guns, cruise missiles and nuclear weapons. However, Ezekiel makes reference to specific ancient weapons.

An approaching Russian cavalry does not seem as impossible to this writer as it might to some. When the Russian hordes invaded eastern Germany in the spring of 1945, this writer was a witness to their primitive armaments. The Americans had come into our part of Saxony some weeks earlier in tanks, armored personnel carriers, with the most modern instruments of war. A few days later, after they regrettably had withdrawn westward, the Russian army came. Many soldiers arrived in horse-drawn covered wagons, drawn by two diminutive Siberian ponies. Some of their main weapons were threshing flails and pitchforks. True, the Russians had some tanks, trucks and machine guns, but the scene of 1945 is indelibly etched in this writer's mind as he witnessed this barbarian invasion, with soldiers armed with the most primitive of weapons, like the Huns centuries earlier. If this could occur in 1945, why not in 2015, or whenever the invasion will be? Pitchforks, flails, wooden wagons and wagon wheels burn. Kalashnikov rifles are not combustible. Whatever the weapons may be carried by the invaders, they will be a substitute for firewood from the forest.

### **3. The Allies: 38:5-6**

Russia is accompanied by a confederation of allies: "Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya with them; all of them with shield and helmet: Gomer, and all his bands; the house of Togarmah of the north quarters, and all his bands: and many people with thee" (Ez. 38:5-6).

Alexander underscores the fact that other armies join Gog from every direction of the compass, "Persia from the east; Cush (Ethiopia/Nubia) from the southwest; and Gomer (probably the ancient Cimmerians) and Beth Togarmah (possibly the ancient Til-garimmu southeast of the Black Sea) . . . from the north."<sup>19</sup>

Some expositors see Cush (Ethiopia), and its inhabitants, the Kassites, as situated north of Persia and Assyria. *Smith's Dictionary of the Bible* suggests that "the African Cush was named from the older country."<sup>20</sup> The reference to Ethiopia in Ezekiel 38:5 could therefore be to either location.

### **4. The Advance: 38:7-9**

**The chronology of the invasion:**

The time element of the attack is inferred from the context of Ezekiel 36-37 which points to a situation after the rapture. The reference to the “latter years” (38:8), and “latter days” (38:16), as already noted, relate to God’s dealings with Israel in the tribulation period.

#### **The condition of Israel:**

Two conditions will antedate Gog’s attack. First, the land itself will have recovered from “the sword.” The expression is a metonym for the carnage of an invading army. Second, the return of Israel from her diaspora will be complete, and she is settled securely in the land.

#### **The campaign of the invaders:**

Like a storm cloud, the vast company of invaders inundates the land with evil design upon the unsuspecting population. This speedy maneuver by a superior mob will leave the population of the land paralyzed.

### **5. The Ambition: 38:10-13**

#### **The design of Russia:**

What amazing attraction does tiny Israel hold for the most expansive nation on earth? Why would Russia, roughly the size of North America, invade a nation the size of Vermont, no larger than 65 miles by 120 miles?

Ezekiel discloses three reasons for the Russian invasion.

#### 1) A Malevolent Spirit: Ezekiel 38:10

“Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, that at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought:”

Russia invades because of “an evil thought.” Block renders the words of God to Russia thusly, “On that day, ideas will arise in your mind, and you will conceive a wicked scheme.”<sup>21</sup> Anti-Semitism propels Russia and her allies toward Israel.

Showers is right on the mark when he notes that Russia is motivated by anti-Semitism: “Before Communism, Russia was notorious for severe persecution of Jews. While Communism held an iron grip on the government of that nation, it suppressed the outward expression of hatred for Jews. Now that Communism has lost that grip at least for a while, anti-Semitism has been allowed to raise its ugly head again. Some members of the Pamyat, a strongly anti-Semitic organization that wants to get rid of all Jews in Russia, blame all of the nation’s problems on the Jews. Some have even accused the Jews of being the source of AIDS. As a result of these ominous trends, a mass exodus of Jews from the former Soviet Union has taken place since the early 1990’s, with the majority going to Israel.”<sup>22</sup> Arguments for the identification of Russia with Gog and Magog converge. To the linguistic and geographical argument can be added the theological argument. There is little doubt that the ruthless antisemitic invader of Israel from the far north is Russia.

#### 2) Material Spoil: Ezekiel 38:11-12

“And thou shalt say, I will go up to the land of unwallled villages; I will go to them that are at rest, that dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, to take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn thine hand upon the desolate places that are now inhabited, and upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, which have gotten cattle and goods, that dwell in the midst of the land.”

The enemy will be greedy for Israel’s wealth and thus embarks on a campaign of conquest and pillage. The returned nation has acquired livestock and possessions. They have made the land productive by irrigating the desert and draining swamp land, thus converting it into productive agricultural soil. Many suggest that the immense mineral wealth of the Dead Sea will attract the invaders. One estimate says that “the Dead Sea holds something like 45 billion tons of valuable chemicals, mainly sodium, chlorine, sulphur, potassium, calcium, magnesium and bromide.”<sup>23</sup> Zev Vilnay, in his remarkable guidebook to Israel, itemizes the rich content of the Dead Sea: “The minerals deposited in this sea have been itemized as follows:

- 22,000,000,000 tons of magnesium chloride
- 11,000,000,000 tons of sodium chloride
- 7,000,000,000 tons of calcium chloride

2,000,000,000 tons of potassium chloride  
1,000,000,000 tons of magnesium bromide.”<sup>24</sup>

Both Jordan and Israel are taking advantage of the riches of the Dead Sea by extracting vast amounts of potash from the Dead Sea, shipped primarily for fertilizer to numerous nations of the world.

Because of its wealth, Israel becomes the cynosure of the Russians. One astute German writer already observed in 1931 that while “all the empires as pictured by Daniel are ravaging wild beasts,” none can compare with “the passion on the one hand for mass rule and on the other of pillage and plunder. . . manifested by the Russians. . . No world power acts like Russia, a veritable steam roller.”<sup>25</sup>

### 3) Military Strategy: Ezekiel 38:12b

An implied third reason for the Russian attack is a strategic one. Israel is in a most central strategic position as the connecting bridge between three continents: Africa to the south, Europe to the west and Asia to the east. Historically, empires who sought control of the Mediterranean world first subjugated the land of Israel. Russia’s clever military strategists undoubtedly realize that access to the Mediterranean world and the oil-rich Middle East must entail conquest of Israel. Long before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Russian czars had designs on the Near East. Some years ago *Newsweek* published a political cartoon from 1890, showing the Russian bear menacingly moving into the Near East (*Newsweek*, January 10, 1977, 23). The Russian bear displayed a voracious appetite for Israel long before there were Communists.

Ezekiel underscores Israel’s strategic importance by stating that the regathered and attacked people of Israel will “dwell in the midst of the land” (Ezekiel 38:12b). The expression is literally rendered “navel of the earth” or “center of the earth,” a concept already stated in 5:5, that God had placed Jerusalem in the middle of the nations. Feinberg cites Rabbinic literature which reflects this concept: “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>26</sup> (*Midrash Tanhuma Qedoshim* 10)

Visitors to Israel notice a strange two-foot-high stone carving in the main Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built over Calvary. It is in the shape of a human navel and called “The Navel of the Earth.” Most likely Crusaders placed it there to mark the spot where Christ died, as the spiritual center of the earth.

Christian scholars likewise have taken notice of Israel’s strategic location. Kurtz observes, “In truth, whether viewed *geographically, politically or commercially*, Palestine is the ‘umbilicus terrarium’ of the ancient world.”<sup>27</sup>

### **The disposition of the nations:**

Other nations observe Russia’s lightning strike against Israel: “Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish, with all the young lions thereof, shall say unto thee, Art thou come to take a spoil? hast thou gathered thy company to take a prey? to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to take a great spoil?” (Ezekiel 38:13).

God turns His attention to interested parties who profit from trade via the land trade route to the Arabian desert east of Israel (Sheba and Dedan) and the maritime trade route to the west (Spain). These names constitute possibly a merism, that is, an expression of totality, from east to west, involving all the nations involved in Mediterranean commerce.

Their rhetorical questions to Gog’s design may either indicate that they fear the Russian rampage, wondering whether they will be the next victims or they evidence their own greed and covetousness, desiring to take advantage of the spoils of war.<sup>28</sup>

## **6. The Attack: 38:14-16**

### **The intelligence of Gog: 38:14**

Russia takes note of Israel's sense of well-being and security (8, 11). Even in unbelief, God refers to Israel as "my people" and their land as "my land" (16) and "my mountains" (21). During other periods of unbelief, He calls His wayward nation the "apple of His eye" (Deut. 32:10; Zech. 2:8). An attack on Israel is an attack on Him, as the invader will soon experience, as have numerous nations in antiquity and in recent years. While the invader cleverly takes advantage of Israel's sense of security, based on a covenant with Antichrist, he does not consider Israel's special covenant relationship with God.

### **The invasion by Gog: 38:15-16**

The northern host will sweep down upon the unsuspecting people of God. Ezekiel envisions a mighty army comprised of an innumerable company of horsemen, spilling into Israel with lightning speed. One German writer notes the striking similarities between the ancient Scythians, who devastated the Near East around A. D. 630 and the depiction of their future counterpart by Ezekiel. "The Scythians were such Nordic barbarians full of greed and lust for war; they had likewise immense armies of horsemen, had such superbly protective armour and were dazzling in their consummate skill to handle the bow, just as is attributed here to Gog."<sup>29</sup>

### **7. The Annihilation: 38:17-23**

#### **The prediction of Gog: 38:17**

God reminds the approaching armies of what was prophesied "in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel" (17). The absence of any reference to Gog in the other prophets suggests that God is referring to prophecies concerning northern invaders (Jer. 36:1-4; 45:12; Is. 8:5-8) which prefigure the attack by Gog and Magog, "the mother of all battles."

#### **The passion of God: 38:18-19a**

God's emotional reaction to Gog is without parallel in the Old Testament, "My fury shall come up in my face, for in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken." God's hot, fiery anger will be released. God brings Gog against His land and His people. In so doing He manifests His sovereignty over people whose degeneracy, depravity and godless greed makes them ripe for judgment.

If indeed Gog and his company are the Russians—and overwhelming evidence points in that direction—the emotional outburst of God suggests His wrath at Gog's present intentions but also His anger over Gog's past iniquities. The deferred destruction of the depraved system known as Communism is about to happen. God has not forgotten the unspeakable crimes perpetrated by the Russian leaders against their own people and those of other nations. The human cost of Communism is enormous. Who can forget the atrocities of Nikita Khrushchev, who starved 9 million Ukrainians in the 1930's by burning their fields? Who can forget the fact that of the 20 million Russians who lost their lives in World War II, 10 million were killed by their own regime? The Russian author Alexander Solzhenitsyn has calculated that at least 60 million Russians were confined to the infamous Gulag Archipelago in the post-World War II era. Some years ago the Free China News Agency reported that between 1949 and 1965, under the Chinese Communist regime, some 65 million Chinese lost their lives.

The unspeakable atrocities of Communism have been detailed in a number of volumes. Six former socialist European scholars, who at last saw the light, wrote an 857-page chronicle of Communist horrors, entitled *The Black Book of Communism—Crimes, Terror, Repression*. After thorough research, they estimate the number of civilian victims of Communism thusly:

U.S.S.R.: 20 million deaths

China: 65 million deaths

Vietnam: 1 million deaths

North Korea: 2 million deaths

Cambodia: 2 million deaths

Eastern Europe: 1 million deaths

Latin America: 150,000 deaths

Africa: 1.7 million deaths

Afghanistan: 1.5 million deaths

The international Communist movement and Communist parties not in power: 10,000 deaths

The total approaches 100 million people killed."<sup>30</sup>

Ezekiel 38-39 is God's answer, in part, to these enormous atrocities. The revelation by Ezekiel has had practical ramifications for believers enslaved by this "Evil Empire." During this writer's frequent visits to relatives and friends in Communist East Germany, he made an interesting observation over and over again. As we sat across the kitchen table from each other during family devotions, one could not help but notice that certain sections of their Bibles were well-worn. At two places in the New Testament the edges of the pages displayed frequent wear, namely around John 14 and 1 Thessalonians 4, passages dealing with the any-moment return of Christ. These dear believers lived in daily expectancy of the rapture of the church. Interestingly, the Old Testament passage with the tell-tale worn pages as evidence of frequent perusal, was Ezekiel 38-39.. They found consolation in the truth of the doom of their slave masters and derived comfort from the truth of the rapture.

### **The prelude to the judgments: 38:19b-20a**

The long-delayed and well-deserved judgment upon Gog and his company will begin "with a great shaking of all the land of Israel" but its effects will be felt and feared by the birds of the air, animals of the land and fish of the sea, as well as humanity worldwide.

### **The progression of the judgments: 38:20b-23**

Russia's swift invasion against unsuspecting Israel brings immediate and unparalleled consequences as God directly intervenes for His people and His land by opening the arsenals of heaven to unleash the forces of destruction. Eight specific judgments are cataloged.

#### 1) An earthquake: 38:19-20

"A great shaking in the land of Israel" (19) will be felt by "all the men that are upon the face of the earth" (20), resulting in the overturning of the mountains with the result that "every wall shall fall down to the ground." If the invaders are in Israel at that time, they will be crushed by toppling mountains and collapsing buildings. Believers living today who wish to see the biblical sites of Israel in their present condition should not defer their visit to the Holy Land until the Millennium!

#### 2) Civil war: 38:21

"Every man's sword shall be against his brother." Alexander notes that "Gog's armies and the nations following him would become so confused that they would slay one another in suicidal strife."<sup>31</sup> Three couplets of judgment follow.

#### 3) Pestilence: 38:22

#### 4) Blood: 38:22

Four times in Ezekiel, pestilence and blood are linked (5:17; 14:19; 28:23; 38:22) referring to plagues of all kinds and all manner of diseases leading to sudden death.

#### 5) Torrents of rain: 38:22

Anyone familiar with Israel knows what havoc and destruction rain can bring. With virtually no topsoil on the mountains of Judah, even an inch of precipitation at higher elevations causes flash floods in the valleys, many times with deadly consequences.

#### 6) Hail: 38:22

As God brought hailstones upon the Amorites and many died (Josh. 10:10-11), so He will use His lethal judgment upon Gog in the middle of the tribulation period. At the end of the tribulation, hailstones weighing 100 lbs. will decimate much of the human population (Rev. 16:21).

#### 7) Fire: 38:22

#### 8) Brimstone: 38:22

Fire and brimstone are paired in Genesis 19:24 as well. Brimstone, or burning sulphur, gives off suffocating fumes. That which destroyed the cities of the plain in 1900 B. C. will be the final judgment upon the end-time invaders.

### **The purpose of the judgments: 38:23**

God concludes His announcement of the judgments with a clear statement concerning His purpose. He said, "I will magnify myself . . . sanctify myself . . . I will be known." In this climactic drama He is displaying His greatness, His holiness and His person. Put differently, He is glorifying Himself, a theme repeated again at the end of chapter 39.

### **8. The Aftermath: 39**

Commentators are in general agreement that the opening verses of Ezekiel 39 recapitulate the scene described in 38:19-23. One unique opposing view is espoused by Hoehner in the study entitled "The Progression of Events in Ezekiel 38-39." He concludes that "Ezekiel 38-39 is best considered as covering the last half of the tribulation: chapter 38 refers to events in the middle of the tribulation, chapter 39 refers to the end of the tribulation."<sup>32</sup> It seems, however, that the writer is describing, not a second invasion, but the same events from a different perspective, with a different emphasis. Ezekiel enlarges upon chapter 38 to underscore the enormous victory. He does so by emphasizing the numbers of the enemy, shown by the quantity of weapons left behind and the length of time necessary for the burial of the invaders.

Then too, the emphasis in chapter 38 is on God's emotions in light of the attack; in chapter 39 it is on His actions. The narrative moves from the defeat of Gog to the disposal of the enemy and deliverance of Israel. The entire chapter can be summarized by certain key words: the battle (1-8), the burning (9-10), the burials (11-16), the banquet (17-20) and the blessings (21-29).

### **The battle: 39:1-8**

God's opening declaration against Gog and Magog has puzzled commentators. The King James Version reads, "And I will turn thee back and leave but the sixth part of thee." The NIV translation, based on recent linguistic studies, is preferable, "I will turn you around and drag you along." The unique root word has the meaning of "to lead," "drive" or "drag."

God outlines His strategy with Gog in eight sharp and succinct declarations: (1) Turn Gog around, (2) drive him on, (3) lead him up from the uttermost parts of the north, (4) bring him to the mountains of Israel, (5) knock his bow out of his left hand, (6) force him to drop his arrows from his right hand, (7) deliver his corpse as food for the birds of prey and the beasts of the field, and (8) torch the homelands of Gog and his allies.<sup>33</sup>

The Russian rampage, masterminded by divine design and met by divine defense, demonstrates God's glory, "So will I make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel" (39:7).

### **The burning: 39:9-10**

The enormity of the battle and extent of the destruction is indicated by the varied nature and vast quantities of weapons gathered by Israel from the vanquished enemy. The weapons will be used for fuel for seven years and include "weapons, both the shields, and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows and the handstaves, and the spears. . .so that they shall take no wood out of the field, neither cut down any out of the forest" (9-10).

The catalog of weapons begins with a general word, meaning armor, followed by six specific weapons arranged logically in three pairs: small shields and body shields, bows and arrows, clubs and spears or lances.

It has been mentioned earlier that it is best to understand these as literal weapons, known to ancients and employed again for undisclosed reasons in Gog's attack. Much can happen between now and the day of the invasion which would make modern metallic weapons obsolete.

The weapons will be a substitute for firewood for seven years, or some three and a half years into the Millennium. Those who understand the weapons to be of the modern variety would find it difficult to explain how machine guns, cruise missiles and MIG jet fighters can become substitute fuel for trees for Israeli fireplaces.

## The burials: 39:11-16

With amazing prophetic specificity, God disclosed through Ezekiel some 2600 years ago the location of the burial, the duration of the burial and the people employed for this purpose. The location is, literally, “the valley of those who have passed on, on the east of the sea.” Some commentators suggest that the reference is to the Mediterranean Sea and the valley might be that of Megiddo. A more common view is that Ezekiel probably refers to the Dead Sea, which is called “the sea” in Ezekiel 47:8, and contrasted with the Mediterranean Sea as the “Great Sea” in 47:10, 15, 19. The place of burial is renamed the “Valley of Hamon-Gog,” that is, the multitude of Gog (39:12). Perhaps the Arnon River valley or some other valley east of the Dead Sea, is in view, so that the polluted land can be purified of alien invaders and their littering corpses (12).

The burial will take seven months, indicating the magnitude of the task, especially when one considers that “not only all the people of the land shall bury them” (13) but also special inspectors are designated to reconnoiter the land for corpses, so that the sextons can dispose of the discovered remains.

Fairbairn has interesting calculations to arrive at the actual number of the invaders:

“The wood of the adversaries’ weapons was to serve for fuel to all Israel for seven years! and all Israel were to be employed for seven months in burying the dead! It would be but a very moderate allowance, on the literal supposition, to say that a million of men would thus be engaged, and that on average each would consign two corpses to the tomb in one day; which, for the 180 working days of the seven months, would make an aggregate of 360,000,000 of corpses. Then the putrefaction, the pestilential vapours arising from such masses of slain victims before they were all buried! Who would live at such a time?”<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, Fairbairn discounts the literal meaning of the text and suggests the material was “written for the amusement of children.” To understand the description literally is “to make it take rank with the most extravagant tales of romance, or the most absurd legends of Popery.”<sup>35</sup>

Commentators who spiritualize Ezekiel’s prophecies and visions are no more able to come to a true understanding of God’s special and specific revelation than rationalistic commentators like Fairbairn. Briscoe, for example, expresses an “agnosticism” about the literalness of what Ezekiel revealed. “We have no way of knowing just what the details. . .meant to him. In all honesty, we cannot know exactly what all the details mean to us in our day either. . .When we finally get to heaven. . .Charles Lee Feinberg and Dwight Pentecost. . .Hal Lindsey and Carl Keil [will] try to figure out what was wrong with their ‘exegesis’.”<sup>36</sup>

Ezekiel reveals that a city is located near the valley of mass burial, which he identifies as Hamonah (16). Its name means “horde” and it serves as a perpetual reminder east of the Dead Sea of the proximity of the mass grave of godless Gog and his company.

It is delightful to discern God’s effort to underscore the literal nature of prophecy by tying specific prophecies to actual geographical sites. God wishes men to understand that prophetic fulfillment is not in some future ephemeral event but will be realized in time and space. Prophecies are history written in advance and many predictions are closely tied to physical features, especially in Israel. By way of illustration, a sampling of such prophecies might be instructive:

1. The rebellion of the nations during the last half of the tribulation in **the valley of Armageddon** (Rev. 16:16).
2. The refuge of Israel during the same period in **the mountains of Ammon, Moab and Edom** (Dan. 11:41b; Rev. 12:6).
3. The return of Christ as a climax to the tribulation to **the Mount of Olives** (Zech. 14:4).
4. The reckoning of Israel after the Second Advent in **Wadi Arabah south of the Dead Sea** (Ez. 20:35-37; Isa. 63:1).
5. The reckoning of the Gentiles after the Second Advent in the **valley of Jehoshaphat near Jerusalem** (Mt. 25:31-34; Joel 3:2, 12).

6. The regeneration of the wilderness after the Second Advent, especially **the desert between Jerusalem and the Dead Sea** (Ez. 47:9-11).
7. The rejuvenation of the **Dead Sea** after the Second Advent (Zech. 14:8; Ez. 47:9-10).
8. The removal of the mountains resulting in a plain in **central Israel** (Zech. 14:4, 10).
9. The reign of Christ from His throne in **Jerusalem** (Zeph. 3:14-16; Mic. 4:1-2; Lk. 1:32).

### **The banquet: 39:17-20**

Ezekiel unfolds a grisly scene as he records God's commands to the birds and beasts of the earth to come to Israel for a banquet hosted by God Himself. The menu includes the "princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan" (18). God enjoins the birds and beasts to gorge themselves with the flesh until they are full and to quaff of the blood until they are drunk (19).

Most Bible students believe that these animals are symbolic for the different ranks of the slain (20). Rabbinic literature adds some interesting details why the wicked invaders are consumed by the wild beasts. Speaking to the multitude of Gog, God explains, "Whereas you had no peace among yourself but made peace to march against Me, so I now call upon the birds and the wild animals, which had no peace among themselves, and cause them to have peace with one another, so that they come upon you."<sup>37</sup>

### **The blessings: 39:21-29**

The display of God's glory. God's primary purpose of the lengthy account of Ezekiel 39:8-39 is not primarily the depiction of end-time events but a manifestation of Himself to the nations (39:21) and to Israel (39:22) in a display of His greatness (38:23), His holiness (38:23) and His glory (39:13). Above all, Ezekiel 38 and 39 are a demonstration of God's holiness. The passage makes abundantly clear that "God's holiness is not just shown in his saving power but also in his destructive power. . . it is simply that God will sanctify himself through Gog before the nations."<sup>38</sup>

The deliverance of the nations and Israel. In the display of these transcendent qualities of a sovereign God, He shows Himself Who He really is by the destruction of the invader, resulting in the deliverance of the nations and of Israel. The slaughter of the invaders will result in the salvation of numerous people. When the nations of the world see God's righteous judgment upon Gog and Magog, and the deliverance of His people Israel, they are prompted to recognize their own rebellion and will come to Him for salvation. God explains to Israel that because of their iniquity He hid His face from them (39:24) but now with every Jew on earth gathered before Him in the land (28) He says to them, "Neither will I hide my face any more from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord GOD" (29).

<sup>1</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994), 190.

<sup>2</sup> Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind* (Wheaton: Tyndale Publishers, 1995), 10-11, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), 117.

<sup>4</sup> Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 65.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas S. McCall and Zola Levitt, *The Coming Russian Invasion* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 26.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>7</sup> J. Dwight Pentecost, *Prophecy for Today* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1963), 107-108.

<sup>8</sup> *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, translated by Samuel Pridaux Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 752 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>9</sup> Edwin Yamauchi, *Foes from the Northern Frontier* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 20.

<sup>10</sup> Jon Ruthven, "Ezekiel's Rosh And Russia: A Connection?" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, October 1968, 125:500, 329.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 332.

<sup>12</sup> Walvoord, *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>13</sup> Caspar Weinberger, "Atlantic Overture," *National Review*, (Oct. 1, 1990, 42:19), 30.

- <sup>14</sup> Steven Lee Myers, "Putin strengthens his political grip," *International Herald Tribune*, September 14, 2004, 1.
- <sup>15</sup> G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel* (New York: Scribner's, 1937), Vol. 2, 410.
- <sup>16</sup> Daniel I. Block, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. The Book of Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), II, 439.
- <sup>17</sup> John F. Walvoord, *Major Bible Prophecies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 331.
- <sup>18</sup> Chuck Missler, *The Magog Invasion* (Palos Verdes, CA: Western Front Ltd., 1995), 174-175.
- <sup>19</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 Vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 6:931.
- <sup>20</sup> William Smith, ed., *Dr. William Smith's Dictionary of the Bible*, (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1871) I:519.
- <sup>21</sup> Block, *Ibid.*, 445.
- <sup>22</sup> Renald Showers, "Gog and Magog," *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 124-125.
- <sup>23</sup> Gordon Gaskill, "The Dead Sea Isn't Dead Anymore," *The Reader's Digest* July 1966, 89:531, 158.
- <sup>24</sup> Zev Vilnay, *The Guide to Israel* (Jerusalem: "Hamaker" Press, 1973), 320.
- <sup>25</sup> Konrad Bussemer, "Was Sagt das Prophetische Wort über Russland?" *Bibel und Gemeinde*, 1981-1, 56 (translation by the writer).
- <sup>26</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 223.
- <sup>27</sup> J. H. Kurtz, *History of the Old Covenant*, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1859), I, 147 (italics in the original).
- <sup>28</sup> Block, *Ibid.*, 448-449.
- <sup>29</sup> Conrad von Orelli, "Gog and Magog," *Realencyclopädie für protestantische Theologie und Kirche* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1899), 6:761(translation by the writer).
- <sup>30</sup> Stéphane Courtois, Nicolas Werth, Jean-Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartošek, Jean-Louis Margolin, *The Black Book of Communism--Crimes, Terror, Repression* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 4.
- <sup>31</sup> Gaebelin, *Ibid.*, 434.
- <sup>32</sup> Charles H. Dyer and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 91.
- <sup>33</sup> Block, *Ibid.*, 461.
- <sup>34</sup> Patrick Fairbairn, *The Exposition of Ezekiel*, (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1851), 421.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>36</sup> Stuart Briscoe, *All Things Weird and Wonderful*, (Wheaton: Victor, 1977), 163-164.
- <sup>37</sup> Hermann Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (München: C. H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1965) III, 839 (translation by the writer).
- <sup>38</sup> Ka Laung Weng, "Profanation/Sanctification and the Past, Present and Future in the Book of Ezekiel," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, December 2003, 28:2, 230.

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