

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.”¹ 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.”² 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.³ As C. F. Keil says, it “denotes man according to his natural condition . . . denoting the weakness and fragility of man in opposition to God.”⁴ 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.”⁵ 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.”⁶ 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.”⁷

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.”⁸ 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.”⁹ 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 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."¹⁰ 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

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

² Wikipedia, accessed May 13, 2008.

³ From a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

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

⁵ Keil, *Ezekiel*, p. 167.

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

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

⁸ 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Fisch, *Ezekiel*, p. 257.