

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.¹

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 Alaska² and the fact that Putin has threatened to put missiles in Cuba again,³ 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.”⁴ 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 39.⁵ 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.⁶

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."⁷ 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."⁸ Charles Feinberg says, "The statement concerning turning Gog about (v. 2) carries with it the idea of compulsion."⁹ 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.¹⁰ It has the basic idea of "to walk along,"¹¹ 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."¹² 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

¹ George Friedman, "The Russo-Georgian War and the Balance of Power," *Stratfor Geopolitical Intelligence Report* (Aug. 12, 2008), www.stratfor.com.

² "Russia's Bear bomber returns" (Sept. 10, 2007) www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6984320.stm.

³ "Putin eyes renewed Russian ties with Cuba," (Aug. 4, 2008) www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/europe/08/04/russia.cuba.ap/.

⁴ 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.

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

⁶ 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.

⁷ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 6.

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

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

¹⁰ Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, 7.4.2.

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

¹² Keil, *Ezekiel*, p. 171.