

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.¹ “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.²

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.³ Here we have “the prophetic perfect” tense of the verb,⁴ 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.⁵ 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 17–20.⁶

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.⁷ 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.”⁸ 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.”⁹ 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

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

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

³ Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

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

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

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

⁷ Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, 7.4.2.

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

⁹ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 115.