

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."¹

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."² 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.³

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."⁴

In this context, the verb appears in the hiphil stem, which denotes causative action. Thus, it means to “allow to be profaned” or defiled.⁵ 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.⁶

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.”⁷ 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.”⁸

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.”⁹ 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).”¹⁰ 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.”¹¹

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.¹²

When contemplating the timing of the fulfillment of this battle, we must notice four key observations.¹³ 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*."¹⁴ 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."¹⁵

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

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

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

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

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

⁵ Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

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

⁷ Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 229.

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

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

¹⁰ Randall Price, "Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel," (2007), p. 43.

¹¹ (*Italics original*) Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 117.

¹² Price, "Unpublished Notes," p. 43.

¹³ These observations are made by Fruchtenbaum in *Footsteps*, p. 117.

¹⁴ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 117.

¹⁵ Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 117.