

EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

Part XXVIII

by Thomas Ice

The view that the battle described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 will occur at the end of the tribulation and is one and the same with the campaign of Armageddon is not widely held today. In fact, the only individual that I know personally who holds this view is Dave Hunt.ⁱ Louis Bowman and Harry Ironside, Bible teachers of a previous generation, are ones who have taken this view.ⁱⁱ

ARMAGEDDON?

No doubt Armageddon is a great international invasion of Israel (Jerusalem to be specific) at the end of the tribulation, which involves the personal intervention of Jesus Christ to protect Israel. There are some broad similarities between the two battles, however, it is the differences that prove decisive when it comes to evaluating whether they are the same battle.

The first major difference is that Ezekiel's invaders are said to be from specific countries, thus not all the nations of the world. At Armageddon, the Lord "will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle" (Zech. 14:2). Thus, the Gog event is a regional invasion while Armageddon involves all the nations of the world coming against Jerusalem. That is a significant difference.

Second, Arnold Fruchtenbaum notes, "the Ezekiel invasion comes from the north, but the Armageddon invasion comes from the whole earth."ⁱⁱⁱ Third, the Gog invasion is clearly said to occur at a time when Israel is "living securely" (Ezek. 38:8, 11, 14) and "at rest" (38:11) in the land. There will probably not be a more threatening and dangerous time for Israel in her entire history than the end of the tribulation and the events of Armageddon. This hardly matches Ezekiel's description.

Fourth, Mark Hitchcock points out, "the passage in Ezekiel does not mention a military battle other than the fact that the invaders kill one another. The destruction is primarily by divine intervention through a convulsion of nature (Ezek. 38:20–23). In the conflagration of Armageddon, there is a great battle fought between the Lord with his hosts and the assembled nations in which the King of kings slays his enemies with the word of his mouth and emerges as the victor (Rev. 19:11–15)."^{iv} In other words, each passage describes contrasting events that indicate they are totally different campaigns.

Fifth, "the purpose of the Russian invasion is to take spoil; the purpose of the Armageddon Campaign is to destroy all the Jews," observes Fruchtenbaum. Sixth, he continues, "in the Ezekiel invasion, there is a protest against the invasion; in the Armageddon Campaign, there is no protest because all the nations are involved."^v Seventh, if these two campaigns are one and the same then there is not any time for Israel to bury the dead (7 months) or burn the instruments of war (7 years) (Ezek. 39:9, 12). Scripture implies that seventy-five days after Christ's return, the thousand-year kingdom will commence and that it will begin after a cleansing of the judgment from the tribulation (Isa. 2:1–4; 65:17–25; Dan. 12:11–12).

Seventh, Ron Rhodes observes another difference between the two battles as follows: "At Armageddon the Beast is the head of the invasion campaign (Revelation 19:19), whereas Gog is the head of the invading force in Ezekiel's prophecy (Ezekiel 38:7)." Eight, "The armies gathered at Armageddon array themselves against Jesus Christ (Revelation 19:19), which is not true of Ezekiel's northern military coalition."^{vi}

The more one contemplates the differences between the two events the more one realizes that they cannot be the same. The details of the two events just do not match up. This is likely why virtually no evangelicals today favor this view. Most of the supporters of the timing of Ezekiel 38 and 39 and Armageddon are primarily from the past.

THE START OF THE MILLENNIUM?

The fourth major future view locates the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 at the beginning of the millennium. This is also not a widely held view. Dr. Elliott Johnson, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary presented a paper in favor of this view at the 1993 Pre-Trib Study Group entitled "The time placement of Ezekiel 37-39." Arno Gaebelein also advocated this view about a hundred years ago in his commentary on Ezekiel.^{vii} This view, of all the futurist views, appears to me to be the most unlikely one.

First, we know from Matthew 13 and 25 (see also Jer. 25:32-33; Rev. 19:15-18) that all unbelievers will be prohibited from entering into the millennium. "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will cast them into the furnace of fire; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:49-50). "Then the King will say to those on His right [believers], 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matt. 25:34). "Then He will also say to those on His left [unbelievers], 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matt. 25:41). Therefore, it is quite clear that the Jewish and Gentile mortals who enter into the millennium will start off as 100% believers. No one would suggest that Gog could be a believer leading a great hoard of believers to attack Israel during the millennium. Thus, the attackers would have to be unbelievers, which would take hundreds of years for them to be born in the kind of numbers noted in Ezekiel. That just does not appear to be feasible.

Second, "Isaiah 2:4 excludes the possibility of war in Christ's millennial kingdom. The only war that breaks out is at the end of the millennium when Satan is loosed (Revelation 20:7-9)." ^{viii} Third, it makes no sense to think that with millennial conditions in force that after the invasion of Gog the land would be defiled for seven months (Ezek. 39:12) while it is cleaned up. Fourth, "Isaiah 9:4-5 tells us that all weapons of war will be destroyed following the beginning of Christ's millennial kingdom," notes Rhodes, "so the northern military coalition would have no weapons."^{ix}

This view that the Gog invasion will take place at the beginning of the millennium has little to support it except for the fact that when the northern invasion takes place Israel will be at peace. That will be Israel's condition at the beginning of the millennium and throughout, however, there are no other real similarities between the start of the millennium and Ezekiel's last days prophecy.

THE END OF THE MILLENNIUM?

The final future view is that the invasion lead by Gog and Magog will take place at the end of the millennium in conjunction with the brief rebellion mentioned in Revelation 20:7-10. The strength of this view is that Gog and Magog are specifically mentioned in the text. "And when the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the

earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them" (Rev. 20:7–9).

A significant number of individuals believe that this locates for us the timing of Ezekiel's prophecy.^x Evangelical scholar Ralph Alexander is an advocate of this view and states the following:

The majority of expositors see these events of Ezekiel 38—39 taking place after the Millennium as described in Revelation 20:7–10. The strong argument for this position is the explicit reference to Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:8. The use of these terms must be explained. The context of the Millennium would surely satisfy Israel's peaceful, prosperous, and safe dwelling. Restoration would have already been accomplished. Nations would be present to observe "Gog's" rebellion. Time would surely be available for the burial of bodies and the burning of weapons.^{xi}

Paul Tanner also defends this view as follows:

Since there is a significant battle at the end of the millennium that John refers to as that of Gog and Magog, why should this not be the same as that in Ezekiel 38–39? One thing they share in common is that the attack is directed at Israel. This provides a fitting inclusio to Biblical history. In Gen 15:18–21 God binds himself by covenant to make a nation of Israel and give them this special land. When Satan is released at the end of the millennium, he makes one last desperate effort to defeat Israel, the apple of God's eye. If he can break God's promise to Israel, he will have defeated God's purposes and thereby won the final victory.^{xii}

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Dave Hunt, *How Close Are We? Compelling Evidence for the Soon Return of Christ* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), pp. 267–70.

ⁱⁱ Louis S. Bauman, *Russian Events in the Light of Bible Prophecy* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1942), pp. 180–89; Harry A. Ironside, *Ezekiel the Prophet* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1949), p. 265.

ⁱⁱⁱ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), p. 119.

^{iv} Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 130.

^v Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, p. 119.

^{vi} Ron Rhodes, *Northern Storm Rising: Russia, Iran, and the Emerging End-Times Military Coalition Against Israel* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2008), p. 187.

^{vii} Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Prophet Ezekiel* (New York: Our Hope, 1918), pp. 252–55.

^{viii} Rhodes, *Northern Storm Rising*, p. 189.

^{ix} Rhodes, *Northern Storm Rising*, p. 189.

^x For example, A. B Davidson, *The Book of Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1892), p. 301;

Henry L. Ellison, *Ezekiel: The Man and His Message* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 133; J. Paul Tanner, "Rethinking Ezekiel's Invasion By Gog," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, March 1996, vol. 39, pp. 29–45.

^{xi} Ralph H. Alexander, "Ezekiel" in Frank E. Gaebelein, gen. ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vol. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), vol. 6, p. 940.

^{xii} Tanner, "Rethinking," p. 45.