

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

by

Don Stewart

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

© 2022 By Don Stewart

Published by EOW (Educating Our World)
www.educatingourworld.com
All rights reserved

English Versions Cited

THE FOLLOWING ENGLISH VERSIONS ARE CITED

The various English versions which we cite in this course, apart from the King James Version, all have copyrights. They are listed as follows.

Verses marked NRSV UE is from the New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition, copyright © 2021 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Verses marked NIV are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, New International Version 2011, Copyright 1973 1978, 1984, 2011 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved

Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, copyright 1996. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

Scripture quoted by permission. Quotations designated NET are from the NET Bible Copyright © 2003 By Biblical Studies Press, L.L.C. www.netbible.com All rights reserved.

GOD'S WORD is a copyrighted work of God's Word to the Nations. Quotations are used by permission. Copyright 1995 by God's Word to the Nations. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked CSB have been taken from the Christian Standard Bible®, Copyright © 2017 by Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture quotations marked "NKJV" are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Verses marked ESV are from The Holy Bible English Standard Version™ Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers All rights reserved.

Verses marked NASB 2020 is taken from New American Standard Bible - NASB 2020 Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995, 2020 by The Lockman Foundation A Corporation Not for Profit, La Habra, California All Rights Reserved

Scripture quotations marked MSG The Message The Bible In Contemporary Language Eugene H. Peterson

Verses marked TVB are taken from The Voice Bible Copyright © 2012 Thomas Nelson, Inc. The Voice™ translation © 2012 Ecclesia Bible Society All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked CEV are taken from the Contemporary English Version (CEV) copyright American Bible Society 1991, 1995

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

Verses marked AMP are from the Amplified Bible, The Lockman Foundation, 2015

Scripture quotations marked NCV are taken from the New Century Version, Copyright Word Publishing 1987.

Verses marked REB are from the Revised English Bible

Scripture quotations marked ISV are taken from the International Standard Version Copyright 2011 ISV Foundation

Scripture quotations marked TLV “Scripture taken from the Tree of Life Version. © 2015 by the Messianic Jewish Family Bible Society. Used by permission of the Messianic Jewish Family Bible Society.

The First Testament, John Goldingay, Inter-varsity Press, Box 1400 Downers Grove, Illinois 60515-1426, ivpress.com, copyright 2018, John Goldingay

Table Of Contents

Introduction

Introduction To The Prophet Ezekiel

The Background Chapters 33-35

The Establishment Of Israel In The Land (Ezekiel 36:1-15)

Restoration To The Promised Land (Ezekiel 36:16-37:14)

Reunification In The Promised Land (Ezekiel 37:15-28)

The Invasion of Gog (Ezekiel 38 and 39)

Appendix 1 The Meaning Of Rosh In Ezekiel 38,39

Appendix 2 Factors That May Help Us Date The Timing Of The Invasion Chapter 38

Appendix 3 Two Prophets: Two Sets Of Predictions: Undeniable Proof That The Bible Is True

Appendix 4 The Russian Invasion Of Ukraine: What Does It Mean Biblically?

About The Author

Introduction

Many of the most often-asked questions regarding “last days” Bible prophecy concern the predicted invasion of Israel described in Ezekiel 38,39. Indeed, there are a number of issues that this passage brings up. This being the case, we have decided to write a book that deals with the major questions about this coming event.

Our plan is as follows . . .

We begin by looking at some important introductory matters concerning Ezekiel and the historical period in which he lived. This includes how this young priest got to Babylon, and how the Lord then called him to be a prophet.

Next, we will give a background on the chapters leading up to the invasion (33-37). This will help provide a context for what follows. It is very important that we understand what was going on at that time in history before we examine these two chapters which predict this “last days” invasion.

Then we do a verse by verse, word-by word, examination of Ezekiel 38,39. In addition to our comments on these two chapters, we have also added a number of appendices.

Our first appendix deals with the complicated question as to the meaning of the Hebrew word *Rosh* as found in Ezekiel 38.

Our second appendix lists some possible factors in determining the time of this invasion.

Appendix three looks at some amazing predictions by two biblical prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, where we document a number of specific predictions that each of them made as well as their fulfillment. We call this, “Undeniable Proofs That The Bible Is True.”

Finally, appendix four looks at Russian invasion of Ukraine and what it means as far as “last days” Bible prophecy.

We trust that this study will benefit all who desire to know the details about this predicted “last days” event. It is truly an exciting subject to study!

Introduction To The Prophet Ezekiel

The name Ezekiel means “may God (*Elohim*) strengthen him.” It is almost identical to the name Hezekiah “may the Lord (*Yahweh*) strengthen him.”

A Time Of Reformation

Ezekiel was likely born in the year 622 B.C.—the year the Book of the Law was discovered. At that time, the good king, Josiah, was enacting reforms in Judah. He had purged the country of the evil priests, torn down the high places, had the Ark of the Covenant placed back inside the temple (2 Chronicles 35:3), and celebrated the Passover for the first time in many years.

It was indeed a season of change. Assyria had dominated Judah for more than a century—since the time of Ahaz in 735 B.C. Against the advice of the prophet Isaiah, Ahaz had put Judah under the protection of Assyria (2 Kings 16, Isaiah 7).

Now the power of Assyria was weakening and Judah was attempting to be free from their bondage. Thus, the earliest days of the Ezekiel were days of reformation.

Reforms Did Not Come From The Heart

In 627 B.C., the 13th year of Josiah’s reign, five years after the reforms began, the prophet Jeremiah prophesied this message to the people of Judah—it’s one thing to eradicate the idols physically it’s another thing to remove them from your hearts.

Jeremiah preached in the temple in Jerusalem against the people of Judah. He rebuked those who broke the laws of the Lord all during the week but still thought that they could continue to rely on God’s past promises of protection. All they had to do is to simply go through the motions, or so they thought.

Jeremiah told them that if they did not change, then the Lord would abandon them, their city, their land, as well as their temple. Like ancient Shiloh, the sanctuary of the Lord would be totally destroyed (Jeremiah 7 and 26).

The good king Josiah died in 609. His son Jehoahaz (called Shallum in Jeremiah 22:10-12) briefly ruled in his place. He was exiled to Egypt and another son, Jehoiakim, ruled in his place (2 Kings 23:29-37).

Jeremiah compared Jehoiakim unfavorably to his father—he was both greedy and arrogant. He predicted that Jehoiakim would die but that the people would not mourn for him (Jeremiah 22:13-19). This indeed came to pass.

In a horrific act, Scripture also tells us that this arrogant king burned Jeremiah’s scroll, which contained God’s prophetic messages, as it was read to him (Jeremiah 36).

Ezekiel was 17 years of age at this time so he would have known about this incident. In fact, he may have witnessed the first reading of the scroll of Jeremiah in the temple. We know that Ezekiel knew the writings of Jeremiah and would later make good use them in his own preaching and writing.

Egypt And Babylon

At this time both Egypt and Babylon were contending for the collapsing Assyrian Empire. In 605 B.C. Babylon, under Nebuchadnezzar, defeated Egypt at the battle of Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar immediately took control

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

over smaller states including Judah. He brought some of the nobility to Babylon (Daniel 1:1) and made Jehoiakim a vassal. However, the king rebelled.

Soon this evil king died and was replaced by Coniah (Jeconiah). After a three month siege of Jerusalem Coniah surrendered.

In 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar plundered the temple treasures. He carried them, Coniah, the royal family, and 10,000 others off to Babylon. This included the 25 year old priest, Ezekiel.

Ezekiel In Babylon

Ezekiel was one of the three captivity prophets (Daniel and Jeremiah being the other two). We know nothing of Ezekiel beyond what is written in the book. He is not mentioned in any other Old Testament book, neither is directly cited in the New Testament, although some of the imagery of the Book of Revelation was based on his vision.

He was a priest (1:3) but there is no evidence he ever performed priestly duties. It seems that Ezekiel spent all of his time in Babylon at the River Chebar—a royal canal of Nebuchadnezzar.

During that time, Daniel the prophet was at the royal court in Babylon, while Jeremiah the prophet was in Jerusalem.

In his fifth year as a captive, on his 30th birthday, he received the call to the prophetic ministry. Ezekiel ministered five years to the captives in Babylon while predicting fall of Jerusalem. The turning point in his life and ministry occurred when news arrived that the city had indeed fallen (33:21) as Ezekiel has prophesied.

His Personal Experiences

The Lord intended Ezekiel to be a sign to Judah during his entire life. His experiences included the following.

Ezekiel shut himself up at his house, bound himself, and became mute (3:24-26)

He was ordered to lie on his left side for 390 days and then on his right side for 40 days (4:4-8)

Ezekiel ate bread prepared in an unclean manner (4:12)

He had to shave his beard (5:1)

Ezekiel was not permitted to mourn at the death of his wife (24:15-24)

The prophet lost his speech (24:27)

From Priest To Prophet

Let us not miss the ironies here. Ezekiel trained as a priest, but he never practiced the priesthood. He had heard the prophet Jeremiah rail against the priesthood. Now Ezekiel himself, the former priest, had himself become a prophet! Ezekiel probably never imagined that he would be in this position as a prophet of the Living God!

Evil Priests Tried To Have Jeremiah Killed

Another irony is that one of the priests, named Pashhur, tried to have the prophet Jeremiah killed. The story is as follows:

When the priest Pashhur son of Immer, the official in charge of the temple of the Lord, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things, he had Jeremiah the prophet beaten and put in the stocks at the Upper Gate of Benjamin at the Lord's temple. The next day, when Pashhur released him from the stocks, Jeremiah said to him, "The Lord's name for you is not Pashhur, but Terror on Every Side. For this is what the Lord says: 'I will make you a terror to yourself and to all your friends; with your own eyes you will see them fall by the sword of their enemies. I will give all Judah into the hands of the king of Babylon, who will carry them away to Babylon or put them to the sword. I will deliver all the wealth of this city into the hands of their enemies—all its products, all its valuables and all the treasures of the kings of Judah. They will take it away as plunder and carry it off to Babylon. And you, Pashhur, and all who live in your house will go into exile to Babylon. There you will die and be buried, you and all your friends to whom you have prophesied lies'" (Jeremiah 20:1-6 NIV)

Judgment was pronounced upon this man and his family. As predicted, this all was literally fulfilled. This episode revealed the corruption of some members of the priesthood at that time.

Jeremiah Continued To Be Persecuted

This persecution continued. We read of another episode in the life of Jeremiah:

Now Shephatiah son of Mattan, Gedaliah son of Pashhur, Jehucal son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur son of Malkijah had heard the things that Jeremiah had been telling the people. ... So these officials said to the king, "This man must be put to death. For he is demoralizing the soldiers who are left in the city as well as all the other people there by these things he is saying. This man is not seeking to help these people but is trying to harm them."

King Zedekiah said to them, "Very well, you can do what you want with him. For I cannot do anything to stop you."

So the officials took Jeremiah and put him in the cistern of Malkijah, one of the royal princes, that was in the courtyard of the guardhouse. There was no water in the cistern, only mud. So when they lowered Jeremiah into the cistern with ropes he sank in the mud (Jeremiah 38:1-6 NET).

Jeremiah was rescued by Ebed-melech—an Ethiopian eunuch of the king.

The Historical Accuracy Of This Account The Seal (Bullae) of Gedaliah son Pashhur Is Discovered

Interestingly, new archaeological evidence shows that Jeremiah's persecutors did indeed exist during the time specified in the Book of Jeremiah. The seal of Gedaliah, the son of Pashur, has been found in a recent dig near the ruins of the first temple in Jerusalem.

The seal confirms the existence of one of Jeremiah's accusers, as described Jeremiah 38:1—demonstrating the historical reliability of the biblical narrative.

Dr. Eilat Mazar, one of the chief archaeologists in Israel, found a seal with the inscription, "Gedaliah the son of Pashur." According to Mazar, the seal dates to the final years of the first temple period—during the reign of Zedekiah, Judah's last king.

Three years previously, Mazar also found the seal of Jucal the son of Shelemiah in a nearby location. Jucal is also mentioned as one of Jeremiah's accusers in the same passage.

Thus, as we emphasize, we are dealing with genuine history in the accounts of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, it is not mythology!

This briefly sums up the background leading to chapters 33-48.

A Simple Outline Of Ezekiel

Prophecies Of Jerusalem's Destruction 1-24
Prophecies Against The Nations 25-32
Prophecies Of Israel's Blessings 33-39
The Millennial Temple 40-48

Prophecies Of Israel's Blessings (Ezekiel 33-39)

This major division of the book emphasizes the future restoration of the entire nation of Israel. We find that Israel would not remain under God's judgment forever.

Indeed, the Lord had set this nation apart as His special people, and for the sake of His holy name, He would eventually fulfill His promises to them. This section is in contrast to the judgment previously pronounced by Ezekiel. It certainly would have been a welcome word from the Lord!

Thus, chapters 33-39 are words of restoration and of hope!

How To Interpret This Section

Some Bible students interpret these chapters in an idealistic or symbolical manner. In other words, they apply what is said in a non-literal manner. The symbolically interpretation sees these chapters as illustrating the struggle of good versus evil rather than seeing some type of literal fulfillment for the nation of Israel in the future. Therefore, the details are not to be understood at face value. Thus, we should not look for a literal fulfillment of any of the predictions.

It Was Literal Thus Far

However, up to this point in the Book of Ezekiel, we are able to interpret all of Ezekiel's predictions in a literal manner. In other words, they are literal predictions that were all literally fulfilled. This being the case, why should we, as some argue, have to change our approach and start interpreting his words in a non-literal manner? The answer is that we should not. For . . .

If the literal sense, makes good sense, then seek no other sense, lest you come up with nonsense.

We will discover that taking Ezekiel's prophecies at face value present far fewer problems than trying to interpret them symbolically.

Moreover, we will also discover that the literal fulfillment of these prophecies accomplished the precise purpose for which God gave them—the encouragement of the people of Israel in a time of great discouragement.

Literal Interpretation

There are basically three views as to how we should interpret this prophetic portion of the Book of Ezekiel.

Option 1: Wooden Literalism

There are those who claim they interpret the text literally. However, in doing so they deny the existence of many figures of speech that we find in the text. This is known as “wooden literalism,” or “letterism.” It claims to seek a straightforward reading of the text. Yet, in many cases, the end result is nonsense.

Option 2: Historical Grammatical

Another option recognizes figures of speech when they occur in the text. While the text is to be read in a literal or normal manner, it is recognized that figures of speech are included. They should not be interpreted in a literal manner—something that would have been obvious to the original readers or hearers.

The goal is to discover how the original readers would have understood the text as a basis for how we should understand it. Many interpreters in this group like to use the term “normal” to describe their principles of interpretation.

Option 3: Literal Interpretation: Except For Prophetic Parts

A third group interprets most portions of the biblical text literally but believes prophetic sections are mainly symbolic and figurative and, thus, are not to be interpreted in a normal, straightforward manner.

Usually, they understand many of the references of God blessing Israel in the future as now being fulfilled in His blessings to the church. In other words, they do not look for a “last days” fulfillment of these promises to the Jews.

There Is No Regathering Of Israel In This View

For example, the various promises of God, to regather Israel to her ancient homeland, are not understood to mean that God will eventually re-gather the Jews to the Promised Land. Rather He will gather His people, all the redeemed, to heaven—the land that He has prepared for us.

Consequently they “spiritualize” the Old Testament prophecies while taking the rest of the Old Testament more or less literally. Most interpreters of this type end up with an amillennial understanding of the future—there is no literal one thousand year period of peace on the earth.

As we will discover, Option 2 will make the most sense as to how we should interpret these predictions concerning the future—they will be literally fulfilled.

With this in mind, let us now consider what the prophet has to say.

Background To This Section (Ezekiel 33-39)

The key background verses are found in Ezekiel 24:

The word of the LORD came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month: Son of man, write down the name of this day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day (Ezekiel 24:1-2 NET).

After this dated announcement, that the siege of Jerusalem had begun, Ezekiel and the exiles in Babylon had a long wait ahead of them. What would be the outcome? Would the city fall?

The wait lasted some two years. The answer this question is found in chapter 33—the city had indeed fallen.

A Warning To Those Exiled In Babylon (Ezekiel 33:1-20)

When the exiles learned that Jerusalem had fallen, we find that Ezekiel’s messages dramatically changed. Before this time, he announced judgment on the kingdom of Judah and the city of Jerusalem (chapters 4-24).

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

In addition, he proclaimed a number of messages of judgment on the nations that opposed the chosen people (chapters 25-32).

After the news came of the fall of Jerusalem, his messages were more of encouragements that God would restore Israel to her land, though judgment was still a minor theme.

This particular message in chapter 33 is an introduction to the promise of the future blessings for the entire nation of Israel. Thus, it serves a transitional function in the book and looks both ways—backward as well as forward.

The Watchman Must Warn, The People Must Listen (Ezekiel 33:1-9)

Ezekiel's message of warning to the exiles in this section is similar to his initial call (3:16-21). Now that his original ministry, of delivering the message of judgment, was completed, God appointed the prophet as a watchman for a second time. His message still stressed individual accountability and responsibility, but the focus was now on the Lord's restoration of the people, not on God's judgment.

Ezekiel 33:1-4

The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, speak to your people and tell them, ‘Suppose I bring the sword against a land, and the people of that land select a man from among them, appointing him as their watchman. And suppose he sees the sword coming against the land and blows his trumpet to warn the people. Then, if anyone hears the sound of the trumpet but ignores the warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his death will be his own fault. (CSB)

After this pause in his messages to the exiles in Babylon, the Lord again commands Ezekiel to speak to them.

Previously, the prophet had not spoken any messages concerning them and their predicament for about three years.

The reason for this interval in the divine messages is given to us in Ezekiel:

And you, son of man, this is what will happen on the day I take from them their stronghold—their beautiful source of joy, the object in which their eyes delight, and the main concern of their lives, as well as their sons and daughters: On that day a fugitive will come to you to report the news. On that day you will be able to speak again; you will talk with the fugitive and be silent no longer. You will be an object lesson for them, and they will know that I am the LORD” (Ezekiel 24:26-27 NET).

Here we find a prediction that someone would come to the exiles in Babylon and report the news that the city of Jerusalem had fallen. It is only then that he would be able to speak again directly to the people regarding their destiny.

However, the prophet was not completely silent during this pause. Indeed, he had uttered five oracles against other nations.

Ezekiel was told to say the following to these exiles: if the people of that land appointed a watchman to warn them of an enemy invasion, they would be responsible if they did not heed his warning. In other words, they were to be personally responsible for their own fate.

Who Were The Watchmen?

Watchmen were men who stood on the towers of walls in ancient cities and scanned the horizon for potential enemies. If they saw one coming, they would blow their trumpet, usually a shophar, a ram's horn. It would warn the people outside of the city walls to take refuge in the walled city.

Ezekiel 33:5-6

He heard the sound of the trumpet but did not heed the warning, so he is responsible for himself. If he had heeded the warning, he would have saved his life. But suppose the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet to warn the people. Then the sword comes and takes one of their lives. He is swept away for his iniquity, but I will hold the watchman accountable for that person's death (NET)

Each person would be responsible for their own death if they failed to heed the warning of the watchman. If they responded to the warning, they could save their life.

But if the watchman failed to warn the people, he would be responsible for their deaths. Again, we find the emphasis of personal responsibility.

Ezekiel 33:7-9

As for you, son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you must warn them on my behalf. When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you must certainly die,' and you do not warn the wicked about his behavior, the wicked man will die for his iniquity, but I will hold you accountable for his death. But if you warn the wicked man to change his behavior, and he refuses to change, he will die for his iniquity, but you have saved your own life (NET).

God reminded Ezekiel that He had previously appointed him as a watchman for Judah (see 3:17-21; also Isaiah 21:6-9; Jeremiah 6:17). Ezekiel was responsible to deliver the Lord's messages to His people.

If Ezekiel failed to warn them that they would die for their sins, God would hold him responsible for their deaths (see also Genesis 4:9; 9:5).

But if Ezekiel warned these sinners of the consequences of their iniquity and they disregarded his warning, then they would die, but God would hold them, not Ezekiel, responsible.

This is similar as to what Paul said to the Ephesian elders:

Therefore I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of you all (Acts 20:26 NET).

Once the message of the Lord is delivered, it is up to the people to respond. In other words, they had a personal responsibility.

Ezekiel had carried out his assignment faithfully. Chapters 4-24 record the warnings that he delivered concerning the judgment that God intended to send upon Judah and Jerusalem for the sins of the people. He was a faithful watchmen.

This Was Not Popular

However, as can be imagined, warning others of the consequences of their sin—judgment—is never a popular assignment.

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

In the same way, believers today have a duty to be watchmen—to warn those who are without Christ. They must realize that final result of rejection of Christ is separation from God for all eternity.

Jesus said to the religious leaders of His day:

Thus I told you that you will die in your sins. For unless you believe that I am he, you will die in your sins (John 8:24 NET).

The final outcome of those who reject the message is found in the Book of Revelation. The Bible says:

And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet are too, and they will be tormented there day and night forever and ever. Then I saw a large white throne and the one who was seated on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne. Then books were opened, and another book was opened—the book of life. So the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to their deeds. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each one was judged according to his deeds. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death—the lake of fire. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, that person was thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10-15 NET).

Our responsibility is to warn those who are lost and proclaim the truth in the best way that we can. Yet, how the message is received is always beyond our control. Paul wrote:

For if I preach the gospel, I have no reason for boasting, because I am compelled to do this. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! (1 Corinthians 9:16 NET).

Note that he felt compelled to do so—to preach the gospel. We should have the same attitude.

The People Were Commanded To Turn From Evil (33:10-20)

This part of Ezekiel's warning to the exiles is similar to what he had previously told them (Ezekiel 18:21-32).

Ezekiel 33:10-11

And you, son of man, say to the house of Israel, This is what you have said: "Our rebellious acts and our sins have caught up with us, and we are wasting away because of them. How then can we live?" Say to them, 'As surely as I live, declares the sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but prefer that the wicked change his behavior and live. Turn back, turn back from your evil deeds! Why should you die, O house of Israel?' (NET).

It seems that something had changed. These exiles seemed to have taken on more personal responsibility for their sufferings than they had earlier (see chapter 18).

Now, they wondered how they could survive God's judgments. This is the first indication in the book that they were conscious of their own sins. This, of course, was spiritual progress on their part.

The Lord affirmed again that He took no pleasure in putting people to death for their sins (see Ezekiel 18:23,32 for the same statements by the Lord). These are verses that all believers should seriously think about. Indeed, the Lord does not enjoy punishing people. In fact, we are told that judgment is His "strange work."

The New Testament makes it clear that the Lord wants people to turn from their sins:

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

The Lord is not slow concerning his promise, as some regard slowness, but is being patient toward you, because he does not wish for any to perish but for all to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9 NET).

What is repentance? It is important that we understand that it is not the same as regret or remorse. Basically, regret is the feeling of “Why did I do this thing?” Remorse often follows regret. It consists of feeling bad, or sorrowful, about what we have done.

However, repentance is different. It consists of a change of the mind concerning our sin. We agree with what God says about sin and we turn away from it and toward the Lord for His mercy and forgiveness. It is not merely feeling regret or remorse for the things which we have done.

Ezekiel 33:12-13

Now, son of man, say to your people, “The righteousness of the righteous person will not save him on the day of his transgression; neither will the wickedness of the wicked person cause him to stumble on the day he turns from his wickedness. The righteous person won’t be able to survive by his righteousness on the day he sins. When I tell the righteous person that he will surely live, but he trusts in his righteousness and acts unjustly, then none of his righteousness will be remembered, and he will die because of the injustice he has committed (CSB)

The Lord made it clear that conduct of a righteous person would not exempt them from judgment—if they continued to sin. Neither would the sinful conduct of a sinful person exempt that person from forgiveness—if they repented.

Therefore, the righteous person should not assume that God’s promise of continued life for righteous living is a guarantee that they would be exempt from punishment; if their attitude changed and they fell into sin.

Having said this, we must emphasize that the issue in this context is not earning eternal salvation or losing it by the way in one lives their life. Dying refers to physical death.

Ezekiel 33:14-16

So when I tell the wicked person, “You will surely die,” but he repents of his sin and does what is just and right—he returns collateral, makes restitution for what he has stolen, and walks in the statutes of life without committing injustice—he will certainly live; he will not die. None of the sins he committed will be held against him. He has done what is just and right; he will certainly live (CSB).

God’s warnings, that the wicked would die because of their sinfulness, also needs to be understood in this context. They would die only if they failed to repent. If the wicked turned from their sins and obeyed the commands that the Lord had given them, then they would not die prematurely.

This is great news! The Lord would not hold their former sins against them. The person would receive their life as a reward for their righteous conduct. Again, the subject is a long-life here—not whether that person would experience life in the next world.

Ezekiel 33:17

Yet your people say, The behavior of the Lord is not right, when it is their behavior that is not right (NET).

The exiles in Babylon were saying that the Lord was not dealing with them in a fair and just manner. Of course, this type of response was ridiculous. As always, the Lord was indeed dealing with them in a correct way.

In actuality, it was their conduct and their thinking that was not right. This is always the case. Questioning the behavior of God is ludicrous. Who do we think that we are?

Ezekiel 33:18-19

When a righteous man turns from his godliness and commits iniquity, he will die for it. When the wicked turns from his sin and does what is just and right, he will live because of it (NET).

This was the warning for the people. If a righteous person abandoned their righteous lifestyle and started pursuing sin, then that individual would suffer the consequence for it—physical death.

But if a sinful person abandoned their sinful lifestyle and did what was right, that person would live. It is the law of sowing and reaping.

Paul would later write:

Do not be deceived. God will not be made a fool. For a person will reap what he sows (Galatians 6:7 NET).

Ezekiel 33:20

Yet you say, The behavior of the Lord is not right. House of Israel, I will judge each of you according to his behavior (NET).

These exiles in Babylon continued to claim that the Lord's ways of dealing with them were unjust. Yet the Lord had assured them that He would deal with each of them fairly, each according to their own individual behavior.

This is an important biblical truth! Indeed, God does not blame one person for another person's sins. We are accountable for only our sins, not the sins of other people.

This message also repeated God's appointment of Ezekiel as a watchman over Judah (chapter 3) and his continued emphasis upon personal responsibility (chapters 3 and 18).

Seemingly, the exiles had difficult time accepting these truths. Instead, they tended to view Ezekiel as an entertainer (vv. 30-32) and God as unfair. They could not have been more mistaken!

Restoration To The Promised Land (Ezekiel 33:21—39:29)

We now enter a transitional stage in the Book of Ezekiel. The word will arrive in Babylon that Jerusalem had fallen, the temple had been destroyed, and the people had been either killed or exiled.

Thus, a question would immediately arise, "Since the city of Jerusalem had fallen, the temple destroyed, the people taken captive, would the land be forever lost to these descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?"

Ezekiel would emphasize that it was the false 'shepherds' of Judah who had lost the land by leading the people astray from the truth.

But the true "shepherd," the Messiah, would ultimately restore the land to the entire nation of Israel (chapter 34). Those foreigners who had possessed the land of Israel and had oppressed her people would be judged and removed so that Israel might again possess her own land (35:1-36:15).

Eventually, the Lord would restore Israel to her promised land (36:16-37:14) and reunite the nation in fulfillment of His covenants with her (37:15-28). Never again would a foreign power have dominion over Israel in her land (chapters 38-39). NEVER!

Therefore, we will discover that the concept of the land is of particularly significance to the messages of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 33:21-39:29).

Israel And The Promised Land (Ezekiel 33:21-33)

Ezekiel then recorded these six messages about Israel's restoration to the Promised Land.

The Date And Setting Of These Messages (Ezekiel 33:21-22)

Ezekiel's last prophecy about the judgment coming upon Judah and Jerusalem ended with an announcement that a refugee would escape Jerusalem's destruction and come and report the city's fall to the exiles (24:25-26).

At that time God predicted that HE would open Ezekiel's mouth—he would be mute no longer (24:27). Now the messenger had arrived and God again opened the prophet's mouth.

Ezekiel's predictions had come to pass—as do all those prophecies which are made by true prophets of God!

Ezekiel 33:21

In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth of the month, a refugee came to me from Jerusalem saying, The city has been defeated! (NET).

We are told that on the fifth day of the tenth month of the twelfth year of the Jews' exile in Babylon, word had reached the exiles from a refugee who had come from the city of Jerusalem—Jerusalem had fallen to King Nebuchadnezzar—just as Ezekiel had predicted, as well as the Word of the Lord that Jeremiah had earlier predicted.

Scripture tells us that the siege of Jerusalem began on the tenth month, the tenth day, and the ninth year of King Zedekiah's reign (2 Kings 25:1) The city fell on the fourth month, the ninth day, and the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign (2 Kings 25:2-7).

Thus, the siege lasted some 18 months. The news of Jerusalem's fall reached the exiles in Babylon about five months after the city fell in 587 B.C. which was apparently the normal time it took to make this trip (see Ezra 7:6-9).

Ezekiel 33:22

Now the hand of the LORD had been on me the evening before the refugee reached me, but the LORD opened my mouth by the time the refugee arrived in the morning; he opened my mouth and I was no longer unable to speak (NET).

Notice the timing. The Lord had spoken to Ezekiel the evening before the refugee arrived and gave him permission to speak to the people when they heard the announcement of Jerusalem's fall. This broke the silence that God had imposed on him (see 3:26-27; 24:27).

Ezekiel was now able to converse with the exiles. His ministry has changed—he can now be a shepherd to them as well as continuing with his prophetic preaching. No longer will he be mute.

The First Message Of Hope (Ezekiel 33:23-33)

This first message dealt with a serious defect among the Jewish people. The Jews, who were still in Judea, were not listening to the whole counsel of God. Instead, they were picking and choosing what they would obey (verses 23-29).

This has been a constant problem. Indeed, the Apostle Paul emphasized to the Ephesian elders that they must teach the whole counsel of God:

For I did not hold back from announcing to you the whole purpose of God (Acts 20:27 NET).

Human nature never changes. Indeed, people only hear what they want to hear.

Meanwhile, though the Jews in Babylon were listening to Ezekiel, they were not responding to his words (verses 30-33). However, it was made clear, that if they were to benefit from these messages of hope they must first respond to those messages that he had previously delivered. In other words, they must repent of their sinful ways.

Hence, this first message in this series prepared the people for those that would follow. The first step was a change in their attitude toward the Word of God. This fact remains true to this very day for anyone seeking genuine hope.

The Attitude Of The Jews In Judea (Ezekiel 33:23-29)

Now we will discover the attitude of those Jews who remained in Judea when the nation was in captivity.

Ezekiel 33:23-24

The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, the ones living in these ruins in the land of Israel are saying, 'Abraham was only one man, yet he possessed the land, but we are many; surely the land has been given to us for a possession' (NET).

The Lord informed the prophet about the attitude of the Jews who were still in the land. The few Jews who still lived in the waste places of the Promised Land were claiming that since God had promised that land to Abraham, they were right in staying in it (see 11:15)

It seems the people didn't appreciate the truth that the physical connection with Abraham would not save them from God's punishment.

John the Baptist would later stress this same point when he spoke to the Jews who approached him as he was baptizing:

Therefore produce fruit that proves your repentance, and don't think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I tell you that God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones! Matthew 3:8,9 NET).

Jesus faced the same misconception. We read the religious leaders saying to him:

We are descendants of Abraham, . . . and have never been anyone's slaves! How can you say, 'You will become free?' . . . They answered him, "Abraham is our father!" Jesus replied, "If you are Abraham's children, you would be doing the deeds of Abraham" (John 8:33,39 NET).

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

Obviously, some people never learn.

Furthermore, Jeremiah had told the Jews in the Promised Land to submit to the Babylonians (Jeremiah 40-44). Why? It was because this punishment that they were receiving was truly the Lord's doing! They needed to appreciate that Babylon was God's instrument in the judgment of His sinful people. However, this message never got through to them.

Ezekiel 33:25-26

Therefore say to them, This is what the sovereign LORD says: You eat the meat with the blood still in it, pray to your idols, and shed blood. Do you really think you will possess the land? You rely on your swords and commit abominable deeds; each of you defiles his neighbor's wife. Will you possess the land? (NET).

Ezekiel was to now address the refugees who had brought the message of Jerusalem's fall, as well the other Jews who already were captives in Babylon.

Since they were NOT keeping the commandments that were written in the God's Law, why did they assume they had the right to possess the Promised Land?

God had indeed promised this particular land to Abraham's descendants, there is no doubt about this. Yet, the Lord had also told them that they could only occupy their land if they obeyed the commandments that He had given to them (see Deuteronomy 27-28; 29:25-29).

In other words, the occupancy was conditional. Since they had not obeyed, He removed them.

Ezekiel 33:27

This is what you must say to them, This is what the sovereign LORD says: As surely as I live, those living in the ruins will die by the sword, those in the open field I will give to the wild beasts for food, and those who are in the strongholds and caves will die of disease (NET).

Now judgment was pronounced upon those who remained in the Promised Land. The Lord assured the people that the Jews who stayed in the land would die there by various means including the sword, wild beasts, and disease (see Leviticus 26:22, 25).

In sum, the physical relationship to Abraham meant nothing because they were in a state of disobedience.

Ezekiel 33:28-29

I will turn the land into a desolate ruin; her confident pride will come to an end. The mountains of Israel will be so desolate no one will pass through them. Then they will know that I am the LORD when I turn the land into a desolate ruin because of all the abominable deeds they have committed (NET).

This is similar to the prophecies that the Lord made through Jeremiah. Indeed, the Lord promised to devastate the land completely which would humble the pride of His people (see Leviticus 26:19,33).

Even the mountains would be desolate, and travelers would not even pass through the land. Then the people would know that the Lord is indeed God, when He desolated their land.

The Attitude Of The Jews In Babylon (Ezekiel 33:30-33)

Now the attention is turned to those Jews who were living as captives in Babylon.

Ezekiel 33:30-31

But as for you, son of man, your people (who are talking about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses) say to one another, ‘Come hear the word that comes from the LORD.’ They come to you in crowds, and they sit in front of you as my people. They hear your words, but do not obey them. For they talk lustfully, and their heart is set on their own advantage (NET).

The Lord then informed Ezekiel that these exiles in Babylon were speaking to one another about him; both privately and publicly. They were saying, Let us go and hear what the Lord has to say to us through Ezekiel. So they came and sat in the presence of the prophet and listened to what he said. However, a huge problem remained—their hearts were still set on pursuing their sinful desires and selfish gain. In other words, they heard the words of the Lord but they did not obey them.

Ezekiel 33:32-33

Realize that to them you are like a sensual song, a beautiful voice and skilled musician. They hear your words, but they do not obey them. When all this comes true—and it certainly will—then they will know that a prophet was among them (NET).

The Lord compared those who listened to Ezekiel to those who listened to skilled musicians. These entertainers expected no response to their performances beyond applause.

However, a proclaimer of the Word of Lord expects people to change their behavior. These exiles in Babylon personally admired Ezekiel for his content as well as his delivery, but, to their shame, they did not put into practice what the Lord, through the prophet, had commanded them to do.

In the New Testament, James had something to say about this. He wrote:

But be sure you live out the message and do not merely listen to it and so deceive yourselves. For if someone merely listens to the message and does not live it out, he is like someone who gazes at his own face in a mirror. For he gazes at himself and then goes out and immediately forgets what sort of person he was. But the one who peers into the perfect law of liberty and fixes his attention there, and does not become a forgetful listener but one who lives it out—he will be blessed in what he does (James 1:22-25 NET).

In other words, these people in Babylon did not apply the Lord’s Word to their own lives. Hence, their behavior did not change.

Consequently, when the things that Ezekiel promised would happen did indeed happen—they were held responsible for what they heard and judged accordingly.

Note that these people would surely know that a prophet, a spokesman for God, had been in their midst, not just some type of entertainer.

This is one of the most powerful indictments of God’s people in the entire Bible—a perfect example of those who heard the Word of God, but did not obey what they had heard.

The False And The True Shepherds (Ezekiel 34)

Previously the Lord had predicted that the nation of Israel would not occupy the Promised Land if they had disobeyed the Covenant that the Lord had given through Moses. This disobedience was obvious from the behavior of the people who were still in the Promised Land (33:25-26) as well as from those exiled in Babylon (33:31-32).

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

Ezekiel had made it clear to the people that they never were allowed to blame anyone but themselves for the situation that they found themselves in.

And yet while the common people were responsible for their sinful behavior, there were those who had a higher degree of responsibility— their sinful leaders.

In this chapter, Ezekiel specifically places the responsibility of the failure of the people at the feet of their evil leaders (see 13:1-14:11; 22). However, we also find a message of hope for this particular section of Ezekiel.

The Old Testament commentator C.F. Keil provides a helpful synopsis of these coming chapters (34-39). He put it this way:

The Restoration of Israel, and Destruction of Gog and Magog—Ezekiel 34-39

The promise of the salvation, which is to blossom for the covenant nation after the judgment, commences with the announcement that the Lord will deliver Israel out of the hand of its evil shepherds, who only feed themselves and destroy the flock, and will take care of His own flock, gather them together, feed and tend them on a good meadow, protect the weak sheep against the strong, and through His servant David bring security and blessing to the whole of the flock (Ezekiel 34). This comprehensive promise is carried out still further in the following chapters in various phases. Because Edom cherishes perpetual enmity against the sons of Israel, and has sought to take possession of their land, in which Jehovah was, the mountains of Seir shall become a perpetual desert (Ezekiel 35:1-15); whereas the devastated land of Israel shall be rebuilt, and sown once more, bear fruit, and be filled with man and beast (Ezekiel 36:1-15).

The Lord will do this for His holy name's sake, will cleanse His people from their sins, when gathered out of the nations, by sprinkling them with pure water, and renew them by His Spirit in heart and mind, that they may walk in His commandments, and multiply greatly in their land, when it has been glorified into a garden of God (Ezekiel 36:16-38).

The house of Israel, which has been slain with the sword, and has become like a field full of dry bones of the dead, the Lord will awaken to new life, and bring in peace into the land of Israel (Ezekiel 37:1-14); the two divided peoples and kingdoms of Israel He will unite into one people and kingdom, will liberate them from their sins, cause them to dwell in the land given to His servant Jacob under the sovereignty of His servant David, will make with them a covenant of peace forever, and dwell above them as their God for ever in the sanctuary, which He will establish in the midst of them (Ezekiel 37:15-28).

And, finally, in the last time, when Israel is dwelling in its own land in security and peace, the Lord will bring Gog from the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, with a powerful army of numerous peoples, into the land that has been restored from the sword; but when he has come to plunder and prey, the Lord will destroy him with all his army, and by this judgment display His glory among the nations, and so have compassion upon the whole house of Israel, and because He has poured out His Spirit upon it, will hide His face from it no more (Ezekiel 38 and 39).

From this general survey it is evident that the words of God contained in Ezekiel 34-37 announce the restoration and exaltation of Israel to be the sanctified people of God, and Ezekiel 38 and 39 the lasting establishment of this salvation, through the extermination of those enemies who rise up against the restored people of God (C.F. Keil, Ezekiel)

This is an excellent summary!

Outline For This Next Section

God promised to bring them:

Out of their rebellion (34)
Into the Promised land (35:1-36:15)
Back from their disgrace (36:18-38)
Up from their grave (37:1-14)
Together, as one nation (37:15-28)

Each of these promises of the Lord will be literally fulfilled at some time in the future.

The Accusation Against Judah's Unfaithful Rulers (Ezekiel 34:1-6)

The Lord now directed His wrath toward those rulers in Judah who were unfaithful to Him and His Word.

Ezekiel 34:1-2

The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy, and say to them—to the shepherds: “This is what the sovereign LORD says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who have been feeding themselves! Should not shepherds feed the flock?” (NET).

The Lord gave Ezekiel a message for these evil shepherds—the leaders and rulers of the nation.

In the Ancient Near East, kings and leaders were often referred to as “shepherds” (see Numbers 27:17; 2 Samuel 5:2; 1 Kings 22:17; Isaiah 44:28; Jeremiah 3:15; 10:21; 23:1-6; 25:34-38; Micah 5:4-5; Zechariah 11:4-17).

Prophets and priests were also called “shepherds.” In this particular instance, we find that kings are also given this designation.

Sadly, in the previous century, before the fall of Jerusalem, with few exceptions, the kings were both moral and spiritual failures. They led their own people into idolatry which set the stage for the punishment that was to come upon the sinful nation.

These words of Ezekiel would remind the wayward people of what his contemporary Jeremiah wrote about the leadership:

The LORD says, The leaders of my people are sure to be judged. They were supposed to watch over my people like shepherds watch over their sheep. But they are causing my people to be destroyed and scattered. So the LORD God of Israel has this to say about the leaders who are ruling over his people: You have caused my people to be dispersed and driven into exile. You have not taken care of them. So I will punish you for the evil that you have done. I, the LORD, affirm it! Then I myself will regather those of my people who are still alive from all the countries where I have driven them. I will bring them back to their homeland. They will greatly increase in number. I will install rulers over them who will care for them. Then they will no longer need to fear or be terrified. None of them will turn up missing. I, the LORD, promise it! I, the LORD, promise that a new time will certainly come when I will raise up for them a righteous branch, a descendant of David. He will rule over them with wisdom and understanding and will do what is just and right in the land. Under his rule Judah will enjoy safety and Israel will live in security. This is the name he will go by: "The LORD has provided us with justice (Jeremiah 23:1-6 NET).

We discover that the Lord pronounced punishment upon these debauched leaders for three distinct reasons.

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

First, they fed themselves rather than the people. In other words, they were selfish. Indeed, they were more interested in providing for their own selfish selves than for the people whom the Lord had placed in their care. Basically, they exploited their followers.

This reminds us of the words of Jesus when He compared Himself, the Good Shepherd, to the “hired hands:”

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. The hired hand, who is not a shepherd and does not own sheep, sees the wolf coming and abandons the sheep and runs away. So the wolf attacks the sheep and scatters them. Because he is a hired hand and is not concerned about the sheep, he runs away (John 10:11-13 NET).

The people of Israel were governed by “hired hands,” not good shepherds.

Add to this, when we consider the history of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, we find that their rulers were a consistent group of corrupt leaders. In fact, there was not a good king among the lot!

However, as Ezekiel had pointed out earlier, the southern kingdom of Judah was worse than her sister Israel (see chapter 23).

Ezekiel 34:3-4

You eat the fat, you clothe yourselves with the wool, you slaughter the choice animals, but you do not feed the sheep! You have not strengthened the weak, healed the sick, bandaged the injured, brought back the strays, or sought the lost, but with force and harshness you have ruled over them (NET).

Specifically, these unfaithful shepherds ate the best parts of the sacrifices rather than offering them to the Lord (see 1 Samuel 2:12-17). They used the wool of sheep to make clothing for themselves.

Second, rather than feeding the sheep of the Lord, they slaughtered them. Furthermore, these evil leaders had not restored those that needed restoring nor did they seek out those that had wandered away and needed finding.

The primary responsibility of a leader is to care for the needs of those they lead, even if this requires sacrificing their own personal desires. Tragically, self-sacrificial loving leadership was never provided by these evil shepherds.

Ezekiel 34:5-6

They were scattered because they had no shepherd, and they became food for every wild beast. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. My sheep were scattered over the entire face of the earth with no one looking or searching for them (NET).

Third, the rulers negligently allowed the people, the Lord’s sheep, to scatter over the earth instead of keeping them safely together.

Therefore, we find that the people scattered because they lacked proper leadership and thus became victims of the enemies of the Lord’s flock. Though they wandered everywhere, there was no one who would seek them out. Compare this to the attitude of Jesus:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them because they were bewildered and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Matthew 9:36 NET).

We should note the huge difference between the Good Shepherd, Jesus, and these “false shepherds.”

There is something else that we should appreciate. In a span of these few verses here in Ezekiel, we find that the Lord calls the people “my sheep” no fewer than five times.

Obviously, God is showing personal concern for His people, His sheep.

The Verdict Concerning The Leadership Of Israel (Ezekiel 34:7-10)

The Lord then repeated His accusation against Israel’s leaders and then announced what He planned to do about the present situation (verses 9-31).

Ezekiel 34:7-8

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: As surely as I live, declares the sovereign LORD, my sheep have become prey and have become food for all the wild beasts. There was no shepherd, and my shepherds did not search for my flock, but fed themselves and did not feed my sheep (NET).

These false shepherds needed to listen to God’s word to them because they had let His people become prey for their enemies, and rather than seeking the lost, they had fed themselves.

Ezekiel 34:9-10

Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the LORD: This is what the sovereign LORD says: Look, I am against the shepherds, and I will demand my sheep from their hand. I will no longer let them be shepherds; the shepherds will not feed themselves anymore. I will rescue my sheep from their mouth, so that they will no longer be food for them (NET).

The sovereign Lord swore to oppose these evil shepherds. They would be held accountable. No longer would they lead His sheep. Sadly, these “shepherds” had forgotten that the flock was not theirs! Indeed, these people belong to the Lord and to Him alone. These shepherds do not own the sheep any more than kings own their own subjects. Though they were entrusted to exercise leadership over God’s people, as noted, these leaders miserably failed.

The Lord’s Intervention For Israel (Ezekiel 34:11-24)

Now we have the promise of the Lord to intervene on behalf of the scattered sheep, Israel.

Ezekiel 34:11-12

For this is what the sovereign LORD says: Look, I myself will search for my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will seek out my flock. I will rescue them from all the places where they have been scattered on a cloudy, dark day (NET)

In contrast to these false shepherds, and their evil dealings with the people of God, the Lord made this promise—it would be He Himself who would seek out His wandering sheep, care for them, and deliver them from the places where they had scattered in those dark days.

God Is Israel’s Shepherd

This is certainly in keeping with what the Old Testament had already stated—the Lord was “Israel’s Shepherd” (Genesis 49:24; Psalm 23:1; 80:1; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah. 31:10).

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

The concern of the Lord Jesus for His people, His sheep, is also highlighted in His parable of the lost sheep. He said:

Which one of you, if he has a hundred sheep and loses one of them, would not leave the ninety-nine in the open pasture and go look for the one that is lost until he finds it? Then when he has found it, he places it on his shoulders, rejoicing. Returning home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, telling them, 'Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost.' I tell you, in the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need to repent. (Luke 15:4-7 NET).

Jesus, of course, expounded upon this theme in His public ministry referring to Himself as the "Good Shepherd" (John 10). The listeners would have connected His words to those found here in Ezekiel.

We should not miss the connection: the Lord is Israel's Shepherd and Jesus said He is the "Good Shepherd." Jesus is the God of the Old Testament!

The Lord now continues His promise to the people of a literal return and a literal restoration to their own land.

Ezekiel 34:13

I will bring them out from among the peoples and gather them from foreign countries; I will bring them to their own land. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams and all the inhabited places of the land (NET).

The Lord Himself would lead them out from among the peoples where they had gone and bring them back to their own land. He Himself would nourish them on the mountains of Israel, beside the streams, and in the best inhabited places of the Promised Land.

Ezekiel 34:14

In a good pasture I will feed them; the mountain heights of Israel will be their pasture. There they will lie down in a lush pasture, and they will feed on rich grass on the mountains of Israel.

They would enjoy good pasture and would experience His rest in good grazing ground, the richest pasture in the land.

This Is Similar To Earlier Promises

Jeremiah, his contemporary, recorded the Lord saying something similar about their first return to the land from the Babylonian captivity. We read:

Yes, I will restore you to health. I will heal your wounds. I, the LORD, affirm it! For you have been called an outcast, Zion, whom no one cares for. The LORD says, I will restore the ruined houses of the descendants of Jacob. I will show compassion on their ruined homes. Every city will be rebuilt on its former ruins. Every fortified dwelling will occupy its traditional site. Out of those places you will hear songs of thanksgiving and the sounds of laughter and merriment. I will increase their number and they will not dwindle away. I will bring them honor and they will no longer be despised. The descendants of Jacob will enjoy their former privileges. Their community will be reestablished in my favor and I will punish all who try to oppress them (Jeremiah 30:17-20 NET).

These promises were literally fulfilled when the people returned from the seventy year Babylonian captivity.

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

We should also note that we have seven “I wills” in this passage. The Lord has said it and He will indeed do it.

There is something else we must consider as we ponder the meaning of these verses—the literal fulfillment of these words.

Now, with respect to what Ezekiel is writing about the far distant future, if the second scattering of the nation would be literal, which nobody can really deny, then the regathering must also be literal. Otherwise these promises of the Lord would be empty and meaningless.

Let us keep this in mind as we continue to look at these chapters. The Lord continues . . .

Ezekiel 34:15-16

I myself will feed my sheep and I myself will make them lie down, declares the sovereign LORD. I will seek the lost and bring back the strays; I will bandage the injured and strengthen the sick, but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them—with judgment! (NET).

The Lord Himself would feed His flock and lead the sheep to rest. He would seek out the strays, return those who had been scattered, He would bandage the injured, and strengthen the sick.

The Fat And Strong Would Be Fed Judgment

Here we also find judgment pronounced upon these false shepherds in the midst of His promised blessing. The Lord would destroy the fat, strong shepherds who had failed Him. Indeed, He would feed these leaders judgment. This is His promise!

Ezekiel 34:17

As for you, my sheep, this is what the sovereign LORD says: Look, I am about to judge between one sheep and another, between rams and goats (NET).

The Lord also announced that He would distinguish among the members of His flock—He would judge each sheep individually. Hence not all of these sheep were “His” sheep. Indeed, some were goats.

Ezekiel 34:18-19

Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture, that you must trample the rest of your pastures with your feet? When you drink clean water, must you muddy the rest of the water by trampling it with your feet? As for my sheep, they must eat what you trampled with your feet, and drink what you have muddied with your feet! (NET).

Now we discover that some of these leaders had not only eaten from the good pasture and had drunk the clear water, they had also made it impossible for the other sheep to eat good food and drink good water. The ordinary sheep had to get by with trampled grass and muddy water.

Ezekiel 34:20

Therefore, this is what the sovereign LORD says to them: Look, I myself will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep (NET).

The Lord then promised to judge between the fat and the lean sheep, between those who fed themselves and kept others from eating and those who had to exist upon poor food and drink. Judgment was coming to these false shepherds who, in actuality, were not His sheep, but rather goats.

This Reminds Us Of The Words Of Jesus

The dividing of the people in this manner is reminiscent of Jesus' words about His coming kingdom.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. All the nations will be assembled before him, and he will separate people one from another like a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left (Matthew 25:31-33 NET).

This principle is found throughout Scripture. The Lord, the Shepherd, will separate the righteous sheep from the unrighteous—here, as in Ezekiel 34, they are termed “goats.” He now illustrates further.

Ezekiel 34:21-22

Because you push with your side and your shoulder, and thrust your horns at all the weak sheep until you scatter them abroad, I will save my sheep; they will no longer be prey. I will judge between one sheep and another (NET).

Because some of the Lord's sheep had suffered at the hands of their fellow sheep, who pushed and shoved them around, the Lord would deliver even the weak.

Again, we are told that He would distinguish between the two types of His sheep. He would deliver His people from their corrupt leaders as well as from predatory nations. The ultimate fulfillment of this will be in the earthly kingdom of the Messiah—the Millennium.

The Promise Of One Shepherd Who Will Rule Over Them

In the next two verses we have the prediction of a Shepherd who will arise. In contrast to those who had previously ruled the people, He will be the “Good Shepherd.”

Ezekiel 34:23-24

I will set one shepherd over them, and he will feed them—namely, my servant David. He will feed them and will be their shepherd. I, the LORD, will be their God, and my servant David will be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken! (NET).

We now come to one of the great passages in the Book of Ezekiel. The Lord promised to set over His sheep one shepherd—His servant David, who would personally feed them. The Lord would be their God, and His servant David would be prince, or king, among them.

The Lord later repeated this promise of David to rule over them (see 37:22-26).

Jeremiah the prophet also spoke of the day when “one of their own people” would rule over them:

One of their own people will be their leader. Their ruler will come from their own number. I will invite him to approach me, and he will do so. For no one would dare approach me on his own. I, the LORD, affirm it! Then you will again be my people and I will be your God (Jeremiah 30:21-22 NET).

Will David Be Resurrected?

Here is an interesting question. Did God mean that He would actually raise David from the dead to lead the Israel again? No it does not mean this. The Lord meant that someone from David's descendants would lead them.

However a few interpreters have concluded that resurrected King David is in view here. David was the model shepherd of sheep and the model king of Israel. He was the man whom God chose and in whom He delighted—the king who triumphed against all his enemies and who extended his kingdom in all directions.

The Greater Son Of David

Though the exact identity of this “David” may have been lost upon Ezekiel's audience, history has clearly demonstrated that it was one of David's descendants who has proved to be this Good Shepherd—Jesus Christ. Jesus said:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. . . I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me (John 10:11,14 NET).

Jesus, the Good Shepherd and the Son of David, is in view here. This is in keeping in line with the promises the Lord made.

The Promises Made To David

First, we note the promise which was made to David himself. David was told the following:

When the time comes for you to die, I will raise up your descendant, one of your own sons, to succeed you, and I will establish his kingdom. He will build a house for my name, and I will make his dynasty permanent (2 Samuel 7:12,13 NET).

David's kingdom would continue beyond his lifetime—his dynasty would be permanent. Later we read:

I, the LORD, promise that a new time will certainly come when I will raise up for them a righteous branch, a descendant of David. He will rule over them with wisdom and understanding and will do what is just and right in the land. Under his rule Judah will enjoy safety and Israel will live in security. This is the name he will go by: 'The LORD has provided us with justice' (Jeremiah 23:5,6 NET).

This particular descendant of David would be the one ruling over Israel. Later in Jeremiah we read:

But they will be subject to the LORD their God and to the Davidic ruler whom I will raise up as king over them (Jeremiah 30:9 NET).

Note that it is a Davidic ruler who will rule over them; not David himself.

This is further confirmed in the words of Hosea:

Afterward, the Israelites will turn and seek the LORD their God and their Davidic king. Then they will submit to the LORD in fear and receive his blessings in the future (Hosea 3:5 NET).

So, it is NOT David himself who will rule but someone who is from David's lineage—the Lord Jesus.

However, the “last days” orientation of this entire passage here in Ezekiel removes the setting from the period of our Lords’ earthly ministry in the first century to that of His Second Coming. It is at that time when He will come to sit upon the throne of David.

In sum, in view of the promises that God Himself would shepherd His sheep, and the promises that His servant David would shepherd them, it seems clear that the God-man, the Lord Jesus, is in view.

The Covenant Of Peace (Ezekiel 34:25-31)

The themes of regathering the people as sheep, and of a covenant, now come together in Ezekiel 34:25-31.

Ezekiel 34:25

I will make a covenant of peace with them and will rid the land of wild beasts, so that they can live securely in the wilderness and even sleep in the woods (NET).

The Lord now promised Israel that He will make a covenant of peace—a covenant or agreement which results in peace (see Ezekiel 16:60; 37:26-28; 38:11-13; 39:25-29; Isaiah 54:10).

The provisions of this covenant that Ezekiel mentioned here include the following.

First, there is the removing of the threats to the people’s safety from the land itself. Consequently, they could even live at peace in its formerly dangerous parts—for example, the wilderness and woods.

Many believe that this is a reference to the New Covenant that God promised to make with Israel in the future. We read about this in Jeremiah:

Indeed, a time is coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. It will not be like the old covenant that I made with their ancestors when I delivered them from Egypt. For they violated that covenant, even though I was like a faithful husband to them, says the LORD. But I will make a new covenant with the whole nation of Israel after I plant them back in the land, says the LORD. I will put my law within them and write it on their hearts and minds. I will be their God and they will be my people. People will no longer need to teach their neighbors and relatives to know me. For all of them, from the least important to the most important, will know me, says the LORD. For I will forgive their sin and will no longer call to mind the wrong they have done (Jeremiah 31:31-34 NET).

The promises of God toward His sheep now continue.

Ezekiel 34:26-27

I will turn them and the regions around my hill into a blessing. I will make showers come down in their season; they will be showers that bring blessing. The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the earth will yield its crops (NET).

Next, we find that God would make His people and the places around His hill—Mount Zion, Jerusalem—a blessing to others (see Genesis 12:3).

The Lord’s seasonal blessings upon Israel, both the people and the land, would be like the rain, and He would send His blessings down in showers!

Peter would later speak of this future period calling it, “times of refreshing.” He said:

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

Therefore repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and so that he may send the Messiah appointed for you—that is, Jesus (Acts 3:19-20 NET).

Fruit trees would bear abundantly, fruits, vegetables and flowers would thrive in the Promised Land (see Hosea 2:22; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13-14; Zechariah 8:12).

Ezekiel 34:27b-29

They will live securely on their land; they will know that I am the LORD, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hand of those who enslaved them. They will no longer be prey for the nations and the wild beasts will not devour them. They will live securely and no one will make them afraid. I will prepare for them a healthy planting. They will no longer be victims of famine in the land and will no longer bear the insults of the nations (NET).

Third, when God will break the yoke that held His people in captivity and free them from their oppressors, they will then know that He is the Lord!

Fourth, His people would live in complete security. They would no longer be a prey to the nations or to the beasts of the earth that had previously devoured them (see Isaiah 11:6-9).

Some Bible commentators believe that the “beasts” may be a figure for the Gentile nations that sought to devour Israel. Israel would live without fear of other nations intruding upon them or their land.

The Lord would provide for them a place where they could put down roots. Famines, as well as the insults of the other nations, would cease forever.

Please note that these promises of the Lord will be accomplished. Indeed, there are 17 “I wills” in verses 11-29 indicating the Lord’s commitment to be personally involved in the lives and destinies of His people.

Ezekiel 34:30

Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they are my people, the house of Israel, declares the sovereign LORD (NET).

Fifth, the Lord would be their God and they would be His special people in the fullest sense that the nation had ever experienced (Jeremiah 31:33; Romans 11:25-27). Everyone would know that He was with them and that they were His Chosen People.

It is important that we note that this covenant of peace anticipated events and promises that were never realized in the first return of Israel from captivity.

When the people came back to the land after 535 B.C., they were under the control of every world-dominating power including Medo-Persia, Greece, and finally Rome.

In A.D. 70 the nation went into exile when the Romans destroyed the city and the temple and the people were taken off into captivity. Therefore, millennial conditions are in view—the time when the Lord returns to this earth and sets up His kingdom.

Ezekiel 34:31

And you, my sheep, the sheep of my pasture, are my people, and I am your God, declares the sovereign LORD (NET).

The sheep, to whom the Lord has been referring, is clarified in this verse. They are people, not real sheep. He was describing His relationship to them as people in the figure of a shepherd and sheep.

What He has promised toward these people He will accomplish for God ALWAYS keeps His promises. And His promises will be LITERALLY fulfilled.

Preparation Of The Promised Land (Ezekiel 35:1-36:15)

Each of the next four speeches elaborates upon an aspect of the peace covenant that was just described.

In the first speech, Ezekiel 35:1-36:15, the Lord pronounced how these foreign nations, who had plundered His people and His land, would be removed and then punished in preparation for Israel's return to her Promised Land.

In the next speech, 36:16-37:14, the Lord provides a beautiful and descriptive account of His restoration of the entire nation of Israel to her land.

In the third speech, Ezekiel 37:15-28, HE stresses the full reunion of the nation and the fulfillment of the covenants when this peace covenant is established.

Finally, Ezekiel 38-39 develops the concept of Israel's permanent and complete security in the Lord—for the Lord will thwart the final attempt by a foreign power—the leader Gog—to possess Israel's land and to plunder God's people.

The Elimination Of Claimants To The Land (Ezekiel Chapter 35)

What follows in this chapter is another oracle against a foreign nation (see chapters 25-32). Edom, who occupied the territory south and east of the land of Israel, were perennial enemies of Israel.

So, we may ask, what is this chapter doing here in the midst of the Lord making promises of future blessing to Israel? Why the placement?

While at first, it may appear that this present prophecy belongs to the oracles against foreign nations, it is likely placed here as a contrast to chapter 36—namely, the coming wrath for Mount Seir contrasted with blessing for the mountains of Israel; with mountains being the key word.

To sum up, the threat against the land involved the people who were in it—God's people.

In addition, Ezekiel seemingly included this oracle here because it promised to desolate a perpetual enemy of Israel which had constantly wanted to occupy Israel's land—the land which God had promised to return to *His* people (chapter 34).

The Sins Of Edom

In this context, Edom sins consisted of numerous things. We can sum them up as follows.

First, Edom aided the Babylonians (verse 5).

In addition, Edom also attempted to annex the territory that belonged to Israel as her own (verse 10).

Third, Edom displayed this pathetic joy over the fall of Judah (see verses 12ff).

Finally, Scripture emphasizes the perpetual hatred between Edom and God's chosen people (verse 5).

The prophet Amos had earlier noted this:

This is what the LORD says: Because Edom has committed three crimes—make that four!—I will not revoke my decree of judgment. He chased his brother with a sword; he wiped out his allies. In his anger he tore them apart without stopping to rest; in his fury he relentlessly attacked them (Amos 1:11 NET).

Why Edom?

But why did the Lord target Edom here? There seem to be a number of reasons.

Edom May Have Been Representative Of Israel's Enemies

It has been suggested that Edom may have been representative of all the enemies of Israel who wanted to take over the Promised Land. Thus, they were selected here because of the long history of land disputes with Israel (see Genesis 25:22-34; 27; 36:6-8, 31-43; Numbers 20:14- 21; 24:15-19; 1 Samuel 14:47; 1 Kings 11:14-22; 2 Kings 8:21; 2 Chronicles 20:1-23; 28:17; Psalm 137:7; Isaiah 11:14; 34:5-6; Lamentations 4:21-22; Daniel 11:41; Amos 2:1; Obadiah 10-14; Malachi 1:2-5).

Longer than any other nation, Edom consistently resisted Israel's occupation of the Promised Land. Historically Edom would rejoice at the misfortune of Israel and join in with their enemies in attacking them.

This hatred of Israel went all the way back to the beginning:

So Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing his father had given to his brother. Esau said privately, "The time of mourning for my father is near; then I will kill my brother Jacob!" (Genesis 27:41 NET).

Therefore, this prediction was not merely, or even mainly, pertaining to these two brothers as individuals, but rather to Esau, and his descendants, being representative of all of the enemies of the Lord.

Indeed, Isaiah 34:5,6 and 63:1-4 are two passages which may use Edom as representative of all enemies at any time.

The first passage reads as follows:

He says, "Indeed, my sword has slaughtered heavenly powers. Look, it now descends on Edom, on the people I will annihilate in judgment. The LORD's sword is dripping with blood, it is covered with fat; it drips with the blood of young rams and goats and is covered with the fat of rams' kidneys. For the LORD is holding a sacrifice in Bozrah, a bloody slaughter in the land of Edom" (Isaiah 34:5,6 NET).

We later read:

Who is this who comes from Edom, dressed in bright red, coming from Bozrah? Who is this one wearing royal attire, who marches confidently because of his great strength? "It is I, the one who announces vindication, and who is able to deliver!" Why are your clothes red? Why do you look like someone who has stomped on grapes in a vat? I have stomped grapes in the winepress all by myself; no one from the nations joined me. I stomped on them in my anger; I trampled them down in my rage. Their juice splashed on my

garments, and stained all my clothes. For I looked forward to the day of vengeance, and then payback time arrived (Isaiah 63:1-4 NET).

Therefore, these series of judgments “may” go beyond the inhabitants of the land of Edom.

However, this does not mean that Edom was merely representative of those who were to receive the Lord’s judgment. Indeed, Edom was directly in the crosshairs of the Lord for their past behavior as well as their behavior at the time Ezekiel was writing.

In fact, after the Babylonians destroyed the city of Jerusalem, certain Edomites invaded the land—a land that NEVER was to belong to them. Yet they refused to accept that fact.

Edomite invasions of Israel followed the Babylonian decimation of Judah which also made Edom a major topic of interest. Historically, the Edomites were Israel’s most bitter enemy and being an enemy of Israel meant being an enemy of the Lord. So, we should assume that this section is mainly directed at this ungodly nation.

Edom’s Judgment Illustrates What Will Happen To Other Nations

The judgment pronounced upon Edom not only had a fulfillment in history but it can also be viewed as prophetically speaking of other judgments still to come. In 1923, A.C. Gaebelein noted the following.

This is another judgment message which is closely related to the coming restoration of Israel. When the Lord is merciful to His people and bestows upon them the promised blessings He will also deal with their enemies in judgment. Edom was the most bitter enemy of Israel, their blood-relation. The judgment threatened was executed upon Edom; but it had a prophetic meaning which is in store for the enemies of God’s people when the times of the Gentiles end and God arises in behalf of His suffering and persecuted people (Gaebelein p. 231).

Therefore, the judgment upon Edom can also be seen as illustrative of a coming judgment against all the enemies of Israel in the “last days.”

Edomites Were Their Relatives

We must remember that the Israelites and Edomites were each descendants of Abraham. The nation of Israel were the descendants of Jacob while Edom descended from his older brother Esau.

The Lord had instructed Israel not to forget their relationship to Esau’s descendants. In fact, Israel was commanded not to fight with them on their way to the Promised Land:

You must not hate an Edomite, for he is your relative; you must not hate an Egyptian, for you lived as a foreigner in his land. (Deuteronomy 23:7 NET).

Note the words of Moses to the Edomites as Israel was on its way to the Promised Land:

Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom, “This is what your brother Israel says, ‘You know all the hardships that have overtaken us. Our fathers went down to Egypt, and we lived in Egypt many years, but the Egyptians treated us and our fathers badly. When we cried out to the Lord, he heard our plea, and sent an angel, and brought us out of Egypt. Now look, we are in Kadesh, a city on the border of your territory. Please let us travel through your land. We won’t travel through any field or vineyard, or drink any well water. We will travel the King’s Highway; we won’t turn to the right or the left until we have traveled through your territory (Numbers 20:14-17 CSB).

The Edomites rejected these generous words from Israel and would not let them pass through their land. This was one of many occasions when they persecuted their blood relatives. Indeed, on more than one occasion, the Edomites attacked their brothers from the “high places.”

Therefore, if God is going to give Israel her land in the future, as He promised in Ezekiel chapter 34, He will have to deal with Edom and all other nations that opposed Israel’s possession of it.

In sum, this particular section assured the readers, whether ancient and modern, that the Lord would deal with those opponents of Israel who are occupying her land. In fact, the Lord predicted the destruction of Israel’s greatest antagonist, Edom, which is pictured as a representative of all such people groups.

The destruction of Edom would signal the beginning of God’s punishment upon the whole earth based on that nation’s treatment of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob:

The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:1-3 NIV).

Some Lessons To Be Learned

William Kelly wrote the following in 1885 as to why this particular chapter is placed here:

The denunciation is all the more solemn as standing out in contrast with the immediately preceding promise of goodness and mercy to Israel. It was this very blessing by divine grace to the chosen people which from the beginning had raised the ever-growing rancour of their kinsmen who looked sullenly on their predicted blessedness from their own heights of proud self-confidence. Soon were they to prove what it is to have Jehovah against one, yea, His hand stretched out to render desolate and waste. And so, the issue declared; for the word and the hand of Jehovah were shortly after manifest in the desolation of their cities and themselves (William Kelly, Ezekiel, 1885)

Indeed, this why we later read:

“I have loved you,” says the Lord. “But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’ “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals (Malachi 1:2-3 NIV).

And Paul citing this passage said:

Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated” (Romans 9:13 NET).

Esau and his descendants were NOT EVER interested in spiritual things.

Lessons For Us

There is also a lesson in this for those living in modern times. Kelly continued:

Yet I may add, for the warning of any careless soul who may glance over these pages, that awful as it was thus to know that He who had so spoken and wrought is Jehovah, displayed in the chastening of Israel and the judgment of the heathen, incomparably more so must be His dealing with every soul in Christendom who trifles with the name and word of the Lord now (Kelly)

Again, we find the practical application of these long-ago prophecies of Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 35:1-2

The word of the Lord came to me: Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir; prophesy against it (NIV)

The Lord directed Ezekiel to prophesy about Mount Seir—Edom, (Genesis 32:3; 36:8), to “set your face against” it. The first use of the expression “set your face against” in this book occurs in a prophecy against the mountains of Israel (6:2). Now the prophet is told to direct his prophecy against Israel’s long time enemy, Edom.

Why did God refer to Edom as “Mount Seir” when in the oracle against Edom, in 25:12-14, He simply called it “Edom?” Apparently, He did so to highlight the contrasts between the mountains of Edom and the mountains of Israel, which He contrasted in chapter 35 and 36:1-15 (see 36:1).

Two oracles against Edom in one book also double the certainty of fulfillment (Genesis 41:32).

Ezekiel 35:3-4

Say to it, “This is what the sovereign LORD says: Look, I am against you, Mount Seir; I will stretch out my hand against you and turn you into a desolate ruin. I will lay waste your cities; and you will become desolate. Then you will know that I am the LORD! (NET).

The Lord announced that He was opposed to Mount Seir (see 36:9), would stretch out His hand in judgment against it (see 6:14), and would turn it into a desolate waste. He would destroy its cities (see 36:10), and the Edomites would learn that He is God.

Ezekiel 35:5

You have shown unrelenting hostility and poured the people of Israel onto the blades of a sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of their final punishment (NET)

He would do this because the Edomites had been enemies of the Israelites throughout their history (see 25:12; Genesis 12:3). Furthermore, they had not helped their brother Israelites in the time of their calamity, the time when God was punishing Israel, but had turned them over to their enemy—the Babylonians (see 2 Chronicles 20:10; Psalm 137:7; Lamentations 4:21-22).

Ezekiel 35:6

Therefore, as surely as I live, declares the sovereign LORD, I will subject you to bloodshed, and bloodshed will pursue you. Since you did not hate bloodshed, bloodshed will pursue you (NET).

For this reason, the sovereign Lord swore that He would turn the Edomites over to others who would shed their blood. Since they had not tried to prevent bloodshed in Israel, they would experience bloodshed in Edom.

There are four occurrences of the Hebrew word for blood (*dam*) in this verse; it is a play on words for the name Edom (which means red). The bloody Edomites would pay with their own blood.

Ezekiel 35:7

I will turn Mount Seir into a desolate ruin; I will cut off from it the one who passes through or returns (NET).

God would make Mount Seir a desolate waste. In fact, it would be so terribly desolated that few people would visit it.

Ezekiel 35:8

I will fill its mountains with its dead; on your hills and in your valleys and in all your ravines, those killed by the sword will fall (NET).

In the Ancient Near East, the height of indignity was not to receive a proper burial. Note that the Edomites would fall slain in all parts of their land (see 6:3, 7).

Ezekiel 35:9

I will turn you into a perpetual desolation, and your cities will not be inhabited. Then you will know that I am the LORD (NET).

Edom would never recover from this judgment, and their cities would remain uninhabited. Again, we note the specific prediction directed against them.

This would be a much harsher destiny than what the Lord inflicted on either Egypt (Ezekiel 29:14) or Ammon (see Jeremiah 49:6).

This reminds us of the words of Jesus to the cities around the Sea of Galilee that rejected Him as the Messiah:

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you! And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? No, you will be thrown down to Hades! For if the miracles done among you had been done in Sodom, it would have continued to this day. But I tell you, it will be more bearable for the region of Sodom on the day of judgment than for you! (Mathew 11:21-24 NET).

Therefore, the Edomites, like these cities in Jesus' day, would know that the Lord is the only true God.

The writer to the Hebrews aptly summed up the situation:

It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31 NET).

Ezekiel 35:10

You said, These two nations, these two lands will be mine, and we will possess them—although the LORD was there (NET).

The Lord gave three more reasons for Edom's judgment (see verse 5). The Edomites had wanted to take over the lands of both Israel and Judah even though they were the lands that belong to the Lord (see 36:12).

Ancient Near Easterners viewed the lands of nations as the territory of the gods of those nations. Indeed, to overtake a nation was to overcome its god. Hence, in trying to take over Israel's land, Edom was attempting to discredit the Lord. Indeed, it is His land. This, in turn, involved failing to recognize and appreciate that the Lord is the only true God (verse. 13).

Ezekiel 35:11-13

Therefore as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I will treat you in accordance with the anger and jealousy you showed in your hatred of them and I will make myself known among them when I judge you. Then you will know that I the Lord have heard all the contemptible things you have said against the mountains of Israel. You said, “They have been laid waste and have been given over to us to devour.” You boasted against me and spoke against me without restraint, and I heard it (NIV).

The sovereign Lord swore again (see verse 6) that He would deal with them with the same anger, envy, and hatred that they had demonstrated toward their blood relatives (see 36:5-6). People would know that the Lord had done this when He punished the Edomites. This would teach them that the Lord had heard the hateful words that the Edomites had spoken against “the mountains of Israel” (see verses 2, 3, 7, 15; 36:1, 4, 8).

By speaking against the chosen people, the Edomites had spoken against the Lord since He was their God, and the Lord had heard them (see 36:5; Malachi 1:1-5).

Ezekiel 35:14-15

This is what the sovereign LORD says: While the whole earth rejoices, I will turn you into a desolation. As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so will I deal with you— you will be desolate, Mount Seir, and all of Edom—all of it! Then they will know that I am the LORD (NET).

The Lord would cause all the earth to rejoice when He made Edom a laughingstock in the world, just as they had rejoiced when Israel became desolate (see 36:5).

Mount Seir and all of Edom would become absolutely desolate (see 36:10). It would not exist when the Lord restored His people to their land. Then the Edomites would learn that the Lord is God.

The prophet Jeremiah predicted that Bozrah, the capital of Edom, would be a pile of ruins:

For I solemnly swear, says the LORD, “that Bozrah will become a pile of ruins. It will become an object of horror and ridicule, an example to be used in curses. All the towns around it will lie in ruins forever” (Jeremiah 49:13 NET).

The prophet Obadiah also predicted their ultimate destruction:

The descendants of Jacob will be a fire, and the descendants of Joseph a flame. The descendants of Esau will be like stubble. They will burn them up and devour them. There will not be a single survivor of the descendants of Esau! Indeed, the LORD has spoken it (Obadiah 1:18 NET).

Isaiah the prophet joined in the condemnation:

They will swoop down on the Philistine hills to the west; together they will loot the people of the east. They will take over Edom and Moab, and the Ammonites will be their subjects (Isaiah 11:14 NET).

Therefore, from four of God’s prophets, we find that the doom of Edom was certain.

The prediction has been literally fulfilled. Edom was first subjugated by Babylon, then Medo-Persia, and then in 126 B.C. by John Hyrcanus the Hasmonean. There is no trace of the Edomites in the present day, although their desolate cities can still be identified, as predicted by Obadiah (verse 18), Jeremiah (49:13), as well as here in Ezekiel.

So we should note another “literal fulfillment” of the predictions made in Scripture.

The Establishment Of Israel In The Land (Ezekiel 36:1-15)

This part of the prophecy of the preparation of the Promised Land sets forth what God will do for Israel. The chapter division here is unfortunate. Ezekiel 35:1-36:15 should actually be one chapter.

Many Important Themes Are In This Chapter

There are many important themes found in this chapter of Ezekiel. They include the following.

Cursing Turns Into Blessing

This chapter contains the opposite of the curses that Israel was warned of in chapter six, and it contrasts Israel’s glorious destiny with the terrible destiny of Edom in chapter 35. It’s now Israel’s turn to be blessed.

Before Restoration There Is Regeneration

This chapter tells us that regeneration comes before restoration.

Jesus And Nicodemus’ Discussion May Have Had This Chapter In Mind

Ezekiel 36 may have been the background of Jesus’ discussion with Nicodemus about being “born again” and “born of water.”

God’s Plan Of Salvation

This chapter contains the most all-inclusive announcement of the plan of redemption to be found in Ezekiel. It lists all the factors that comprise the Lord’s plan of salvation. In addition, Ezekiel 36 parallels the New Covenant that God had promised to Israel and Judah in Jeremiah 31. This covenant includes, at least, three specific elements:

- (a) Restoration to the Promised Land (Ezekiel 36:24; Jeremiah 31:27-29)
- (b) Forgiveness of sin (Ezekiel 36:25; Jeremiah 31:34), and
- (c) The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit of God (Ezekiel 36:26-27; Jeremiah 31:33).

It Is The Acid Test For Interpreters

Charles Feinberg explains the importance of this particular chapter in the prophecies of Ezekiel:

This chapter constitutes the acid test for those who would explain prophecy in any other way than literally. It must be admitted, even grudgingly, that the chapter is speaking of a literal Israel, a literal land, and a literal regeneration experience. Those who suggest the passage may be expounded in a typical or figurative fashion do not make a convincing case; first, they give no valid reason for departing from the literal, commonsense interpretation, and second, in their comments they are forced to treat the promises as literal ones (Feinberg, p. 205).

Therefore, this chapter constitutes God’s literal plan for the future.

The Future Of Israel

It has been observed that the future of the nation of Israel in chapters 36 and 37 can be summarized in four words: Restoration, Regeneration, Resurrection, and Reunion.

Douglas Stuart puts this chapter into proper perspective:

Now it's Israel's turn. The story of Edom has been told. What about those whose troubles the Edomites had been gloating over? What about that poor little southern . . . nation recently overrun by the Babylonians whose cities were in ruins and whose temple razed to bedrock? What about those tens of thousands of people exiled great distances from their previous homes, having to face an uncertain and difficult future trying to stay alive as impoverished strangers in a hostile foreign land? (Stuart p. 331).

Ezekiel 36:1

As for you, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel, and say: O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the LORD! (NET).

Note that the Lord now commands Ezekiel to prophesy *to* the mountains of Israel. This is in contrast to his prophecy *against* Mount Seir in the last chapter.

Speaking To Inanimate Objects

Douglas Stuart explains why Ezekiel addressed “the mountains:”

Verse 1 is standard in form for a prophecy to or against something or someone and is unusual only in the sense that it seems to our Western ears unusual for inanimate objects to be addressed directly. It is a well-known biblical phenomenon, however, (cf. Psalm 24:7,9; 87:3,7). (Stuart p. 332)

Mountains, therefore, represent the land and the people.

The Lord Had Prophesied Against Them

Previously the Lord prophesied “against” the mountains of Israel. The Lord had said:

Son of man, turn toward the mountains of Israel and prophesy against them: Say, Mountains of Israel, Hear the word of the sovereign LORD! This is what the sovereign LORD says to the mountains and the hills, to the ravines and the valleys: I am bringing a sword against you, and I will destroy your high places (Ezekiel 6:2-3 NET).

Now it is time for the judgment of the nations. The Lord had warned that those who cursed Abraham's descendants would be cursed:

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (Genesis 12:3 NIV).

The fulfillment of this covenant with Abraham is now taking place.

Ezekiel 36:2

This is what the sovereign LORD says: The enemy has spoken against you, saying “Aha!” and, “The ancient heights have become our property!” (NET).

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

Ezekiel had earlier written about how the high places had been lost to the people of Israel:

So I said to them, What is this high place you go to? (So it is called “High Place” to this day.) (Ezekiel 20:29 NET).

The Hebrew word that is usually translated “high places,” the places where pagan altars stood in Israel, more generally, and here, refers to the mountains themselves.

When God’s judgment came upon His people, Israel’s enemy, Edom, had spoken against the nation cursed her, and rejoiced that the everlasting heights—the mountains of the land—had come into their possession.

Now we are going to discover that the possession of these mountains will return to Israel.

Ezekiel 36:3

So prophesy and say: "This is what the sovereign LORD says: Surely because they have made you desolate and crushed you from all directions, so that you have become the property of the rest of the nations, and have become the subject of gossip and slander among the people (NET).

At this point, Israel was the possession of the nations of the world and the subject of their ridicule.

The rest, of the nations, consists of those not conquered by the Babylonians—Ammonites, Moabites and Philistines. Israel had become the subject of these “idle talkers,” these “slanderers.”

This had been predicted by the Lord.

The Holy Land Covenant: Deuteronomy 28-33

Before the nation entered the Promised Land the Lord gave to them what is known as the Holy Land Covenant (Deuteronomy 28-33). This consisted of blessings for obedience as well as cursings for disobedient.

For example, we read the following warning to the people if they disobeyed the Lord:

You will become an occasion of horror, a proverb, and an object of ridicule to all the peoples to whom the LORD will drive you (Deuteronomy 28:37 NET).

The prophet Jeremiah wrote:

I will bring such disaster on them that all the kingdoms of the earth will be horrified. I will make them an object of reproach, a proverbial example of disaster. I will make them an object of ridicule, an example to be used in curses. That is how they will be remembered wherever I banish them (Jeremiah 24:9 NET).

The nations talked both publicly and privately about her fate. In other words, they were humiliated in the sight of the world; just as the Lord had warned.

Again, we have predictions literally fulfilled that the Lord had previously made. We note the following:

It was not just the fear for their land that gnawed away at the exiles’ morale. There was also the shattering blow to their national pride. What possible status among the nations could be held by a decimated remnant of landless refugees? Apart from the sting of military defeat, there was a taunt of landlessness.

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

In the ancient world, at much as today, stateless peoples count for little in the corridors of international power or prestige. For the people of Judah it was a terrible collapse of national self-respect. The once great empire of Solomon, courted by the king of Tyre and the Queen of Sheba, was now reduced to this uprooted fragment. Once they had stood aside the major trade routes of the ancient Near East and played a part in the international power games of the great empires of the Nile and the Euphrates:

Now they were nothing but the flotsam and jetsam of devastating wars. The earliest prophetic word of Ezekiel 5:15-17 had come true. From being the hub of the nations, they had sunk to being a horror to the nations, the target of mockery and abuse. The emotional and spiritual trauma of the experience is poignantly reflected in Lamentations and several other psalms (Wright p. 286).

Again we find that the destruction of the city and the temple, as well as the exile of its inhabitants, was devastating to the southern kingdom of Judah.

Ezekiel 36:4-5

Therefore, O mountains of Israel, hear the word of the sovereign LORD: This is what the sovereign LORD says to the mountains and hills, the ravines and valleys, and to the desolate ruins and the abandoned cities that have become prey and an object of derision to the rest of the nations round about—therefore this is what the sovereign LORD says: Surely I have spoken in the fire of my zeal against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who with great joy and utter contempt have made my land their property and prey, because of its pasture (NET).

Now the sovereign Lord had something to say to the entire land that had fallen victim to Israel's neighbor nations. Because Edom and the other nations had taken over the Lord's land, and they jubilantly had derided the people, the Lord would pronounce judgment on them in his anger:

The enemy intended to swallow the people of God, the verb literally means to pant or snuff up, a figure from the panting of wild beasts, as a wild beast ravenously smells its prey to devour it (Feinberg p. 206)

The psalmist wrote something similar:

Have mercy on me, O God, for men are attacking me! All day long hostile enemies are tormenting me. Those who anticipate my defeat attack me all day long. Indeed, many are fighting against me, O Exalted One (Psalm 56:1-2 NET).

These enemies would be never-ending in their fight against God's people.

His Land

The Promised Land, the Holy Land, was the Lord's land in the same sense that the Sabbath day was His day, and that the tithe was His possession. They represented and illustrated His ownership of all lands, all days, and all possessions. The psalmist wrote:

The LORD owns the earth and all it contains, the world and all who live in it (Psalm 24:1 NET).

Israel's enemies had dealt with the people in *their* anger and envy (35:11) but now the Lord would deal with them in *His* fierce jealousy over the welfare of His chosen people.

Ezekiel 36:6-7

Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and hills, the ravines and valleys, This is what the sovereign LORD says: Look, I have spoken in my zeal and in my anger, because you have endured the insults of the nations. So this is what the sovereign LORD says: I vow that the nations around you will endure insults as well (NET).

Ezekiel was to announce to the entire Promised Land that the Lord had spoken in His jealousy and wrath because the people had suffered the insults of the nations.

The nations round about Israel would surely have to endure the consequences of their insults against the chosen people (Genesis 12:1-3).

Verses 8-15 contain four specific promises concerning the land.

Ezekiel 36:8-9

But you, mountains of Israel, will grow your branches, and bear your fruit for my people Israel; for they will arrive soon. For indeed, I am on your side; I will turn to you, and you will be plowed and planted (NET).

First, the land would become productive because the people of Israel would come back into the land. The Lord assured the land that He was behind this return, He would bless it, and the land would become cultivated again instead of desolate and uninhabited.

Previously, the Lord had said that He was *against* Mount Seir (35:3) now He emphasizes He is *on the side* of Israel!

Ezekiel 36:10-11

I will multiply your people—the whole house of Israel, all of it. The cities will be populated and the ruins rebuilt. I will increase the number of people and animals on you; they will increase and be fruitful. I will cause you to be inhabited as in ancient times, and will do more good for you than at the beginning of your history. Then you will know that I am the LORD (NET).

Second, the Lord promised to fill all the land with the His people, to enable them to live in their cities and rebuild their places that had become ruins (see 6:3, 5-7).

In contrast to this, the Lord promised to desolate all the land of Edom (35:15) and to lay waste her cities (35:4).

The mountains of Israel would again become populated with people and animals. The Lord would bless them greater than ever before. Then His people would know that He is indeed God.

Ezekiel 36:12

I will lead people, my people Israel, across you; they will possess you and you will become their inheritance. No longer will you bereave them of their children (NET).

Third, the Lord would cause the people of Israel to take possession of these mountains as their inheritance and never leave them again (Genesis 12:7). In contrast, the Edomites had formerly determined to possess these mountains for themselves (35:10).

Ezekiel 36:13-15

This is what the sovereign LORD says: Because they are saying to you, “You are a devourer of men, and bereave your nation of children, therefore you will no longer devour people and no longer bereave your nation of children, declares the sovereign LORD. I will no longer subject you to the nations’ insults; no longer will you bear the shame of the peoples, and no longer will you bereave your nation, declares the sovereign LORD” (NET).

The nations had accused the Promised Land of devouring its inhabitants. This is similar to the message that the spies had originally brought back to the people before they entered the land of promise. We read:

Then they presented the Israelites with a discouraging report of the land they had investigated, saying, “The land that we passed through to investigate is a land that devours its inhabitants. All the people we saw there are of great stature. We even saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak came from the Nephilim), and we seemed liked grasshoppers both to ourselves and to them” (Numbers 13:32,33 NET).

But the Lord would see that the land would no longer devour its inhabitants. This devouring may have consisted of such things as wars, famines, droughts, and plagues of locusts.

Fourth, the Lord would no longer allow His people to hear insults from their neighbors, to bear their disgrace any longer. He would restore the nation to their lofty position as His Chosen People (see Deuteronomy 28:13; Zechariah 8:13, 20-23).

Each of these connections, between how the Lord would deal with Israel relative to the nations, illustrate His justice. He would deal with the enemies of His people as they had dealt with Israel, and He would bless Israel in the very ways the nations sought to humiliate Israel.

Symbolic Interpretation

We must pause here for a moment and note that there are believers who hold to a symbolic interpretation of these passages—that they are fulfilled in the church, the new Israel, and not the actual descendants of Abraham.

They argue that the church should take great comfort in the fulfillment of the certainty of its success, as well as the ultimate victory over all its foes in the world (35:1-36:15).

Response

Yet there is nothing remotely in this context that would cause one to interpret this passage any other way than in a literal manner addressed to the nation of Israel, and to be literally fulfilled by them at some future time. Charles Feinberg puts it in this manner:

Ezekiel predicted that the land to which Israel will be restored will be productive, populated and peaceful. These prophecies, especially in verses 12-15, could not have been fulfilled in the return from Babylon. The promise of productivity was addressed directly to the mountains of Israel themselves. The present great reforestation projects in the State of Israel, amazing as they are, are only harbingers of the reality to come. The conditions depicted here are clearly millennial. When Ezekiel stated that they were at hand to come, he did not mean Israel, but the blessings just promised. From Ezekiel’s viewpoint these promises were near at hand. Thus many take the primary reference to the return from Babylon. But the prediction will not be completely fulfilled until the future restoration, of which the return from Babylon was a foreshadowing (Feinberg p. 207).

Therefore, the literal fulfillment of the predictions, given to us here, awaits a time to be literally fulfilled in the future by the nation of Israel.

Restoration To The Promised Land (Ezekiel 36:16—37:14)

Having prepared the land for the people of Israel (35:1-36:15), the Lord would bring them back into it. This prophecy consists of four parts (36:16-21, 22-32, 33-38, and 37:1-14).

Part 1: The Reason For Israel's Scattering (Ezekiel 36:16-21)

Ezekiel 36:16-17

The word of the LORD came to me: Son of man, when the house of Israel was living on their own land, they defiled it by their behavior and their deeds. In my sight their behavior was like the uncleanness of a woman having her monthly period (NET).

The Lord told Ezekiel that when the Israelites had lived in the Promised Land, they had defiled it by the way they lived. They resembled a woman during her menstrual period who ceremonially defiled everything she touched (Leviticus 15:19-23; Isaiah 64:6).

It's important that we understand why the Lord used this particular illustration. It was not because a woman's menstrual cycle was in any sense sinful. In fact, many things that caused ritual uncleanness were not inherently sinful. It is crucial to understand that in the religious thinking of Israel, uncleanness was not necessarily a moral category.

We should also appreciate the fact that the chapter in Leviticus dealing with this form of ceremonial uncleanness is gender balanced. Indeed, Leviticus 15:1-18 deals with the male uncleanness as well—caused by discharges or emissions. The balance is summarized as follows:

This is the law of the one with a discharge: the one who has a seminal emission and becomes unclean by it, . . . the one with a discharge, whether male or female . . . (Leviticus 15:32-33 NET).

This needs to be emphasized in view of the common misconception that a woman's menstrual uncleanness was an example of gender bias. It was not.

In fact, it has more to do with the realm of life and death. For ancient Israel, any contact with the realm of death, through the loss of bodily life-fluids, whether it be blood or semen, or through contact with a dead body, rendered a person unfit to be in contact with those in the realm of life.

So what is the meaning here? Well, the nation had turned the Promised Land into a permanent place of death. They defiled it by means of bloodshed and idolatry. By doing so, they made it a place that was unfit for the Lord, the Living God, to dwell.

Consequently, good to His Word, the Lord brought the curses upon the people that He had previously warned against, and scattered them among the various nations (see Deuteronomy 29:22-28).

Ezekiel 36:18-19

So I poured my anger on them because of the blood they shed on the land and because of the idols with which they defiled it. I scattered them among the nations; they were dispersed throughout foreign countries. In accordance with their behavior and their deeds I judged them (NET).

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

The Lord had poured out His wrath on them because of their bloodshed and idolatry. He had punished them for their deeds by scattering them among the nations (see Deuteronomy 29:1-30:10).

Ezekiel 36:20-21

But when they arrived in the nations where they went, they profaned my holy name. It was said of them, These are the people of the LORD, yet they have departed from his land. I was concerned for my holy reputation which the house of Israel profaned among the nations where they went (NET).

Israel was guilty of two great sins.

The first of which was polluting God's land, His Holy Land (verses 16-19).

Their second sin was that of profaning the Lord's name before the Gentiles (Ezekiel 36:20-23).

This action of the Lord, in removing His people from the Promised Land, solved one problem. However, it created a new one. Indeed, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had promised to bring this people, His people, who were called by His name, into this particular land as an *everlasting possession*.

The Lord had established a three-way relationship between Himself and His people and His land. Yet now the chosen people were no longer in the Promised Land. Thus, the other nations could see that this three-way relationship had been broken.

Had the Lord broken his promise to them? Or was He not strong enough to keep His promises to His people? This was the dilemma.

The Situation Of The Nation

The situation that the chosen people faced looked bleak. Douglas Stuart writes about how other nations would view this land and their people who were now completely removed from it:

The appearances were those of Israel as a people and its former lands. Both looked to be in bad shape. Israel was scattered to the winds. Large numbers of the northern nation (Israelites) had been exiled by the Assyrians in 722 B.C., and replaced by people from other conquered territories (2 Kings 17:24-33). Large numbers of the southern nation (Judeans) had been deported at three different times 605, 598, 586 B.C.) by the Babylonians to many places including North Africa (Jer. 41:17), Eastern Iran (Neh. 1:1), and Europe (Joel 3:6). Back in Judah, the land was in ruins. The cities were burned and broken down, and the land not seized by the Edomites and others was returning to wilderness for lack of cultivation (Stuart p. 337).

Bleak indeed!

Part 2: The Method of Israel's Restoration Ezekiel (36:22-32)

The next verses in this chapter are among the most monumental in Scripture on the subject of Israel's restoration with the Lord and their national conversion.

Ezekiel 36:22-23

Therefore say to the house of Israel, This is what the sovereign LORD says: It is not for your sake that I am about to act, O house of Israel, but for the sake of my holy reputation which you profaned among the nations where you went. I will magnify my great name that has been profaned among the nations, that you

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

have profaned among them. The nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the sovereign LORD, when I magnify myself among you in their sight (NET).

Please note what the Lord says here! Ezekiel was to tell the people that it was in spite of them that God would act on their behalf—He would deliver them for the sake of *His* own reputation that they had profaned (see 20:39).

The Lord would vindicate His claim as being the only God who exists when He proved Himself in the sight of all of the nations (see Exodus 5:2; 9:16; 32:11-18; Leviticus 18:21; 20:3; 22:31-33; Numbers 14:13-19; Deuteronomy 29:1-30:10). Now we find a chronology of what He will do.

Ezekiel 36:24-25

I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries; then I will bring you to your land. I will sprinkle you with pure water and you will be clean from all your impurities. I will purify you from all your idols (NET).

There will be a worldwide regathering. The Lord promised to take the people of Israel from all the nations, to regather them, and to bring them back into their ancient homeland (11:16-17; 20:34; 34:13; 37:21).

He would then purify His people and cleanse them from all their former uncleanness (see verse 17; 11:18; Exodus 12:22; Leviticus 14:4-7; Psalm 51:7; Jeremiah 31:31-34; 1 Corinthians 6:11).

While the people who returned from the Babylonian captivity no longer practiced idolatry, the ultimate fulfillment of this prediction is still in the future.

Ezekiel 36:26

I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you. I will remove the heart of stone from your body and give you a heart of flesh (NET).

Third, He would give the people a new heart and spirit and would remove their hardness of heart and give them soft hearts. In other words, He would regenerate them (see 11:19; 18:31; 2 Corinthians 3:3-6).

Perhaps this is the passage that was in mind of the Lord Jesus when He spoke to Nicodemus about the new birth (John 3). The heart, in this context, stands for the whole person—our mind, will, as well as our emotions (see 2:4; 3:7).

Many commentators attempt to limit the fulfillment of the “new heart” and “new spirit” of 36:25-27 exclusively to Christian conversion in our present age. However, New Testament conversion is only a preview of what is to come.

Ezekiel 36:27

I will put my Spirit within you; I will take the initiative and you will obey my statutes and carefully observe my regulations (NET).

Fourth, the Lord would also put His Spirit within the people of Israel and cause them to obey His commands (see Ezekiel 11:19-20; 18:31; 37:14; 39:29; Jeremiah 31:31; Joel 2:28-29; Acts 2:17-18; Romans 7:7-8:4; 2 Corinthians 3:6-18; Hebrews 8:6-10:39).

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

This is a coming of the Holy Spirit upon the people of Israel in the future. It is not His coming upon the New Testament church on the Day of Pentecost. Then we have this great promise!

Ezekiel 36:28

Then you will live in the land I gave to your fathers; you will be my people, and I will be your God (NET).

Fifth, they would live in the Promised Land and enjoy a permanent, intimate relationship with the Lord (Jeremiah 31:33).

Ezekiel 36:29-30

I will save you from all your uncleanness. I will call for the grain and multiply it; I will not bring a famine on you. I will multiply the fruit of the trees and the produce of the fields, so that you will never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations (NET).

Sixth, He would give them abundant harvests constantly so they would never experience famine (see Ezekiel 34:29). In other words, the Lord would bless them with consistent fertility and fruitfulness.

Notice the Lord says He will “call” for the grain and multiply it. This reminds us of the first chapter of Genesis where the Bible says the Lord spoke and it was done. For example, we read:

God said, “Let there be light.” And there was light! (Genesis 1:3 NET).

It Is Not Being Fulfilled Today

Contrary to the claims of some Bible teachers, Iain Duguid correctly points out that we are not seeing the fulfillment of this in our day:

In contrast to the destruction to be poured out on Edom and thus on all that Edom represents, the land of Israel is promised unparalleled fertility. Should we see a fulfillment of this in the present agricultural development of the desert areas of Palestine? To do so is to miss the significance of the Edenic overtones of the promise. It is not merely fruitfulness that is being promised to the mountains of Israel but specifically a return to the Edenic-like conditions of the blessing that accompany the presence of the Lord in the midst of his people. What is promised is nothing short of complete fulfillment of the blessings promised to the patriarch Abraham, of a land and its people blessed by the immediate presence of the Lord (Iain Duguid p. 408).

Ezekiel 36:31-32

Then you will remember your evil behavior and your deeds which were not good; you will loathe yourselves on account of your sins and your abominable deeds. Understand that it is not for your sake I am about to act, declares the sovereign LORD. Be ashamed and embarrassed by your behavior, O house of Israel (NET).

Seventh, the people would recall their former sins and loathe themselves for it (see 6:9; 20:43).

Again, the Lord would not accomplish this regathering for the sake of His people, but for the sake of His reputation among the rest of the population of the world (see v. 22).

This context, and that of similar accounts of God’s restoration of Israel to her land, makes it clear that the return mentioned in this passage does not refer to the return to the Promised Land under Zerubbabel. The

details of Israel's reestablishment to her homeland, set forth in this passage, simply did not occur in the returns under Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Rather, it is referring to a final and complete restoration under the rule of the Messiah at the time of the end.

God's Word And Spirit Will Accomplish This Restoration

This new covenant passage, found in Ezekiel 36:22-32, is similar with the new covenant passage in Jeremiah 31:31-34. However, there is a significant difference. Jeremiah placed more emphasis on the role of God's Word in Israel's transformation whereas Ezekiel put more emphasis on the role of God's Spirit.

Thus, both His Word and His Spirit will be crucial in Israel's future restoration.

Part 3: The Results Of Israel's Return (Ezekiel 36:33-38)

Ezekiel 36:33-34

This is what the sovereign LORD says: In the day I cleanse you from all your sins, I will populate the cities and the ruins will be rebuilt. The desolate land will be plowed, instead of being desolate in the sight of everyone who passes by (NET).

Future cleansing from sin, the restoration of the Jews to the land, and restoration of the land to fruitfulness would all occur at the same time.

This shows that the Jews' present occupation of the Promised Land does not fulfill these promises. Indeed, they have not yet experienced God's cleansing for their sins, which comes with regeneration (see Romans 11:26-27).

Ezekiel 36:35-36

They will say, This desolate land has become like the garden of Eden; the ruined, desolate, and destroyed cities are now fortified and inhabited. Then the nations which remain around you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruins and replanted what was desolate. I, the LORD, have spoken— and I will do it! (NET).

People will marvel at the lushness of the formerly desolate land and at the strength of the formerly ruined cities of Israel (see Isaiah 11:6-9; 51:3; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13-15; Romans 8:19-22; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1-4, 23-27).

The other nations of the world will recognize that Israel's God, and He alone, was responsible for this amazing transformation.

Ezekiel 36:37

This is what the sovereign LORD says: I will allow the house of Israel to ask me to do this for them: I will multiply their people like sheep (NET).

The Lord now promises to respond to the prayers of the Israelites to increase their population.

For the first time in the book of Ezekiel, the Lord permits the house of Israel, the people of Israel, to ask of him what they wish. Earlier the Lord specifically said that He refused to listen to their prayers:

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

Son of man, these men have erected their idols in their hearts and placed the obstacle leading to their iniquity right before their faces. Should I really allow them to seek me? (Ezekiel 14:3 NET).

Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and tell them: "This is what the sovereign LORD says: Are you coming to seek me? As surely as I live, I will not allow you to seek me, declares the sovereign LORD." (Ezekiel 20:3 NET).

Ezekiel 36:38

Like the sheep for offerings, like the sheep of Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the ruined cities be filled with flocks of people. Then they will know that I am the LORD (NET).

The people of Israel will fill the cities like the sheep used to fill Jerusalem during the feasts when they offered large numbers of them as sacrifices to the Lord.

Summation: Ezekiel's Doctrine Of Salvation

In analyzing Ezekiel's doctrine of the salvation of Israel, we note these factors.

- (1) The dominant motive in their future redemption will be the glory of the Lord (verses 22, 32).
- (2) Israel will know ultimately that their God is the Lord of all (verse 38).
- (3) From the people, there will be a loathing of their sins (verses 31-32).
- (4) Forgiveness of their sins will indeed take place (verse 25).
- (5) The people will be regenerated (Ezekiel 11:19; 18:31; 36:26-27).
- (6) The gift of the Holy Spirit will be granted to those who believe (verse 27; 37:14).

We note that no biblical prophet, before Ezekiel, assigns the ministry of the Holy Spirit in regeneration in such a precise way as he does.

- (7) Included is obedience to God's laws (verse 27; 11:20).

By faith in Jesus Christ, Gentiles as well as Jews presently experience many of the same blessings that the Lord promised to bring to the entire nation of Israel in the future.

But this should not lead us to conclude that these promises have no future fulfillment with Israel but are merely fulfilled spiritually in the New Testament church. God added blessings to this covenant as He revealed it progressively through history. Ezekiel merely added some further revelation that Jeremiah did not give.

This Has Not Been Fulfilled Yet

It should be clear that the realization of these promises did not come to pass in the period after the return from Babylon, nor have they been fulfilled even today. Israel as a nation has not been supernaturally regathered by the Lord, has not experienced spiritual regeneration, and the Holy Land is not characterized by the supernatural productiveness described in Ezekiel 36:22-38. This still awaits to be fulfilled in the future!

The Predictions In This Chapter: False Prophecy? Symbolic?

Many Christian commentators note that this prophecy of the Jews returning to their land in peace and prosperity was *not* literally fulfilled when the exiles returned from the Babylonian captivity. However, they do NOT see a future fulfillment of this passage regarding God's ancient people, the Jews.

So how do they deal with it?

It is interesting to note the various ways it is explained. We will cite a few examples.

After acknowledging the amazing predictions found in Ezekiel Chapter 36 of a complete restoration of Israel to their land, Christopher Wright then concludes the following:

It has to be recognized, of course, that there is some distance between Ezekiel's optimistic portrayal of the restoration and the historical reality that faced the returning exiles after the decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. (just as there is with the picture painted in Is. 40-55 as well). Nevertheless, although the small post-exilic community in Jerusalem and Judah struggled, they did survive, and a restored viable community was indeed established in the land under Persian protection (Wright p. 302 note 80).

This conclusion is disconcerting to say the least. It seems a polite way of saying that the predictions of restoration, peace, protection from their enemies, etc., were not fulfilled as given, but that we should not really be concerned about it! The fact that some of the exiles came back and formed a viable community seems to be sufficient.

Was It Partially Fulfilled In The Church?

Some see it as being partially fulfilled in the church and then ultimately fulfilled in a new heaven and a new earth. Iain Duguid writes:

The multiplication of the people envisaged by Ezekiel (36:10-12) find a partial fulfillment in the adding of multitudes to the kingdom of God through the carrying out of the Great Commission to make disciples of all nations (Matthew 28:19). This is the New Testament analogue of the creation mandate given to humanity in Eden to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). Its ultimate fulfillment however still lies in the future, where the Edenic fruitfulness of the earth will be restored in the new heavens and new earth, where God's presence is in the midst of his people forever (Rev 21:1-3). (Duguid pp. 408,409).

This view finds no fulfillment whatsoever to the people to whom it was originally given—the Jews. Instead it sees it as symbolic for what the Lord will do in His church, as well as in eternity. In this viewpoint, there is no glorious future for the physical descendants of Abraham.

These types of explanations should cause us concern. Either Ezekiel's prediction was false, or the actual predictions to the physical descendants of Abraham remain to be literally and completely fulfilled in the future. There does not seem to be any meaningful middle ground.

To try to say it was somewhat accomplished, or to shift the meaning to the church, flies in the face of the clear pronouncements by God to His people. Indeed, we are told that this increase in the population in the Promised Land would also convince people that the Lord alone is God. This has NEVER happened. But we truly believe that someday it will.

Ralph Alexander gives a fitting summary of verses 33-38:

The effects of Israel's restoration will be great. The land will produce like the garden of Eden had. It will be paradise regained (cf. Isa. 51:3; Rom 8:19-22; 2 Pe 3:13; Rev 21:14,23-27). Ruined cities will be rebuilt and fortified for the many inhabitants (vv.33-35). The people of Israel will so increase in number that they will constitute a large flock for the Shepherd Messiah. They will be numerous, like the flocks kept for the many offerings in Jerusalem during Israel's appointed feasts (vv. 37-38).

The most important consequence of Israel's restoration will be the spread of the knowledge of the Lord throughout the nations. The nations will unequivocally know that Israel's God has accomplished this great restoration. They will know that the Lord is not a weak god but the only God, who does exactly what he says (v.36). Israel will humbly acknowledge that the one who restored her is the Lord her God (v. 38). (Alexander p. 846).

The Predictions Of Commentators

Interestingly, those ancient commentators who took the Bible prophecy literally predicted the day that the land of Canaan, the Promised Land, would be restored. The 19th century German writer Karl Auberlin, wrote:

The doctrine of the glorious restoration of Israel to Canaan, after severe chastisement and humiliation, is so essential and fundamental a thought of all prophecy, that the difficulty is not so much to find passages to support it, as to make a selection from them. By way of example, let us notice Isaiah 2:2-4; Isaiah 4:2-6; Isaiah 9:1-6, Isaiah 9:11 and Isaiah 9:12; more especially Isaiah 11:11., 24ff., 60ff.; Jer 30-33; Ezekiel 34:23-31, 36-37; Hosea 2:16 -25; Hosea 3:4-5; Hosea 11:8-11; Hosea 14:2.; Joel 3:1-5; 4:16-21; Amos 9:8-15; Obadiah 1:17; Micah 2:12-13; Micah 4:1-13; Micah 5:1-15; Micah 7:11-20); Zephaniah 3:14-20; Zechariah 2:4., Zechariah 8:7., Zechariah 9:9., Zechariah 10:8-12; 12:2-13:6; Zechariah 14:8. (Karl August Auberlin, *der Prophet Daniel*, ed. 2, 1856, pp. 400f.)

While this restoration has not happened yet, the fact that Israel is back in the land after 1,900 years of exile should make it clear that it will indeed happen. Why? Because the Lord said so!

Thus, we believe that the final stage of the fulfillment of these predictions is still ahead of us.

Spiritual Conversion, Spiritual Life

Charles Feinberg reminds us of what this chapter has to say about Ezekiel's emphasis on true conversion:

Those interpreters who accuse Ezekiel of being ritualistic, formal, legalistic, external, etc. owe him a genuine apology on the basis of this chapter alone. Ezekiel has shown himself to be not one whit behind the most emphatic of the prophets in the matters of spiritual conversion and spiritual life. The doctrines of Ezekiel are, indeed, those of Paul as well: forgiveness (v.25), regeneration (v.26), the indwelling and ruling Spirit of God (v.27), the spontaneous keeping of God's law (v. 27; Rom 8:4): the inseparable connection of Israel's history with God's self-revelation to the nations (vv. 33-36, Rom. 11); and the conversion of the nation Israel (vv. 24-31; Rom 11:25-27). (Feinberg p. 211).

In that light, we should take seriously the words commentator Charles Feinberg penned as he concluded his commentary on this chapter:

The words of this chapter should fill us with joy. Is there not something the Lord wants you to do to work toward the day of Israel's deliverance and glory? (Feinberg, p. 211).

Indeed!

A Vision Israel's Restoration (Ezekiel 37:1-14)

This well-known vision of the valley of dry bones pictures the manner in which the Lord would restore His people. This may be the best-known section of the Book of Ezekiel.

The Passage Is Often Misinterpreted

Few other passages have suffered more from the extremes of interpreters who see either too much, or too little, in both meaning and application of the figures, symbols, and types.

This Involves The Promised Land

The New Covenant involves a new heart and a new spirit, to be sure, but it is deeply rooted in history and in the Promised Land. The promises to Abraham was unconditional and included in its benefits a geographical inheritance—indeed, not just any territory but specifically the land of Canaan (Genesis 12:1, 7; 13:15-17; 15:18-19; 17:8). It is that land that is in view throughout Ezekiel's historical and "last days" perspective. Indeed, unless that land is the focus of God's covenant fulfillment, the ancient promises lose their intended significance.

Overview Of Ezekiel Chapter 37

Ralph Alexander explains what this chapter contains and the literary form in which it has been written:

Chapter 37 begins without any transition, revealing an apocalyptic vision that concludes Ezekiel's message on Israel's future restoration. This vision pictures the manner in which the Lord will restore the chosen people.

Apocalyptic literature is not familiar to most people. In Ezekiel's day the exiles would have been acquainted with the Mesopotamian dream visions and their literary form. It seems that the Lord adopts this specific type of literature of the seventh and sixth centuries BC in order to develop a new type of biblical literature known as apocalyptic. . . . This literature is a symbolic visionary-prophetic type of literature consisting of visions whose events are recorded exactly as they were seen by the author and are explained through a divine interpreter. . . .

Apocalyptic literature has a simple twofold form: (1) the setting of the vision, in which the recipient and the geographical location are identified, and (2) the vision itself, with its divine interpretation (Alexander pp. 846, 847).

The content primary deals with events that will take place in the "last days."

The Condition Of The People

Interestingly, we find that this type of biblical literature was written during difficult times for its recipients. Indeed, they were suffering the most oppressive of conditions. All of these elements are found in this passage. Those Judeans in exile needed to have hope for their future. This vision gave them that hope!

This section also provides the concluding illustration of the oracle of restoration which began at 36:16.

Ezekiel 37:1

The hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and placed me in the midst of the valley, and it was full of bones (NET).

The Lord lifted Ezekiel up by His Holy Spirit and transported him in a vision to the middle of a valley full of dry bones (see Ezekiel 1:3; 8:1; Deuteronomy 28:25-26).

This may have been the same valley, or plain, Hebrew *Big'a*, in which Ezekiel saw his vision of God's glory that is mentioned in chapter 1.

Ezekiel Recounts What He Sees And Does (Ezekiel 37:2-10)

Ezekiel will now relate to us what took place.

Ezekiel 37:2

He made me walk all around among them. I realized there were a great many bones in the valley and they were very dry (NET).

In this vision, the prophet walked around among the many very dry bones that littered this valley.

Ezekiel 37:3

He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said to him, "Sovereign Lord, you know" (NET).

The Lord asked Ezekiel if the bones could live again. The prophet replied that only the Lord knew.

This reminds us of an episode in the Book of Revelation:

Then one of the elders asked me, "These dressed in long white robes—who are they and where have they come from?" So I said to him, "My lord, you know the answer." Then he said to me, "These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb!" (Revelation 7:14 NET).

Ezekiel 37:4

Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and tell them: 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD (NET).

The Lord also instructed Ezekiel to prophesy over the dry bones and to tell them to hear His word.

Ezekiel 37:5-6

This is what the sovereign LORD says to these bones: Look, I am about to infuse breath into you and you will live. I will put tendons on you and muscles over you and will cover you with skin; I will put breath in you and you will live. Then you will know that I am the LORD (NET).

The Lord told the bones that He would cause breath—the Hebrew word *ruah*, which can mean wind or spirit—to enter them and they would come back to life (Hosea 6:2). The various occurrences of the Hebrew word *ruah* in this account sometimes mean breath (verses. 5, 6, 8, 9, 10) or wind (v. 9) or spirit, or Holy Spirit (verses 1, 14). Context determines the meaning. The Lord would also put sinews on the bones, make the flesh grow back on them, cover them with skin, and then put breath in them. They would come back to life and know that He is indeed the Lord.

Ezekiel 37:7-8

So I prophesied as I was commanded. There was a sound when I prophesied—I heard a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to bone. As I watched, I saw tendons on them, then muscles appeared, and skin covered over them from above, but there was no breath in them (NET).

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

Ezekiel spoke to the bones as the Lord had commanded him, and as he did, he heard a rattling noise as the bones began to come together. The prophet saw sinew, flesh, and skin come back on them, but there was no breath in them—they were not yet alive.

Ezekiel 37:9

He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, – prophesy, son of man– and say to the breath: ‘This is what the sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these corpses so that they may live’” (NET).

The Lord then told Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath and to command it in the name of the Lord to come from the four winds—every direction—and give life to the bones (see Isaiah 43:5-6; Jeremiah 31:8).

Ezekiel 37:10

So I prophesied as I was commanded, and the breath came into them; they lived and stood on their feet, an extremely great army (NET).

Ezekiel followed the Lord’s instructions, and breath came into the corpses (see Genesis 2:7; Romans 8:1-17). They came to life, stood up, and formed a very large group of people, as large as an army.

What is the significance of the two stages that we find in verses 4-8 and 9-10?

The recovery of the bones to form bodies speaks of the restoration of the nation, while the breath entering these restored bodies speaks of their spiritual renewal, their spiritual life. In other words, the restoration and spiritual life will take place in two stages. This is important to understand: This imitates the sequence of the restorative events in ch. 36 (cf. John 3:1-8) (Alexander p. 848)

Now the Lord will give us the explanation.

Ezekiel 37:11

Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are all the house of Israel. Look, they are saying, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope has perished; we are cut off’” (NET).

The Lord explained to Ezekiel that the bones represented the whole house of Israel (see Ezekiel 36:10). The people of Israel were saying that they were like dry bones—they had been dead for a very long time spiritually as well as physically.

They had no hope of life in the future—they had lost all hope of becoming a modern state again or of seeing God’s promises to them fulfilled literally. The Lord had cut them off completely—the bones were separated from each other, indicating that the people of Israel were scattered over all the earth.

Ezekiel 37:12-13

Therefore prophesy, and tell them, “This is what the sovereign LORD says: Look, I am about to open your graves and will raise you from your graves, my people. I will bring you to the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and raise you from your graves, my people” (NET).

Consequently, Ezekiel was to prophesy to them that the sovereign Lord would open their graves, cause them to come up out of them, and bring the people back into the Promised Land. Then they would know that He is God.

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

It is important for us to realize that this chapter then does not deal with the doctrine of the personal bodily resurrection but with a national resurrection of the people to their land.

Ezekiel 37:14

I will place my breath in you and you will live; I will give you rest in your own land. Then you will know that I am the LORD—I have spoken and I will act, declares the LORD (NET).

He promised again to put His Spirit within them, bring them back to life, and place them in their land (see verses 9-10, 15-28; 36:22-32). This would teach them that He is indeed the Lord.

Notice that what God promised was both a spiritual and a physical restoration of the Israelites, and the “end times” are in view. This gathering seems to be the one the Lord Jesus made reference to.

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other (Matthew 24:30-31 NET).

So this is not a vision of the physical resurrection of all Israelites sometime in the future, nor is it a vision of the spiritual salvation of Jews and Gentiles in the future.

Old Testament passages teaching the resurrection of human beings include 1 Kings 17; 2 Kings 4:13-37; 13:21; Isaiah 25:8; 26:19; Daniel 12:2; and Hosea 13:14.

Ralph Alexander writes:

This could genuinely be termed a ‘rebirth’ of the nation (see Romans 11:26-27). Just as the necessary elements of a nation were essential to the initial formation of Israel in Genesis through Joshua—a people, a government, and a land—so God would provide all three essentials once again in this rebirth of Israel in the future.

The people of that day are brought together through restoration in 36:16-37:28. The land is provided in the prophecy of 35:1-36:15. The government of renewed Israel would be given in Ezekiel's apocalyptic vision revealed in chapters 40-48. When Israel is restored and becomes a nation once again, then the people will definitely know that it has been done by the Lord, who alone is their God (Alexander p. 849).

Others do not see it this way. Douglas Stuart comments:

Israel did return to the promised land and reinhabit it beginning in 538 B.C—never again as an independent nation and never with the level of the blessings predicted by Ezekiel, because those predicted blessings, including resurrection, were meant to stand for something much greater than the recreation of one of the world's smaller nations. But the end of the exile and the beginning of an orthodox community of faith signaled by the dawn of the new age, whose brightness could be seen only when Christ arrived, and whose fullness is yet to come (Stuart p. 345)

Reunification In The Promised Land 37:15-28

Ezekiel 37:15-17

The word of the LORD came to me: As for you, son of man, take one branch, and write on it, ‘For Judah, and for the Israelites associated with him.’ Then take another branch and write on it, ‘For Joseph, the

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

branch of Ephraim and all the house of Israel associated with him.’ Join them as one stick; they will be as one in your hand (NET).

The Lord also commanded Ezekiel to take two sticks or tablets (see Zechariah 11:7-14).

He was to write on one of them “For Judah and for the sons of Israel, Judah’s companions.” He was to write on the other stick “For Joseph and for the sons of Ephraim, Joseph’s companions.”

One stick represented the Jews of the Southern Kingdom of Judah and the other the Israelites of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Ezekiel was then to join the two sticks together in his hand end to end so they appeared to be one stick.

Mormonism teaches that the two sticks represent the Bible (the stick of Judah) and the Book of Mormon (the stick of Joseph), but the rest of the passage refutes this interpretation.

Ezekiel 37:18-19

When your people say to you, ‘Will you not tell us what these things mean?’ tell them, ‘This is what the sovereign LORD says: Look, I am about to take the branch of Joseph which is in the hand of Ephraim and the tribes of Israel associated with him, and I will place them on the stick of Judah, and make them into one stick—they will be one in my hand (NET).

When Ezekiel’s audience asked him what his symbolic act represented (see 4:1; 5:1; 12:9; 17:12; 20:49; 24:19), he was to tell them that the Lord said He would combine the two parts of Israel into one whole nation (see Isaiah 11:12-13; Jeremiah 3:18; Hosea 1:11).

This promise refutes the teaching of British Israelism and other groups who hold that the 10 northern tribes were lost and later became some other national entity (see Isaiah 43:5-7; 49:5-6; Jeremiah 3:12-15).

We know comparatively little about the history of the exiled northerners, but there is no evidence of any return. There was Jewish awareness of northern tribes in Assyria. Indeed, the apocryphal book of Tobit has such a setting.

Ezekiel 37:20-22

The sticks you write on will be in your hand in front of them. Then tell them, “This is what the sovereign LORD says: Look, I am about to take the Israelites from among the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from round about and bring them to their land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel, and one king will rule over them all. They will never again be two nations and never again be divided into two kingdoms (NET).

The prophet was to hold these sticks, on which he had written what the Lord told him, in the sight of the exiles.

He was to explain that the Lord promised to bring exiles from both kingdoms back into the land. He would make one united kingdom of them again and set up one king over all of them (see Genesis 12:1-3, 7; 16:10; 17:7-9; 22:17-18; 28:4, 13-15). They would no longer be two nations—a divided kingdom.

Yet there are those commentators who do not see this as ever happening. Douglas Stuart writes:

It must be said that the North and South of Israel never did reunite politically. They never again regained their independence and gradually submerged into the Persian, Greek, Seleucid, Roman, Turkish and other Empires, respectively. Therefore, if one looks for a political fulfillment for this passage it will not be found-

and certainly not in the modern Jewish state that has taken the name Israel, since in that state only 5 percent of the population is actively religious and Christ, the true Son of David, is more firmly rejected than almost anywhere else. However, if one carefully looks at the passage's language, it becomes clear that this is a prediction of the eschatological [future] new age, and the reality it envisions goes far beyond mere political considerations of this worldly sort (Stuart p. 347).

Ezekiel 37:23

They will not defile themselves with their idols, their detestable things, and all their rebellious deeds. I will save them from all their unfaithfulness by which they sinned. I will purify them; they will become my people and I will become their God (NET).

These Jews would no longer defile themselves with idols, other detestable things, or transgressions of the Lord's covenant.

The Lord promised to deliver them from the many places where they had gone and sinned and to cleanse them (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). Then they would enter into a proper relationship with Him.

Ezekiel 37:24-25

My servant David will be king over them; there will be one shepherd for all of them. They will follow my regulations and carefully observe my statutes. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, in which your fathers lived; they will live in it—they and their children and their grandchildren forever. David my servant will be prince over them forever (NET).

God's servant David would rule over the Jews and be their king (34:24; 2 Samuel 7:13, 16; Jeremiah 30:9; Hosea 3:5).

They would have only one king who would shepherd them so that they would follow the Lord faithfully (see Exodus 19:5-6; Leviticus 26:12; Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:18-19; 27:9; Jeremiah 30:22; 31:33; 32:38).

In addition, they would live in the Promised Land forever, and the Lord's servant David would be their appointed ruler forever. In view of God's promise to David in 2 Samuel 7:12-13, this must refer to the Son of David, the Messiah.

In sum, Israel will enjoy the occupation of her ancient homeland forever (verse 25a), as well as the rule of David forever (verse 25b).

Ezekiel 37:26-28

I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be a perpetual covenant with them. I will establish them, increase their numbers, and place my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then, when my sanctuary is among them forever, the nations will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel (NET).

The Lord also promised to make a covenant of peace with His people (see Ezekiel 16:62; 20:37; 34:25). He would plant them securely in the land and multiply their numbers (see Genesis 22:17-18).

The Lord would also set His sanctuary in their midst forever (see Ezekiel 20:40; 40:5-43:9; Zechariah 6:12-13).

This would not be something temporary as He had done previously with the tabernacle and the temple. The dwelling place of the Lord would be with His people forever. In doing so, He would also establish an intimate relationship with them.

The chosen people would have special purpose in the earth when the Lord would set up His sanctuary in Israel's midst forever (see Exodus 19:5-6).

The words "forever" and "everlasting" occur five times in verses 25-28. The reestablished people of Israel will live in the land forever and would have an everlasting king, an everlasting covenant, and an everlasting sanctuary. There are also 13 promises in verses 15-28 and 10 "I will" commitments.

The nations of the world would then know that He is indeed the Lord who specifically chose Israel to be His unique people. Again we emphasize, that this choice was for His glory, it was not for theirs.

This being the case, it seems clear that the Lord meant for us to understand these predictions in a literal manner.

How To Interpret This Vision

If we read the passage at face-value it seems we are forced to conclude the following:

The vision is self-evident and needs no interpretation once the bones are identified (Alexander p. 849).

Indeed, a natural reading of the text would have us understand this as a promise to the dispersed nation of Israel of their ultimate re-gathering and spiritual restoration. Yet, as we have mentioned, not all Bible commentators see it this way.

A False Prophecy?

Here again we come to a place where the literal fulfillment of this prediction has never occurred. Many non-Christian commentators realize this prophecy has not been fulfilled but it seems that "Christian" commentators try to have it both ways. Notice the words of commentator Leslie Allen:

Greenberg called the predictions regarding a restored northern kingdom "perhaps the most conspicuous example in the [Old Testament] of patently false prophecy (Allen, *Ezekiel*, Volume 2, p. 195)

Well, if it wasn't fulfilled at the return of the captives, which these Christian commentators think it should have been, isn't Greenberg right? Isn't it a false prophecy?

How does Allen reply? He writes:

Should it not rather be regarded as a truly divine wish that it became victim, in part at least, to human willfulness (cf. Luke 13:34)? The prophetic dream refused to bow totally to the intransigence of historical realities: it continued to surface in one form or another. . . The ideal, like that which Ezekiel set before his audience, presents a challenge to work toward (Allen, *Ezekiel*, Volume 2, pp. 195, 196).

So what we have here is some sort of "wish" on the part of the prophet—a wish that was never really fulfilled. And this "wish" is a challenge that we must "work toward?"

Does this square with the "words of the Lord" in this section? Obviously, it does not. HE will do it, not us. It will be a supernatural work—a work that remains to be fulfilled at some time in the future.

Another commentator explains why Judah and Israel were not united into one people, one nation, as the prophecy clearly said they would:

So the prophecy goes on to envisage a future that will not merely involve the restoration of the survivors of Judah, but will constitute a reconstruction of the original nation. In a literal sense, of course, it did not happen in this way. The dispersion of the northern tribes by the Assyrians after the destruction of Samaria in 721 was never really reversed in the same way that the exiles of Judah returned from Babylon after the edict of Cyrus in 538. But Ezekiel's point again is not so much ethnic and geographical but theological, or we might say ecclesiological. He is determined to insist that the future of God's people is a future for *one* people, One God, one people one covenant (Wright p. 313).

Again we note how the non-fulfillment of this specific prophecy is dealt with. Admitting that it wasn't fulfilled "literally" he goes on to explain that the point of Ezekiel was actually a theological fulfillment, not an ethnic or geographical.

It seems that we are left with a few simple choices.

First, the prophecy was a false prophecy—it was never fulfilled by the ones who returned from Babylon and has not been fulfilled until this day.

Our second option is to assert that it was fulfilled figuratively but not literally. The Jews did literally come back to the Promised Land but were scattered again in A.D. 70. Never have they lived peaceably like the prophecy states. Therefore, the ultimate fulfillment is seen in the church rather than in the physical descendants of Abraham.

Finally, we can believe that it will be fulfilled literally at some time in the future—with the return from Babylon as a foreshadowing of a future blessing not yet attained.

Thus, the ultimate fulfillment will be with a future generation of those from the nation of Israel—a generation which has yet to appear. This is the position that we hold concerning this matter.

**EZEKIEL 38 AND 39
(Battle Of Gog And Magog)**

Introduction

These two chapters in Ezekiel (38 and 39) constitute some of the most debated issues in the area of biblical interpretation. Therefore, we must approach them with humility and grace.

The Disputed Issues Of Ezekiel 38 and 39

There are a number of disputed issues that we will encounter in these two chapters. They include, but are not limited to, the following.

1. The Placement Of The Chapters

How these chapters fit into the prophecy of Ezekiel. Are they out of chronological order? Chapter 37 ends with the Lord predicting his sanctuary will be among them and Chapter 40-48 explains the dimensions of the sanctuary—the future temple. In between, we have these two chapters that predict this coming invasion. How do they fit into the flow of the argument of Ezekiel?

2. The Relation Of Chapter 38 To Chapter 39

Does chapter 39 merely restate what has been said in chapter 38? If it merely restates what is taking place, then we cannot divide the two chapters into two different events separated by a number of years as some commentators do.

3. Is This A Specific Prophecy Or Is It To Be Symbolically Understood?

Is this is actually a specific prophecy to be fulfilled at some time in the future, or merely to be understood symbolically without paying attention to the fulfillment of the literal details?

4. If Symbolic, What Does It Symbolize?

Symbols mean something; what are they supposed to be telling us? Is there any consensus among those who see these chapters as symbolic? Can we know?

5. Does The Church Replace Israel?

There are others who see the fulfillment in this age with the New Testament church. In other words, it has nothing to do with the physical descendants of Abraham—Israel. Is this the proper way of understanding the passage?

6. If A Literal Prediction, Then When Was It, Or Will It, Fulfilled?

If it is an actual prediction of future events, has it already been fulfilled in the past, or does it await future fulfillment?

7. Was There A Past Fulfillment?

Some argue that these events have already been fulfilled in the past. If it has been fulfilled in the past, then the question is when did it occur? Are there any legitimate candidates?

8. **If Still In The Future, Then When In God’s Timetable?**

If a future event, when will it take place with respect to God’s program for the future?

9. **If A Literal Battle, Then Who Are Nations Involved?**

Since the ancient geographical names listed in Ezekiel are no longer in use, who are the nations that will be involved in this invasion if it remains to be fulfilled?

10. **Rosh: Is It A Proper Name Or Simple Noun?**

If it is speaking of a literal battle with actual nations, then does the Hebrew term Rosh refer to a specific country or region, or is it a noun or adjective meaning “head” or “chief.”

11. **Is Russia Mentioned?**

Even if Rosh is assumed to be a proper noun, does it refer to the area that is modern-day Russia as many people suppose or could it refer to another region—Turkey.

12. **Is The United States Mentioned?**

Some see a reference to the USA in this great invasion. Is this warranted by the evidence?

13. **What About The Primitive Weapons That Are Used?**

How are we to understand the primitive weapons which the account says will be used? Are we to understand them literally? Will they actually be riding on horses and using bows and arrows?

These are some of the issues that we encounter in these two chapters. Please note that each and every one of these matters continues to be hotly debated by Bible-believers.

Ralph Alexander sums it up well:

The major interpretive difficulties in these two chapters are the identity of the characters and places and the time when these events occur (Alexander p. 852).

Different Views On How To Understand The Invasion Listed In Ezekiel 38-39

Assuming the Bible is the Word of God, and that His Words are to be taken seriously, there are at least thirteen views from Bible believers as how we are to understand these two chapters (The Battle of Gog and Magog).

They are as follows . . .

View 1: There Is No Literal Fulfillment: The Idealistic Or Symbolic Approach

To begin with, it must be decided if this particular Biblical prophecy is intended to communicate a message that would be fulfilled in history. In other words, is this prophecy meant to be taken literally as something which will actually occur in the future or is it merely symbolic of the struggle of good versus evil?

There is a school of Bible interpretation that does not believe that the Ezekiel passage (or most prophetic Scripture for that matter) was meant to give predictions that would be fulfilled in history. Among other things, this view is known as idealism.

Generally speaking, the *idealist* does not believe either that the Bible intends to give us the timing of future events or that we can determine their timing in advance. Instead, idealists see prophetic passages as a teacher of great truths about God to be applied to our present lives. Idealists believe that the Bible uses prophetic passages to present principles from a message that is universal and abiding. That message is not bound to any particular time or place even though these terms and expressions represent scenes taken from countries in the Ancient Near East.

An idealist may claim that Bible prophecy is always accurate in what it intends to reveal, but rarely does it reveal information so that we may know the future in advance. Thus, the idealist will not be able to plainly tell anyone what passages of Scripture actually mean, but this one thing they do know is that Bible prophecy should not be interpreted literally—that is the language is not to be understood in its normal sense.

In sum, this view is that Bible prophecy should not be taken literally, as has been done by many Bible-believing Christians.

Thus, the invasion listed here in Ezekiel 38-39 is only symbolic of the attempts of evil forces to overcome God's people. Nothing more. It does not describe a real battle but in the language of warfare pictures the triumph of good over evil, the forces of God over those of Satan.

Douglas Stuart is representative. He writes:

This prophecy against Gog and his assembled army is widely misinterpreted. Because the identity of Gog is debatable, and Gog comes for out of the "north," many people who know little about how apocalyptic prophecy is properly interpreted have tried to equate Gog with some modern "northern" nation. Since the Communist revolution in 1917, American antipathy for the Russians has made the Soviet Union the prime candidate for identifications with Gog, especially because the mention of "Rosh" in 39:3, since "Rosh" sound something like the first syllable of "Russia" (although not in Russian or Hebrew). The communicator must help his or her audience to get beyond this misinterpretation, and a good starting place is one of the basic rules of interpreting Bible prophecy: no modern nation is mentioned in the Bible. This does not, of course, mean that modern times and characteristics are not mentioned in the Bible, but simply that the history of any particular modern nation is not a subject that God has chosen to cause to be incorporated into His Word . . .

Again we must remember that this is apocalyptic prophecy, which by its nature is highly figurative and symbolic. Too much attention to the particular details will throw off the reader from the real point the victory of God over the forces of evil on behalf of his people . . . Thus what Ezekiel is talking about is what the Book of Revelation talks about in its depiction of the Battle of Armageddon: a figurative description of the powers of darkness influencing the world to try to crush God's people and the sure total victory of God against these forces (Stuart p. 351, 352).

Hence, the invasion listed here in Ezekiel 38-39 is only symbolic of the attempts of evil forces to overcome God's people. It means nothing more than this. It does not describe a genuine invasion but in the language of warfare, Ezekiel pictures the triumph of good over evil, the forces of God over those of Satan.

Response

A study of Scripture shows the idealist is mistaken. Indeed, God plainly tells us that Bible prophecy is given to us to let us know He exists and that He knows what will happen in the future. Listen to what the Lord has said through the prophet Isaiah:

"Present your argument," says the Lord. "Produce your evidence," says Jacob's king. "Let them produce evidence! Let them tell us what will happen! Tell us about your earlier predictive oracles, so we may examine them and see how they were fulfilled. Or decree for us some future events! Predict how future events will

turn out, so we might know you are gods. Yes, do something good or bad, so we might be frightened and in awe. Look, you are nothing, and your accomplishments are nonexistent; the one who chooses to worship you is disgusting (Isaiah 41:21-24 NET).

Elsewhere we read the Lord saying:

Remember what I accomplished in antiquity! Truly I am God, I have no peer; I am God, and there is none like me, who announces the end from the beginning and reveals beforehand what has not yet occurred, who says, 'My plan will be realized, I will accomplish what I desire,' . . .

"I announced events beforehand, I issued the decrees and made the predictions; suddenly I acted and they came to pass. I did this because I know how stubborn you are. Your neck muscles are like iron and your forehead like bronze. I announced them to you beforehand; before they happened, I predicted them for you, so you could never say, 'My image did these things, my idol, my cast image, decreed them.' You have heard; now look at all the evidence! Will you not admit that what I say is true? (Isaiah 46:9,10; 48:3-6 NET).

It seems clear that the Lord wants us to understand His predictions in a literal manner!

In addition, the amount of detail we find, and the many specific references to places and times in this prophecy argue against this view that it is only meant to be symbolic.

Indeed, why go into all this detail talking about an invasion that never will happen? Furthermore, as we examine many of these prophecies that were supposedly merely symbolic of the struggle between good and evil, we find that the specific things mentioned are being literally fulfilled.

View 2: It Is Fulfilled Symbolically In The Church

Others think there is a fulfillment to be found but *not* in the people to whom it was directly given to; the nation of Israel. Instead, it is the New Testament church that is seeing the fulfillment of the promises but *not* in a literal manner. We have already seen this in our examination of chapters 33-37.

The same holds true for these chapters. Scores of commentators reject the idea that a literal Israel will someday be involved in the literal fulfillment of these two chapters but they see some type of fulfillment in the church age.

Is Meant To Be Prophetic Of An Actual Battle For Israel

If we see this as a specific prophecy where an actual battle will take place, future to the time of Ezekiel, with the literal nation of Israel being attacked by various nations, then the question becomes one of the timing of this battle. Has it already occurred? If not, then will it occur?

Various Timing Views

The specific time of the invasion in Ezekiel 38 is difficult to determine. Indeed, there are a number of different views that interpreters put forth.

View 3: It Was Already Fulfilled In History

A few interpreters see this passage as having already been fulfilled. Sometimes the events described in Esther 9, are alleged to have occurred in about 473 B.C., in the days of Queen Esther of Persia are cited as the fulfillment.

Other times are also suggested by commentators. The point they make is that we should not be looking for any literal future fulfillment of these chapters since they have already been fulfilled in the distant past. However, when we examine the specifics of this prophecy, we discover that nothing in the past can even come close to fulfilling that which is predicted.

View 4 It Is Future To Our Day

The remaining viewpoints believe that Ezekiel is writing about an actual event that has not yet taken place but will be literally fulfilled at some time in the future. The physical descendants of Abraham, the nation of Israel, will be at the recipients of God's divine intervention.

In other words, it refers to a literal attack on the nation of Israel who are dwelling in their land—an attack where the Lord will supernaturally intervene and destroy the enemies.

The timing that these views, that it still remains to be fulfilled in the future, can be summarized as follows.

1. It Will Happen Sometime During The Church Age; Likely At The End

This position sees the invasion taking place during the church age, before the beginning of the Seventieth Week of Daniel—the final seven year period before Jesus Christ returns to the earth to set up His kingdom (see Daniel 9:24-27).

Those who hold this position often see it occurring during the very end of the church age but this is not always the case.

2. The Battle Occurs Before The Rapture Of The Church And The Great Tribulation

This view is similar to the previous one. The battle will happen during the church age but at the very extreme end—almost simultaneous with the rapture of the church and the beginning of the seventieth week of Daniel or the Great Tribulation.

Please note that the Great Tribulation is technically the “second half” of the last seven year period (Matthew 24:21) but for convenience sake we will call the entire period “the Great Tribulation,” as it is popularly called.

The sequence is usually explained in this manner: the invasion begins, the rapture of the church takes place immediately afterward and then the Great Tribulation immediately follows. If the tribulation is closely preceded by a failed regional invasion of Israel, then this would remove much of the Muslim influence currently in the world today.

Consequently it allows the power and influence to be centered in the nations of Western Europe. This defeat would also set the stage for the rebuilding of the Temple as a result of the devastation of these Islamic nations.

In sum, the final seven-year period is preceded by a failed regional attack on Israel, and the end of this period ends with all the peoples of the world attacking Israel at Armageddon.

3. It Occurs After The Rapture, Before The 70th Week Of Daniel (Great Tribulation)

This view sees the invasion taking place after the rapture of the church but before the Great Tribulation, or the Seventieth week of Daniel, begins. It is contended that there may be a large time gap between the rapture and the start of the final seven year period—the seventieth week of Daniel. This view says that that interval may be days, weeks, months or even years between the rapture and the Great Tribulation.

4. **This Takes Place Early In The Great Tribulation, After The Rapture**

Another view holds that the rapture of the church has taken place, and the Great Tribulation has begun before this battle takes place. Thus it occurs sometime during the early part of the Great Tribulation.

5. **It Occurs In The Middle, Or Near The Middle, Of The Final Seven Year Period**

This view is similar to the last one. It believes that this invasion will take place around the middle of the final seven-year period—possibly as early as a year before. This view often identifies Ezekiel 38 and 39 with an invasion of the king of the north in Daniel 11:40.

The fact that Israel is “living securely, all of them” (Ezekiel 38:8), is said to be the result of the false peace brought by the Antichrist in the first half of the Great Tribulation. Thus, for three and a half years this man of sin will encourage the Jews to return to the Holy Land, but then he will break his covenant with them and begin to attack them.

Consequently Israel will enjoy a period of peace in the Tribulation. It is during the first half of the Tribulation, toward its end, that advocates of this view place the fulfillment of this prophecy.

6. **These Chapters Take Place At The Battle Of Armageddon**

Many Bible teachers believe that the Gog and Magog event is synonymous with what the Book of Revelation calls the “Campaign of Armageddon” (Revelation 16:16). Since Armageddon is a huge invasion of Israel around the time of the Second Coming and the invasion of Israel described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 is said to be in “the latter years” (Ezekiel 38:8) and “in the last days” (Ezekiel 38:16), then they must be the same event.

7. **It Is At Two Different Times: Chapter 38 At The Middle Of Tribulation, Chapter 39 End Of Tribulation**

There are those who believe that the events of Chapter 39 do not necessarily happen immediately following chapter 38. Thus, it is contended that Ezekiel 38 takes place at the middle of the tribulation period while Ezekiel 39 occurs some three and one half years later—at the end of this period.

8. **The Conflict Occurs After The Second Coming But Before The Millennium**

There is the view that the invasion occurs after the Second Coming of Christ, during the interlude, or transitional time, between the tribulation and the start of the Millennium. According to this view, since Israel will be dwelling in peace it assumes millennial conditions.

9. **The Events Take Place At The Beginning Of The Millennium**

There is also the position that this event happens at the beginning of the Millennium when Israel is now living in peace with the coming of the Messiah.

10. **These Things Occur At The End Of Millennium**

There are those which see that battle of Ezekiel 38 and 39 will occur at the end of the millennium. Revelation 20:7–9 speaks of a conflict at the end of the Millennium when Satan is released. Revelation 20:8 speaks of Satan coming 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 strength of this view is obvious—Gog and Magog are specifically mentioned in the text.

This sums up the various timing views with respect to the predicted invasion occurring at some time in the future.

Are These Chapters Meant To Be Understood In A Literal Or Figurative Manner?

As we noted, one of the major issues with respect to interpreting these chapters has to do with whether they are meant to be understood literally or figuratively. It's important that we address this matter before we proceed further.

Specific Arguments For A Nonliteral Interpretation

Many commentators view these particular chapters as being merely symbolic of God's victory over his enemies. We can list the reasons they put forth as follows.

The Number Seven Is Repeated

There are *seven* nations mentioned which are involved in this battle, it takes seven months for the burial of the dead, and there are seven years needed for the burning of the weapons. It is contended that this repetition of the number *seven* shows that the passage is not to be understood literally since seven in the Bible is usually used as symbolic of completeness. Consequently, the fact that the number seven is repeated is seen as a clue as to how to understand and interpret these chapters—symbolically.

The Identity Of Gog

There is no known biblical or historical character known as Gog who could qualify as the leader of this coalition. Thus, Gog seems to be a symbolic or an ideal character invented by Ezekiel.

Consequently, there is no need to take the account of Gog and the various nations that follow him into battle as literally occurring—especially if there is no reason to accept Gog as a literal character.

The Nations Are Not Contiguous

The nations mentioned in these two chapters are not contiguous to Israel or even with one another. If this is a literal battle, then why don't we find nations closer to Israel, and closer to each other, being involved in this attack? Why only these specific nations? The fact that they are geographically far apart indicates the symbolic nature of the account.

These Nations Are Unlikely Partners

Not only are the nations not contiguous, their partnership is certainly unlikely. Indeed, there has never been a coalition in history which involved these particular nations. There seems to be no reason as to why these specific nations would join together in an attack against Israel.

Why So Many Nations To Attack A Small Country?

It has also been suggested that such a small nation like Israel would not be invaded by such a huge force as envisioned in these chapters. Indeed, the battle portrays many armies coming from many different directions. The large number of nations coming from all different directions seems to indicate that we are not dealing with a realistic invasion.

Is Israel Worth Invading?

In addition, why would all these nations bother to invade Israel? What is there in this small country that would be worth sending in so many troops to take a spoil? In other words, what specifically could entice them to invade this tiny nation?

The Number Of Corpses That Need To Be Buried Can't Be Literal

The seven-month burial of these bodies causes a problem. If taken literally, the number of corpses would cause an impossible problem for burial. Estimates range in the multiple millions. Seven months would not be enough time for burial of these millions of dead bodies.

There is also the problem of pestilence that would occur with all of these unburied corpses lying around for this long of a time. To many, this makes a literal interpretation out of the question.

The Scenario Does Not Fit Messianic Times

Furthermore, if this section speaks of Israel settled peaceably in the land in “Messianic times” that is, a time of universal peace, it seems inappropriate that the Lord would resort to such a drastic judgment! Indeed, wiping out all these armies, with His people back at their homeland, is inconsistent with a time of universal peace.

We Need To Understand Apocalyptic Literature

As mentioned, since these chapters are written in a literary form known as apocalyptic, we are informed that this indicates the details are not to be understood literally. Once this is appreciated then there will be no need to try to fit the details into any known historical characters or countries—it is not meant to be understood in that manner.

Israel Is No Longer In God's Program

Finally, there is also the argument that God is finished with the nation Israel. When they rejected Jesus as the Messiah at His First Coming, the Lord also rejected them. It is now the New Testament church from whom the Lord is working. Since Israel has no future in the program of God, it is not possible that these chapters refer to a literal Israel living peaceably in their literal homeland.

Summary

In sum, many Christians contend that the purpose of these chapters is NOT to give us any specifics on some supposed future battle. Instead it is to encourage believers in all ages, from ancient Israel to the present, that good will eventually overcome evil.

The Arguments For A Literal Understanding

While many good commentators believe these chapters are meant to be understood symbolically an excellent case can be made for a literal understanding. We will first answer the objections made by those who see them as something which occurs symbolically and then we will give further reasons as to why literal interpretation is the best way to deal with these chapters.

1. There Were Seven Nations Which Were Previously Judged

We should not forget that earlier in Ezekiel the Lord predicted judgment against seven nations which existed at the time of the captivity (chapters 25-32). These nations literally existed and were literally judged.

Therefore, the idea that there will be a seven nation coalition in the last days, that is ripe for judgment, is certainly consistent as to how God has literally judged in the past. Actually, the number seven, with respect to these nations, seems to be a good argument for them being literal nations since we have the previous chapters as a precedent.

2. The Identity Of Gog Is A Non-Issue

The fact that an historical Gog cannot be clearly identified certainly doesn't mean that such a personage cannot arise in the future. While his identity is unclear for the present, this does not mean that such a personage will not lead a coalition of nations against Israel in the future.

3. The Fact That The Nations Are Not Contiguous Is Irrelevant

While it might have made sense in the ancient world for specific nations to be contiguous to gather in a coalition against Israel, this is certainly not the case in the twenty-first century.

Modern technology will allow nations to align themselves with whomever and wherever they please—no matter where they are on the globe.

4. These Nations Would Unite: They Are Muslim!

The fact that all but one of the various nations listed in these chapters are now Islamic in our modern-day makes such a coalition not only likely, but actually predictable. Israel is their sworn enemy. Each of them would like to see Israel's destruction.

Therefore, such a coalition is consistent with the makeup of these nations. Indeed, we see it forming right before our very eyes.

5. The Number Of Nations Is Necessary

While Israel is small, it is certainly not defenseless. In fact, the world is very well aware of their capabilities—which include nuclear weapons. To achieve certain victory, and to accomplish what they are trying to accomplish, to take a spoil, a large number of ground troops would be necessary.

6. The Burial Of The Corpses

We should not assume that each body will be individually buried. Mass burial would certainly take place. Furthermore, the geography of the land may explain why it takes so long.

7. This May Not Be Speaking Of Messianic Times

While Israel is said to be living in peace, it does not necessarily follow that we are dealing with the times of the Messiah. Indeed, a case can be made that the setting is one that is previous to the era that the Messiah is ruling. For example, if the greater Son of David, the Lord Jesus, is ruling and reigning then why isn't He mentioned or alluded to in these chapters? Why doesn't He destroy the enemies as He does in Revelation 19 at His return?

8. Apocalyptic Style Does Not Determine Our Interpretation

There is no doubt that the form in which these chapters are written may be considered apocalyptic. Yet this should not force us to assume that they are to be understood symbolically rather than literally. The geographical places from where these armies will come from were literal places in Ezekiel's day.

In other words, they are not symbolic names. These lands were inhabited by ancient peoples. As previously mentioned, there is nothing in the passage that gives any hint that we are dealing with a symbolic event.

9. God Is NOT Through With Israel

Finally, we must insist that Scripture makes it clear that the Lord is *not* through with the nation Israel. Indeed, they have been set aside in the program of God, but only temporarily. They do indeed have a future as a distinct nation.

We can make the following observations.

The Prophetic Clock Testifies They Have A Future (Daniel 9:24-27)

A final regathering of the Jews to their ancient homeland is absolutely necessary to complete the plan of God. The 9th chapter of the Book of Daniel makes this clear. In it, the Lord gives a 490 year time period to finish His plan with Israel. It is the prophecy of the “Seventy Weeks” (or the Seventy Sevens). The Bible says:

Seventy weeks have been determined concerning your people and your holy city to put an end to rebellion, to bring sin to completion, to atone for iniquity, to bring in perpetual righteousness, to seal up the prophetic vision, and to anoint a most holy place (Daniel 9:24)

The Hebrew word translated “weeks” means “sevens.” In this context, the sevens are years. Therefore, we are dealing with a 490 year time period.

The Starting Date Predicted

The clock would start for this 490 year period when the commandment would be given to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. Daniel wrote:

So know and understand: From the issuing of the command to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until an anointed one, a prince arrives, there will be a period of seven weeks and sixty-two weeks. It will again be built, with plaza and moat, but in distressful times (Daniel 9:25 NET).

Therefore, when a command is given to restore and rebuild the destroyed city of Jerusalem the prophetic clock would start.

Divided Into Three Periods

We also note from this verse that these seventy weeks are divided into different periods. The first two periods consist of “seven weeks” (or 49 years), and “sixty-two weeks” (or 434 years) were to be accomplished until the coming of the Messiah. This would total 483 years (69x7).

The Interval

Remember that Daniel’s prophecy concerned “seventy sevens.” Sixty-nine of them were fulfilled with the coming of the Messiah. This means that one last week, or seven year period, remains to be fulfilled.

It is important to note that at that time the Messiah arrived on the scene the prophetic clock stopped. Daniel then described a time gap, an interval, before the last seven year period would begin.

He tells us that three things would happen during the interval—the Messiah will be killed, then after that the city of Jerusalem, as well as the temple will be destroyed:

Now after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one will be cut off and have nothing. As for the city and the sanctuary, the people of the coming prince will destroy them. But his end will come speedily like a flood. Until the end of the war that has been decreed there will be destruction (Daniel 9:26 NET).

We are still in that interval.

The Clock Will Restart

One last seven year period remains. Again we are told what will start the clock. It will begin when a covenant is confirmed with Daniel's people, Israel. The Bible says:

He will confirm a covenant with many for one week. But in the middle of that week he will bring sacrifices and offerings to a halt. On the wing of abominations will come one who destroys, until the decreed end is poured out on the one who destroys (Daniel 9:27).

The "he" is the final Gentile world ruler, "the prince that will come." This individual will appear on the scene shortly before the Second Coming of Christ. He is known as the "man of sin" (2 Thessalonians 2:4) "the first beast" (Revelation 13) or the Antichrist (1 John 2:18).

Therefore, just as we have had the starting point, the fulfillment of the first group of "sevens" (483 years), we are also told what will begin the last seven year period.

Some Conclusions That We Can Make

The fact that this final Antichrist will confirm a covenant with Israel, and that their sacrificial system will be operating assumes a number of things.

First, the nation of Israel will continue to exist until the time of the end, they will be in their own land at that time but they will be in unbelief of Jesus.

How do we know this? They will continue to make animal sacrifices to the Lord.

The New Testament makes it clear that no sacrifice is necessary today—Jesus Christ completed the work which the Lord had sent Him to do and then sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high:

The Son is the radiance of his glory and the representation of his essence, and he sustains all things by his powerful word, and so when he had accomplished cleansing for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3 NET).

Consequently, since there is one last seven-year period where God will deal with the nation Israel it is clear that He is not finished with them yet.

Jews, Greeks (Gentiles), And The Church

The New Testament confirms that there remained a distinction between Israel and the church *after* the death of Jesus.

The Apostle Paul made the distinction between Jews, Greeks (Gentiles), and the church of God when he wrote to the Corinthians:

Do not give offense to Jews or Greeks or to the church of God (1 Corinthians 10:32 NET)

Here a distinction is made between the Jews, the Greeks, or Gentiles, and the church. In this passage Israel and the church are distinct. In other words, the church did not inherit the promises given to Israel.

In the Book of Acts, we discover that the term translated *church* is used some 19 times while the term *Israel* is used 20 times. This is another indication that Israel and the church are distinct. There is no indication that we are to view them as the same entity. Indeed, the terms are never used interchangeably.

Much more could be added. Suffice to say the nation of Israel still has a future in the program of God which causes us to understand Ezekiel in a literal manner.

Other Points To Consider

There are other points to consider as to why these chapters should be understood as a literal prophecy.

There Was Literal Fulfillment In The Past Of Other Prophecies

The past predictions Ezekiel the “prophet” made were literally fulfilled! Since this is the case, why should we expect these not to be? In fact, it would be strange for us to assume that they would be fulfilled in any other manner since we have the precedent in previous chapters of an exact fulfillment.

There Is Nothing In These Chapters Which Demands A Symbolic Fulfillment

As we closely examine these chapters, we find nothing that causes us to interpret it figuratively. This is crucial. Usually there are obvious clues as to why any passage, or certain parts of it, is to be understood symbolically. Though these chapters do use apocalyptic language and speak of tremendous signs in the heavens this is not inconsistent of what we read elsewhere in Scripture which describes actual phenomena that occurred.

There Are Many Specific Details In These Chapters

Furthermore, there are too many details in these chapters that suggest a literal fulfillment. If symbolic, it is hard to understand why we have so many minute details. The natural way of understanding Ezekiel 38 and 39 is that of an attempted invasion of the Promised Land that will literally be thwarted by God Himself.

Symbolic Interpreters Do Not Come To The Same Conclusions As To What It Means

If this is meant to be symbolic, we must ask, “Symbolic of what?” It seems interpreters are all over the map in attempting to tell us what these chapters are symbolic of. The fact that we have so many diverse interpretations of what these chapters are supposed to mean, if not understood literally, provides further reason to reject the idea of symbolic interpretation.

In sum, we conclude that what we have in these two chapters is a prediction of a future attempted invasion of the Promised Land by various nations coming from a variety of different directions.

MAJOR ISSUE: Have These Chapters Already Been Fulfilled In History?

If we should expect a literal fulfillment of these chapters, the next question that we ask concerns possible past fulfillment. Is there any evidence that this event has already occurred?

A number of suggestions are given such as the time of Esther, the time of Ezekiel, or at the time of Alexander the Great.

Were These Chapters Fulfilled At The Time Of Esther?

There are those who believe that what was predicted in these two chapters of Ezekiel was fulfilled about 100 years later during the time of Esther. The events of Esther 9 (about 473 B.C.) are said to be what Ezekiel was speaking of in these chapters.

However, a close examination will find numerous problems with believing that the battle described in Ezekiel 38-39 has already been fulfilled through the events of Esther 9. The problems include the following.

The Enemies Died In The Persian Empire, Not Israel

The place of attack does not fit. In Esther, the Jews are attacked in cities throughout the Persian Empire. According to Esther 9:30, the attacks took place in 127 provinces in ancient Persia. The attacks were seemingly conducted by various gangs of people, not armies. Furthermore, the Jews defended themselves against these attacks (Esther 9:2). In Ezekiel the enemies die in the mountains of Israel—the Promised Land.

Jews Will Bury The Dead In Their Own Land

Ezekiel informs us that the Jews will bury the dead bodies over a period of seven months. The reason is to *cleanse* the land of Israel (39:12). But in the story of Esther, there was no need to cleanse the land of Israel because the corpses were not there!

Gog Will Be Buried In Israel

We are told in Ezekiel that Gog, the leader of the invasion, will be buried in Israel:

On that day I will assign Gog a grave in Israel. It will be the valley of those who travel east of the sea; it will block the way of the travelers. There they will bury Gog and all his horde; they will call it the valley of Hamon-Gog (Ezekiel 39:11 NET).

Again, nobody is said to have been buried in Israel in the account given in Esther.

There Was No Supernatural Deliverance As Ezekiel Describes

We do not find a supernatural deliverance by God in the way that it is clearly described in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Indeed, those who were killed were killed by the Jewish people themselves along with assistance from local officials (Esther 9:3-5). This is not what Ezekiel predicts will happen.

In fact, we are told that the invading armies are destroyed by a massive earthquake in the land of Israel. Add to this infighting among the troops, plagues, as well as fire from heaven (38:19-22).

Thus, it is the Living God who destroys these enemies in a supernatural manner.

The Invaders Came From Various Countries

In Ezekiel we read that invaders are from as far west as ancient Put (modern Libya) (Ezekiel 38:5) and as far north as Magog, the land of the Scythians. God will then send fire upon the land of Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands (39:6).

The Persian Empire did not include these areas. It only extended as far west as Cush—modern Sudan (Esther 8:9) and as far north as the bottom part of the Black and Caspian Seas.

Why Wasn't This Victory Celebrated?

There is something else. If the battle that is predicted in these two chapters of Ezekiel was literally fulfilled in the days of Esther why didn't anyone recognize it? The Jews living in Persia at that time certainly did not see it as a fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy. There is not the slightest hint that they saw this as fulfilling this prophecy.

There is still more. The events recorded in Esther 9 led to an important Jewish holiday known as Purim—a holiday that is celebrated to this very day. Among other things, this holiday celebrates Israel's enemies delivered by the mighty hand of God. Purim is celebrated by the public reading of the book of Esther.

Yet never do find the Jews reading Ezekiel 38 and 39 in connection with the observance of Purim.

Now if the events of Esther 9 were a fulfillment of these two chapters in Ezekiel we would expect some sort of reference to it. But there is none.

There Is No Tradition That Ezekiel's Prophecy Was Fulfilled

In addition, there has been no tradition among Jewish interpreters that Ezekiel 38 and 39 has found its fulfillment in these events. Instead, they have viewed the prophecy of Gog and Magog as something that will occur at the end of time—a “last days” event.

The Prophecy Will Be Fulfilled In The Last Days

The major problem with this position is that is that the prophecy will take place in the “last days.” Ezekiel wrote:

After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come to a land restored from the ravages of war, with many peoples gathered on the mountains of Israel that had long been in ruins. Its people were brought out from the peoples, and all of them will be living securely. . . You will advance against my people Israel like a cloud covering the earth. In the latter days I will bring you against my land so that the nations may acknowledge me, when before their eyes I magnify myself through you, O (Ezekiel 38:8,16 NET).

Note that verse 8 speaks of the “latter years” and verse 16 of the “latter days.”

This clue to the timing of the event seems to rule out any fulfillment in Ezekiel's day or shortly thereafter.

Therefore, the theory that it was fulfilled previously, whether in Esther's day, at Ezekiel's time, or at the time of Alexander the Great, is without merit.

Indeed it seems clear that the fulfillment of this prediction will take place “in the last days” of the nation of Israel before they experience the wonderful promises of everlasting peace and prosperity.

MAJOR ISSUE: The Placement of Chapters 38 and 39

A further matter concerns the placement of these two chapters in the Book of Ezekiel.

To begin with, we find that chapters 33-37 speak of Israel's restoration and peaceful existence in the land of promise. Fittingly, they end with the promise of God's covenant of peace as well as the promise of having a sanctuary in their midst. The Bible puts it this way:

I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be a perpetual covenant with them. I will establish them, increase their numbers, and place my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them;

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then, when my sanctuary is among them forever, the nations will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel (Ezekiel 37:26-28 NET).

We find this theme continued later in chapters 40-48 where a detailed description of this future Temple is given. Yet, in chapters 38-39, there is the depiction of this great battle of Gog and Magog.

Because the theme of restoration is interrupted in these chapters, some wonder if Ezekiel 38 and 39 may be out of place. Instead of developing the subject of restoration, peace, and the building of a sanctuary there is the prediction of the enemies of Israel attempting to come down to the promised land and plunder its goods. This seems inconsistent with this climatic theme of restoration and peace.

Indeed, chapters 25-32 dealt with the enemies of Israel. Why aren't chapters 38-39 connected with them? Why are they placed here in the midst of God's promises for Israel's glorious future?

Understanding The Chronology

The solution seems to lie in the timing of this section. It was immediately after Ezekiel received this word from God about Israel's future that news arrived of the destruction of the city and the first temple:

In the twelfth year of our exile, in the tenth month, on the fifth of the month, a refugee came to me from Jerusalem saying, "The city has been defeated!" Now the hand of the LORD had been on me the evening before the refugee reached me, but the LORD opened my mouth by the time the refugee arrived in the morning; he opened my mouth and I was no longer unable to speak (Ezekiel 33:21,22 NET).

The next chronological notice that we have in the Book of Ezekiel is fourteen years later:

In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was struck down, on this very day, the hand of the LORD was on me, and he brought me there (Ezekiel 40:1 NET).

Therefore, the placement of these two chapters seems to be based upon when Ezekiel received the message from the Lord—some fourteen years before the explanation of the future temple was given to him (chapters 40-48).

Restoration And Judgment Are Both Found In These Chapters

There is something else to consider. A careful look at chapters 33-37 will discover that the subject of God's judgment is also connected with the idea of restoration. Indeed, in these five chapters the Lord describes some of the sins of Israel that brought about the judgment upon the nation. These sins led to the destruction of the city and the temple and the exile of its inhabitants.

Furthermore, chapter 35 takes up the subject of the judgment upon another enemy of Israel—Edom. So it is incorrect to say that the judgment upon the nations was limited to chapters 25-32.

Consequently, it is incorrect to say that chapters 33-37 are only about restoration and peace—judgment is a theme which is also developed in this portion of Ezekiel.

What we have in chapters 38-39 is an attempt by a number of ungodly nations to possess the land that the Lord has promised Israel. Thus, in the midst of the promises of restoration and peace, we find a number of nations attempting to thwart God's specific promises to Israel.

Therefore, the chapters actually fit nicely into what has been written before and afterward. When these invaders are destroyed, then the Lord will set up his sanctuary in the midst of the land and peace will then reign.

MAJOR ISSUE: Are These Chapters Chronological?

Another issue that we will have to consider concerns how these chapters relate to what has been written previously and what follows. Should we assume a strict chronology?

Or should these chapters be looked at separately from the previous and following chapters? This is another of the many debatable issues that we find in these chapters.

Ralph Alexander explains:

These two chapters may be viewed as isolated from the previous messages delivered on the night prior to the arrival of the fugitive from Jerusalem to announce the city's fall (cf. 33:21-22). Others will see these two chapters as integrally related to chs. 40-48. But Ezekiel's chronological scheme argues against the latter position. He normally keeps his themes and messages within the chronological framework of what precedes, not what follows. Ezekiel 40:1 supplies a major chronological notice that separates the messages before it from those after by approximately twelve and one-half years (Alexander p. 852).

So here we have an issue. Do these chapters (37-48) lay out a chronology of the end times? Or is the fact that the prophecy listed in chapters 40-48 was not given until some 12 years later argue against this? This is one of the many issues that we will decide as we go through these chapters.

Chapter 39 And Its Relationship To Chapter 38

Another question concerns how these chapters relate to one another. Some see chapter 39 as a restatement of the events in chapter 38. Ralph Alexander writes:

One must keep in mind that 39:1-8 is essentially a restatement of 38:1-23 with some expansion. Such reiteration was common in the judgment speech literature of the sixth and fifth centuries B.C. (Alexander p. 852).

However, others see these chapters talking about two distinct battles taking place over a period of time. Harold Hohner writes:

These two chapters should be viewed as describing events that are spread over a period of time . . . Chapter 38 refers to events in the *middle* of the tribulation, and chapter 39 refers to events at the *end* of the tribulation. Rather than one battle, there will be a campaign or a series of battles lasting three and one half years (Hohner pp. 87,88).

This view sees these chapters as part of an extended campaign, not merely one battle.

Again, after going through these chapters we will weigh the evidence as to which of these views seems correct.

The Themes

As we begin to look at these particular chapters it is important that we remember the themes that come before them and after. Charles Feinberg explains:

In the last great division of Ezekiel's prophecy the themes are distinct and significant. Chapter 34 emphasized the rulers, chapter 35, the enemies, chapter 36, the nation converted, chapter 37, the nation

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

resurrected, chapters 38-39, the land, and chapters 40-48 the sanctuary. Chapters 38-39, it is generally recognized constitute one prophecy. They tell, if interpreted literally, of a coming northern confederacy of nations about the Black and Caspian seas with Persia and North Africa, who will invade the promised land after Israel's restoration to it (Feinberg, p. 218).

With this in mind it's time to consider what this particular prophecy has to tell us.

Introduction To Ezekiel 38 and 39

We now come to the final message in a series of six night oracles which were delivered by the prophet Ezekiel. As we look at them, we find that a main concern throughout each of the oracles has been the possession of the *land* of Israel.

Indeed, this series of messages was given to encourage those Babylonian exiles that the Lord would ultimately remove those who had invaded their land. In doing so, He would restore this Promised Land back to the nation to whom it was originally promised—Israel. Once there, they would be forever protected by the Lord.

The prophecy contained in these chapters may be divided into two major sections.

In the part one, Ezekiel speaks of an invasion of many nations against the Holy Land. This invasion will be led by a personage named Gog (38:1-16).

The second part of this prophecy reveals the judgment of the Lord, the God of Israel, which will come upon Gog and his allies (38:17-39:16).

Literal Interpretation When Possible

We will follow the “golden rule” of Bible interpretation set out by David Cooper:

When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense: therefore take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the context clearly indicate otherwise (Cooper, p. 4).

This will be our basic guide as we go through these chapters.

The Time Frame

One of the big questions we will need to answer is the time frame. There are those who see this taking place after the Lord has inaugurated his covenant of peace with the people.

In other words, the Messiah has already returned. Ralph Alexander explains:

The message in Ezekiel 38-39 initially describes the entire nation of Israel as peacefully dwelling securely in her land. She has entered a covenant of peace with God and is living without walls, bars, or doors (38:7). The remainder of the message describes a final attempt by foreigners to possess the land of Israel (Alexander p. 852).

Others, however, see this as occurring *before* the Messiah returns. They believe that the people are supernaturally brought back to the land but they are there in unbelief.

Harold Hohner writes:

In chapter 37 Ezekiel prophesied Israel’s restoration to her land. This is a restoration, not a physical resurrection, because the portrayal is not death but dispersion among the nations as the bones figuratively commiserate with one another regarding their dispersion (v.11). The bones are gathered with no breath in them until after they are in the land (vv.7,12,14), which implies they are gathered to their land in unbelief. This makes good sense, for Israel in her unbelief will confirm a covenant with the godless prince of the west at the beginning of the tribulation (Daniel 9:27). Such a covenant would be unlikely if they were believers who were trusting God (Hohner p. 88).

We will wait to make conclusions on this matter after we have examined these two chapters.

There Are Ten Proper Names Listed

The prophecy of the invasion of Gog from the land of Magog begins with a list of “ten” proper names in 38:1-7. They are Gog, Magog, Rosh, Meshech, Tubal, Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, and Beth-Togarmah (there are “nine” if Rosh is not considered to be a proper name).

Apart from Gog, which is the name of the leader of this coalition, these names refer to specific geographical locations. They are all listed in the table of nations in Genesis 10:2-7 (with the possible exception of Rosh). We will have more to say on that later.

Ezekiel 38:1

The word of the LORD came to me

This section begins by emphasizing the divine nature of the revelation we are about to study. God’s inspired Word came to the prophet Ezekiel. Thus, NONE of this was his idea. This is in keeping with what the Scripture says about biblical prophecy. Peter wrote:

Above all, you do well if you recognize this: No prophecy of scripture ever comes about by the prophet's own imagination, for no prophecy was ever borne of human impulse; rather, men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God (2 Peter 1:20-21 NET).

Consequently we have to read this entire section in this light . . . it is *God's truth* we are examining here!

Ezekiel 38:2

Son of man, turn toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. Prophecy against him

or Son of man, turn toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Prophecy against him

Ezekiel: Son of Man

Ezekiel is called “son of man” throughout the book. This phrase is used 93 times in this book and it always refers to the prophet. The first use is found in 2:1. It simply means “human being.”

So the question arises: why Ezekiel is so often addressed by God as “son of man” when he is about to receive divine revelation from the Lord?

One possible answer is that this phrase stresses his humanity in relationship to God. In other words, it is emphasized that *the Lord* is the One who is the Revealer of these truths while Ezekiel, as a mere human, is the recipient of the Divine message. His responsibility is to pass it on to other “mortals.”

Thus, what Ezekiel is giving to us is an “inerrant prophecy” which will be fulfilled in the future—precisely as predicted. Why? Because it’s ultimate source of this prophecy is God Himself!

set your face toward Gog

Ezekiel here is commanded to prophesy against “Gog.” Thus, this section will be directed against him—whether it is a person, title, or a representative term.

Ezekiel is told to set his face “toward” or “against” Gog. The Hebrew lexicon—dictionary—Brown Driver and Briggs (BDB) says, the word translated “toward” is a preposition that denotes “motion to or direction towards (whether physical or mental).”

BDB also tells us that when “the motion or direction implied appears from the context to be of a hostile character,” then it has a negative connotation and would be translated “against.”

Thus, Ezekiel is told to turn his face in the direction of Gog because the Lord is against him.

Later in the sentence the text says that Ezekiel was to “prophesy against him”—that is Gog. The sense of this passage is that God is initiating the attack by Gog against Israel. Furthermore, the Lord is against, or opposed, to Gog and his allies.

Was Ezekiel to look north? If so, let’s remember he is looking from Babylon. North of Babylon is Turkey, and then Russia.

Who Is Gog?

We are introduced to Gog from the land of Magog. This is one of the many debates in these two chapters—the identity of Gog.

What We Do Know About Gog

There are certain things which we do know about the word “Gog.” The name means “high, supreme, a height, or a high mountain.”

The Hebrew proper noun “Gog” occurs some 12 times in the Hebrew Old Testament. All but one use of the word occurs in Ezekiel 38 and 39 (Ezekiel 38:2, 3, 14, 16, 18; 39:1 [twice], 11 [three times], 15).

The only non-Ezekiel occurrence is in 1 Chronicles. It reads:

The descendants of Joel: His son Shemaiah, his son Gog, his son Shimei (1 Chronicles 5:4 NET).

Here is an example of Gog as a proper name. However, this particular reference does not contribute to our study since the person named here is not related to the Gog of Ezekiel’s prophecy.

The Various Options Concerning The Identity Of Gog

So, who is Gog? Bible commentators have made a number of suggestions with respect to the identity of Gog. They include such things as: the name of a specific individual, a title such as Caesar, Czar or Kaiser, a symbol of evil, the name of a country, a geographical area, or a name arbitrarily formed from the country Magog.

We can sum up the possibilities as follows.

1. It Is Symbolic Of Evil

Some commentators see the name as being merely symbolic of evil. In other words, this is not referring to any specific person, whether past or present. Instead it is used symbolically of evil. That’s it. This has been a popular way of trying to understand the meaning of Gog.

Yet the way the term is used in these two chapters strongly suggests we are dealing with more than a symbolic figure.

2. **An Arbitrary Name Formed From Magog**

The great Old Testament commentator, C.F. Keil, believed Ezekiel probably formed the name Gog out of the country Magog from where he originated. In other words, it was a made-up name to describe the leader. If this is the case, then we can know nothing of this personage.

3. **A Country**

Some see Gog as a particular country rather than a specific individual. However, this does not seem to be an option since we find Gog appearing in 1 Chronicles 5:4 as the name of a person.

4. **A Title**

Rather than being a proper name, it has been contended that Gog is a title of the leader of this confederation. This is certainly possible.

5. **A Person Of The Past Gyges (Gugu)**

Some modern scholars have identified Gog with Gyges (Gugu)—a seventh century B.C. Lydian king. Gyges is mentioned in six inscriptions of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal.

However, the setting of Ezekiel 38-39 is future, not past. Gyges reigned a century before the time of Ezekiel. Hence, he cannot be the fulfillment of this prophecy. Furthermore, Gyges never led an invasion into Israel.

Nevertheless, it is possible that Ezekiel used Gyges as an archetype, or symbol, of the great invader who would come into the Promised Land in the future.

6. **A General Name For Any Enemy Of God**

There is also the view that the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, used the term “Gog” as a general name for any enemy of the people of God. If this is true it would give further evidence that we are dealing with a specific individual.

An Actual Person Who Will Arise In The Future

Whether Gog is a specific name, a general name for an enemy of God’s people, or a title, it speaks of an actual individual who will arise in the “last days.”

Indeed, he is directly addressed several times by God (38:14; 39:1) and is called a prince (38:2; 39:1). These references seem to indicate that we are dealing with a genuine person.

Is Gog The Final Antichrist?

Some commentators have linked the person of Gog with the coming Antichrist. However, we have no evidence whatsoever of this being true (we look at this question in detail in our book *Look Up: A Timeline of 50 Last Days Events*).

The King Of The North

A number of Bible interpreters see Gog as the King of the North referred to in the Book of Daniel.

Another Evil Personage Different From Antichrist And The King Of The North

There is also the view that Gog is a different personage from the Antichrist and the King of the North.

Summary

Gog, from the land of Magog, is described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 as a shadowy personage who will arise in the last days and lead a coalition of nations in a military campaign against Israel. This coalition will supernaturally meet its doom upon the mountains of Israel.

Ralph Alexander offers a fitting conclusion about Gog:

It does seem that Gog is a person, whether mentioned in this context by name or by title. In the light of the paucity of data, perhaps further identification does not seem wise, nor is the specific identity necessary in order to interpret the significance of the text (Alexander p. 853).

from the land of Magog

Gog, the leader of the invasion of the land of Israel, is said to be “of the land of Magog.” The location of the land of Magog is another issue that needs to be examined. Here’s what we do know.

The proper noun Magog is found four times in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. It is used twice in biblical genealogies: Genesis 10:2 and 1 Chronicles 1:5. We read:

The sons of Japheth were Gomer and Magog and Madai and Javan and Tubal and Meshech and Tiras (Genesis 10:2)

1 Chronicles 1:5 is basically a repeat of the genealogical information from Genesis 10:2.

Magog is also used twice in these two chapters of Ezekiel (38:2; 39:6).

The fact that Magog is used in the table of nations (Genesis 10) provides a basis for tracing the movement of one of the earliest post-flood descendants of Noah.

The Descendants Of Magog Are The Scythians

The identity of the Magog’s descendants seems to be relatively simple. A majority of scholars throughout history have traced them to the ancient people that we know as the Scythians. Indeed, we find numerous ancient historians who identified Magog with the Scythians. They include Hesiod, Josephus, Philo, and Herodotus. Modern scholars tend to follow this identification.

Where Did They Live?

Where is Magog and who are the Scythians? Ralph Alexander writes:

Magog, a Japhetic descendant (Ge 10:2) in the Table of Nations, is identified by Josephus (Ant. 1. 123 [6.1]) as the land of the Scythians, a mountainous region around the Black and Caspian seas. This position is generally accepted (Alexander)

Ezekiel Is Using The Table Of Nations To Describe The Invaders

This brings up an important point. As previously mentioned, to describe the various people who will attempt to invade the Promised Land, the prophet Ezekiel is using the names of peoples that are found in the Table of Nations (Genesis 10:2-7). Thus, he was using ancient place names that were familiar to the people of his day.

Yet none of the place names can be found on any modern map of that part of the world. While the names of these geographical locations have changed many times throughout history, and may change again, the geographical territory remains the same. It is the geographical territory in which we are interested.

Consequently, regardless of what names they may be called at the time of this invasion, it is these specific geographical areas that will be involved. Therefore, we need to discover who these people were, as well as their geographical locations, in the sixth century B.C.

Once we know their geographical locations at Ezekiel's time, we will then look at a map of our modern world and discover what peoples are living in these areas today. This will tell us the identity of these nations that will be involved in this invasion—assuming, of course, that each of these countries remain the in control of their particular territory.

David Cooper provides us with an important reminder:

As we attempt to identify and to locate the nations mentioned in this prophecy, let us always bear in mind the fact the past, present, and future are one eternal present with the Lord, and that if the prediction was not fulfilled in the past, it will yet be carried out literally (Cooper p. 9).

It will indeed be literally fulfilled. He also made the following observation:

The proper approach to the study of the nations given in this prophecy is an examination of Genesis 10:1-7. A glance at these verses shows that all the peoples mentioned here are descendants of Japheth, with the exception of Cush and Put (Cooper, pp. 8,9).

The Prince (The Leader)

Though the next word in Hebrew is usually translated “prince” this can be misleading since prince in English usually means the “son of a king.” The Hebrew word can mean “chieftain” “captain,” “ruler” or “leader.” This is the meaning of the word in this context.

The Rosh Question

We now arrive at one of THE biggest questions in the account of the invasion of Gog and Magog—the meaning of the term “Rosh.” We have two basic options.

Option One: A Proper Name

The first sees Rosh is a proper name. If this is the case then our translation should reflect this. It would read something like this.

The Prince (or Leader) of Rosh

This translation assumes Rosh refers to a specific people who lived in a particular geographical area.

Option Two: A Noun Which Further Describes The Word Prince (Leader)

This option sees Rosh as a noun which is used to further describe the Hebrew word translated “prince” or “leader.” It would mean something like “the chief one.” Thus, the translation would be roughly like this.

The Prince (the leader), the (chief one) of Meshech and Tubal

How English Translations Render It

We will give a few examples of English translations which will further highlight the difference.

Option 1: Rosh As A Proper Name

The following translations see Rosh as a proper name:

Son of man, set thy face unto Gog, of the land of Magog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy concerning him (Young’s Literal Translation 1862)

Son of man, set thy face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him (English Revised Version 1885)

Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him (Darby 1890)

Son of man, set thy face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal (American Standard Version of 1901)

Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, (New King James Version)

Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him (New American Standard Bible)

According to these translations, Gog is the “prince of Rosh” a specific geographical region.

Option 2: Rosh As An Adjective

Most translations render Rosh as an adjective. The following are representative.

Sonne of man, set thy face against Gog, and against the lande of Magog, the chiefe prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophecie against him, (Geneva Bible 1560)

Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, (KJV)

Son of man, turn toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. (New English Translation)

Son of man, turn your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. (Christian Standard Bible)

Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, (English Standard Version)

Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshek and Tubal; prophesy against him (New International Version)

Son of man, turn towards Gog, to the country of Magog, towards the paramount prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him. (New Jerusalem Bible)

Mortal, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. Prophesy against him (New Revised Standard Version)

Son of man, turn and face Gog of the land of Magog, the prince who rules over the nations of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him. (New Living Translation)

Human being, turn your face toward Gog (of the land of Magog), chief prince of Meshekh and Tuval; and prophesy against him. (Complete Jewish Bible 1998)

Son of man, turn to Gog from the land of Magog. He is the chief prince of *the nations of* Meshech and Tubal. Prophesy against him. (God's Word To The Nations)

Each of these translations has Gog as the “chief prince” of Meshech and Tubal or something like that. As mentioned, the great majority of English translations render it in this manner.

The Dilemma

So which is it, and does it matter? Yes, it certainly does.

Indeed, our conclusion will make a difference as to how we are to interpret these two chapters. If Rosh is a proper name, then there are “nine” geographical locations which we must identify in these two chapters.

If it is an adjective that further describes the word prince, then we do not have to look for any type of identification of the term.

In our first appendix, we will set forth the case that is made for each of these translations, listing the main arguments, their strengths and weaknesses. In doing so, we can at least have an understanding of the issues that it before us. Unfortunately, it is complicated.

Our conclusion will be that Rosh is indeed a proper name which refers to the present-day country of Russia. Again, for the details of why we come to this conclusion see the appendix.

Meshech

Meshech appears 10 times in the Hebrew Old Testament, including its first usage in the Table of Nations (Genesis 10:2).

In Genesis 10 Meshech is listed as a son of Japheth. The genealogical descent from Genesis 10 is repeated twice in 1 Chronicles (1:5, 17). Other than references in Psalm 120:5 and Isaiah 66:19, the other occurrences of Meshech are all found in Ezekiel (27:13; 32:26; 38:2, 3; 39:1).

All we know about Meshech from the Old Testament is that Meshech and his partners Javan and Tubal traded with the ancient city of Tyre, exporting slaves and vessels of bronze in exchange for Tyre's merchandise. That's all the Bible tells us about ancient Meshech.

However, ancient history has a great deal to say about the location and people of ancient Meshech.

Is It Moscow?

Some Bible teachers in the past have taught that Meshech is a reference to Moscow, and thus refers to Russia. This is the view of The Scofield Reference Bible, Harry Rimmer and Hal Lindsey. Rimmer says of Meshech: “his descendants came to be called ‘Mosche,’ from which derived the old term ‘Muscovites.’

While this later word is, and has been, applied to all Russians who come from Moscow and its vicinity, the identification of Meshech with Moscow is merely based upon a similarity of sound. There is no real historical basis to support such a view. Therefore, it must be rejected.

Allen Ross, based upon historical and biblical information in his dissertation on the table of nations, says:

Tubal and Mesek are always found together in the Bible. They represent the northern military states that were exporting slaves and copper (Ezekiel 27:13, 38:2, 39:1, 32:26 and Isaiah 66:19).

Herodotus placed their dwelling on the north shore of the Black Sea (III, 94). Josephus identified them as the Cappadocians. . . . Mesek must be located in the Moschian mountains near Armenia. Their movement was from eastern Asia Minor north to the Black Sea.

This area, generally speaking, is where the present-day countries of Turkey, Russia and Iran intersect.

Such a conclusion is not really a controversial one since virtually all scholars agree with this view.

and Tubal

“Tubal” appears eight times in the Hebrew Bible (Genesis 10:2; 1 Chronicles. 1:5; Isaiah 66:19; Ezekiel. 27:13; 32:26; 38:2, 3; 39:1). Tubal is identified as the fifth son of Japheth and the brother of Meshech in the table of nations (Genesis 10:2).

Tubal is always grouped together with Meshech in the Bible and Ezekiel 38 is no exception. The ancient geography would place it in the area of the modern countries of Russia, Turkey, and Iran.

Is It Tobolsk?

Some prophecy teachers have taught that modern Russian city of Tobolsk is a derivative of Tubal. This view was popularized by *The Scofield Reference Bible* and a number of other teachers.

However, as was the case with Meshech, such a view is developed from similarity of the sound of Tubal and Tobolsk. This view lacks a solid historical basis. The historical record, as was the case with Meshech, is that Tubal and his descendants immigrated to the area around the Black Sea.

prophecy against him

Ezekiel was told to “prophecy” against Gog. The Hebrew word for “prophecy” is the usual one found in the Scripture.

Now, in this context, it carries the notion that Ezekiel will be foretelling future events about Gog and the coalition that he will head. Indeed, the Hebrew preposition “against” tells us that this is not a positive prophecy which will benefit either Gog or those associated with him.

Instead, the prophecy is against Gog because the Lord is opposed to him! We shall discover this as the passage unfolds.

Summing Up Verse 2

Ralph Alexander sums up what we know of this personage Gog:

It can be concluded that Gog is a person from the region of Magog who is the prince, the chief ruler, over the geographical areas, or countries, Meshech and Tubal. These land areas or countries appear to be located generally toward the south of the Black and Caspian seas in the modern countries of Turkey, Russia, and Iran (Alexander pp. 854).

Bible scholar Thomas Constable writes:

The whole region would be what is now parts of southwestern Russia, Georgia, eastern Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

If Rosh is a proper name, signifying Russia, then this is further evidence that the leader of this coalition will come from this particular modern-day country.

If not, then this future leader could come from the modern country of Turkey.

Is It An Islamic Invasion?

There are a number of commentators who reject the idea that Russia will be part of the invading horde. This would make it an Islamic invasion:

All of the countries mentioned here by Ezekiel are today Muslim countries. Assuming their spiritual allegiance does not change, the future invasion of Israel by these nations will not be a Russian invasion, but an Islamic invasion. The coordination of attack on Israel will not come from Moscow, but from the leadership of these Muslim governments (Online Moody Commentary, Ezekiel)

The Testimony Of Ancient Commentators

Interestingly, Derek Walker made the observation about how some past commentators viewed this description, of where Gog originated, as referring to Russia:

In the light of the abundant evidence, it is no wonder that men, centuries before Russia rose to its present state of power, foresaw its end-time role in history. Before current events could have influenced the interpreter's ideas, they recognised Ezekiel's prophecy about the northern commander referred to Russia. In *The Destiny of Nations*, Dr John Cumming (1864) writes: "This king of the North I conceive to be the autocrat of Russia. That Russia occupies a place, and a very momentous place, in the prophetic word has been admitted by almost all expositors."

Bishop Lowth of England wrote in 1710, "Rosh, taken as a proper name, in Ezekiel signifies the inhabitants of Scythia, from whom the modern Russians derive their name." Rev Chamberlain was another who saw this. They were ridiculed by their contemporaries. After all, who could have imagined then that Israel would be restored as a nation and that Russia would rise to be an anti-God (atheistic) superpower?

In 1857 Rev. F.E Pitts delivered 2 sermons on prophecy before a joint session of the houses of the U.S. Congress. His was one of the most respected prophetic voices of his day. 60 years before the Communist conquest of Russia, he had the boldness to warn the US Government of the coming day when Russia

would be a dominant world power. He had insight derived from Ezekiel and access to prophetic literature of his time, showing that over 100 years ago Rosh was identified as Russia.

It should be remembered that most of these quotations were written many years before the Bolshevik Revolution and the rise of Russia to power. Bible scholars anticipated Russia becoming a dominant power in the end time while she was a nonentity as a nation. Early in the 20th century she was still a 2nd-rate power (Derek Walker).

Russia is indeed a definitely possibility as the location from which this last days leader Gog will arise.

Not All Agree

Contrast this statement with those who do not see this as a futuristic prediction of a “last days” battle:

In the twentieth century, a popular and influential brand of Christian fundamentalism identified Gog and Magog with the communist Soviet empire. ‘Rosh’ (the Hebrew word meaning ‘head’ and translated *chief prince* in the NIV at 38:2 was obviously Russia; Meshech was therefore Moscow and Tubal was Tobolsk. On the filmiest of word association (which has no etymological credibility whatsoever), the Christian world was warned of an impending invasion of the land of the modern state of Israel by the armies of the Soviet empire to the north, which would spark the final great battle of Armageddon, and other events plotted on a particular millennialist time-chart. God, as well as Gog, had his marching orders (Wright p. 325).

Sadly, we find so many comments like this in otherwise well-done commentaries on Ezekiel. The misconceptions and misstatements in this quotation are too many to detail. The disdain for those of us who believe in a futuristic fulfillment is all too obvious.

Ezekiel 38:3

And say: ‘This is what the sovereign LORD says: Look, I am against you, Gog, chief prince (or the Leader) of Meshech and Tubal.

Sovereign LORD

Note this title: Sovereign Lord. This is emphatic! It is He who has spoken!

look, I’m against you

Daniel Block notes that the phrase “I am against you” may be a formula for challenging someone to combat or a duel. Thus, the Sovereign Lord, the Living God, singles out this person for His wrath.

The participants have been identified in verse two. We will now discover what the Word of the Lord has to say about them. We have already seen in the first part of the verse that Ezekiel is told to set his face toward the direction of Gog and the nation from which he comes from.

Such a statement implies that this coalition is a real, historical group of nations—not some symbolic figures.

We learn at the end of verse 2 that Ezekiel is to “prophecy against him.” The “him” refers back to Gog, the leader of the invasion. Thus, we have further evidence that Ezekiel is prophesying against a single individual who will actually lead an actual coalition of nations in an attack aimed at Israel.

Again, everything we read in this context suggests a literal battle. Gog, is the prince (leader) of Rosh, the leader of Meshech and Tubal Here we have again Gog singled out as the one whom the Lord is against.

God Against Gog

The Lord God tells Ezekiel to announce that He (God) is against this personage Gog. As we will learn later in the passage, Gog may think that he is one who is bringing together the coalition to attack Israel. However, we discover that it is the God of the Bible who ultimately is the cause of this great event (note verses 4, 8).

As always, the Living God is in control.

Ezekiel 38:4

I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and bring you out with all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them fully armed, a great company with shields of different types, all of them armed with swords.

I will turn you around

This is the Lord speaking. He says, “And I will cause you to turn around.”

The Hebrew word has the basic meaning is “to move in an opposite direction from that toward which one previously moved. . . . turn around, turn.”

Therefore, to paraphrase what He is saying, “I will cause you to turn away from the right road, to go astray.”

C. F. Keil says, “it means to lead or bring away from his previous attitude, *i.e.* to mislead or seduce, in the sense of enticing to a dangerous enterprise.”

And I will put (place)

Again, we must notice that it is the LORD who is doing this. Since the Lord wants to move Gog in the direction of coming down to attack Israel, the Hebrew verb is used to explain the means that God will employ—the Lord will “place” or “put” hooks into the jaws of Gog.

Thus, we find that Gog is represented here as an unmanageable beast, which is compelled to follow the one who is leading it.

In another context we find that Lord saying this about putting “hooks in someone’s nose:”

Because you rage against me and the uproar you create has reached my ears, I will put my hook in your nose, and my bridle between your lips, and I will lead you back the way you came (Isaiah 37:29 NIV).

The idea is that the Lord is in control here. Consequently, Gog is compelled to obey the power of God.

Indeed, he has no choice.

hooks into your jaws

While the literal meaning of the Hebrew word is “thorn,” in the Old Testament it is used metaphorically for a hook. In the majority of occurrences in Scripture, this word is employed in military contexts for a hook put through the nose, or cheek, of captives.

For example:

of Sennacherib, in whose nose God will put a hook

of Jehoahaz taken to Egypt by hook

of Zedekiah taken to Babylon by hook

of Pharaoh, in whose jaw God will put a hook

and of Gog, in whose jaw God will also put hooks

In Job 41:2, God silences Job by asking him if he is capable of taming a sea creature known as the Leviathan. Can Job put a hook through its jaw?

Obviously, Job cannot.

Yet we discover that God is able to put the hook in its jaw as well as in the jaw of the *tannim*, an aquatic figure that is used to represent the Egyptian Pharaoh (Ezekiel 29:4).

The Lord is also able to put the hook in the jaw of Gog (Ezekiel 38:4).

We read elsewhere that the Lord will put a bridle in the jaws of the people of the nations (Isaiah 30:28) but take it from the jaws of his own people so that they may eat (Hosea 11:4).

Thus, this imagery would have been well-known to the readers of Scripture. In sum, God is leading Gog around “by the nose.”

God’s Timing

Consequently, just like the ring in the nose of a captive, or a great hook in the jaws of a large sea creature, the Lord will pull Gog and his coalition of soldiers toward Israel when He is ready for them! In other words, Gog will do God’s bidding and will act according to God’s timetable. Clearly, it is God Who is in control—it is He who is bringing the invasion about.

Thus, while studying this passage, one should continually note the sovereignty of God in this invasion. This will be the means by which God will punish these nations for their sins. On the one hand Gog’s willful decision to invade (verse 11) is based on his own passions, his own evil desires (verses 12-13).

However, on the other hand, we discover that he is drawn, as someone who has a hook in his jaw, verse 4.

All of this will allow the Lord to show a supernatural demonstration of His power when He intervenes on the side of Israel against these nations (verses 21, 23; 39:27). Finally, it will also be a sign to Israel itself (39:28).

Gog Is Possibly Russian

As we have noted, one interpretation of the Hebrew word “Rosh” is that it refers to a distinct people group (which seemingly are the modern day Russians).

If so, then the key sin of Russia is her long history of anti-Semitism—a problem that has persisted to this very day. The pogroms in Russia at the end of the 19th century sent millions of Jews to America. At that time the Lord blessed America but judged Russia.

Thus, Gog may be a Russian individual who will lead the Russian nation and its allies in an attack on regathered people of Israel. This is the precise situation that we see in our world today as we examine the present geopolitical landscape. In other words, the stage is already set for just such an attack.

If Not Russian

Now, if Rosh does not refer to Russia, we still have a strong motive for the Lord to bring these nations down to Israel. Why? It is because they are all non-Arab Muslim nations. If so, then this leader, Gog, would come from Turkey. Thus, if the non-Russian view is adopted it still makes sense for this invasion to happen.

This Is A Different Role Than Past Invaders Of The Holy Land

We must appreciate that the role of Gog is different than that of past invaders of the Holy Land such as the Assyrians and Babylonians. Indeed, these nations had been called the “rods of God’s wrath.” We read in Isaiah:

Assyria, the club I use to vent my anger, is as good as dead, a cudgel with which I angrily punish (Isaiah 10:5).

This Is Not Divine Chastisement

Thus, this prophecy in Ezekiel should not be compared to past disciplinary actions by God where He used other nations to punish Israel—as He did with Assyria against the Northern Kingdom of Israel (722 B.C.) and with the Babylonians against the Southern Kingdom of Judah (586 B.C.).

If such were the case, then God would *not* intervene on behalf of Israel as He does in this passage. When God used a pagan nation to discipline Israel or Judah, He never intervened to protect them during such an invasion.

The Omission Of This Phrase By The Septuagint

Interestingly, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the Septuagint, omits the phrase, “I will put hooks in your jaw.”

I will cause you to be brought out

The Lord, after having put hooks in Gog’s jaw will bring him out of his place. Once again, this is not something that Gog would have instigated had not God intervened to bring him out to his eventual destruction.

with all your army

When Gog comes down against Israel, it will be with “all your army, horses and horsemen.” The Hebrew word for “army” has the basic meaning of “strength or power,” depending upon what is referenced in the context.

It is the chief word for army in the Old Testament but it also has the idea of “strength,” and “wealth.” In fact, it has been suggested that it could be translated here, “with all your wealth.”

The word is used again to describe Gog and his allies in 38:15. The semantic range of this word means that it would not be limited to an ancient army. Thus, we do not have to insist that this speaks of some past battle.

In addition, since the word “all” is used with army, it may mean that their entire army, not just part of it, will come in this “last days” invasion of Israel. In other words, this is a HUGE invasion of God’s Land.

horses and horsemen

The army is then described as having “horses and horsemen.” This is a reference of soldiers going into battle. In the Old Testament, we often find horsemen distinguished from those riding chariots.

Will There Be Only Horsemen?

Now, herein we have a huge issue. Why are only horses and horsemen mentioned? Is it limited to this? Are we then talking about a primitive army compared to the modern weapons or warfare—like those in biblical times?

This is indeed an important question.

To begin with, the mention of horses and horsemen should not be taken to mean that the army would consist of either entirely, or even primarily, of cavalry. We can support this idea by the fact that previously the text said, “all your army,” along with the horses and horsemen. This would include all aspects of the military resources of this coalition.

If this is the case, perhaps the horses and horsemen are singled out, and mentioned specifically, since this was the most powerful offensive force for an invading army at the time of Ezekiel.

fully armed

This is also a reference to the horsemen being fully armed or “splendidly attired.” The Hebrew word, which may be translated “splendidly,” is found only here and in Ezekiel 23:12.

It is defined with such terms as “most gorgeously” or “all sorts of armor.” Actually, there is little agreement over the correct translation of this particular word since it is only used twice in Scripture.

In each case, it is used in contexts to describe the appearance of soldiers. It would seem to indicate that the army was “all fully equipped.” In other words, these “last days invaders” will all have the best military equipment available in their day.

Not only will these invaders be well equipped, there will be an overwhelming number of them who will come to the Promised Land.

with shields of different types

There are two Hebrew words here for shields—a larger shield and a smaller shield. Some English translations use the word “buckler” to describe the smaller shield—which is meaningless to most people.

Basically, it further describes a well-equipped army.

all of them armed with swords

Apart from the defensive weapons of this invading force, we are told that they will also carry swords as offensive weapons.

The Hebrew word translated “sword” can refer to one of two weapons. It may be the two-edged dagger, or short sword (Judges 3:16, 21) or it could refer to the single-edged scimitar, or long sword.

Seeing that these soldiers are riding on horses, the long sword seems to be what is in view here. In fact, historically this has been the weapon of choice for cavalry.

Considering this overwhelming number of well-equipped soldiers, from a number of different countries that will invade the Promised Land in the “last days,” it becomes clear that that Israel will find itself in an impossible situation—humanly speaking.

Such an impossible situation calls out for divine intervention—and this is precisely what will take place!

What About The Weapons?

Again, we must note that there are those commentators who do not see this passage referring to some future battle. They use the fact that the text speaks of horses, horsemen, swords, and shields as being descriptive of an ancient battle rather than some type of modern warfare with present-day weapons.

Consequently, on this basis, they believe that this passage has already been fulfilled in the past. Simply put, the weapons are ancient because the battle was ancient.

So When Was It Fulfilled?

If so, then we may ask, “When in the past was it fulfilled?” As we have already mentioned, there is no consensus on this question.

Indeed, there is nothing in history that remotely fulfills what is predicted here. This being the case, do those interpreters want to accuse Ezekiel, inspired by the Holy Spirit, as being wrong?

Interestingly, most commentators who hold a non-futurist position become vague at this point.

They usually insist that none of this can be taken literally but is merely symbolic of God’s victories over His enemies in the past, as well as the assurance of His victories in the future. They seem to want to have it both ways.

Obviously, these are out-of-date weapons from the standpoint of modern warfare. And it is indeed a problem for those who see this prophecy as something that remains to be fulfilled in the future.

So, how do we deal with this? There are a number of options.

Option 1: Weapons That Ezekiel Was Familiar With

Ezekiel is using language with which he was familiar—he was speaking of the weapons that were common in his day to anticipate modern weapons. What he is saying is that when this invading army enters the Promised Land, it will be fully equipped with the most up-to-date weapons of war.

Such an interpretation does have its problems. We are told in the passage that the wooden shafts of the spears and the bow and arrows will be used for kindling wood. If these are merely symbols, it would seem to be difficult to burn these symbols.

Option 2: The Will Be A Disarmament

Another suggested solution is that there will be some type of a disarmament agreement between nations. If so, it would be necessary to resort to primitive weapons. This would allow a literal interpretation of the passage.

Option 3: Metal Will Not Be Used

A third solution, that has been suggested, is based upon the premise that modern missile warfare will have been developed to the point where missiles will seek out and destroy any considerable amount of metal. Under these circumstances, it would be necessary to abandon the large use of metal weapons and substitute them with wooden weapons.

Whatever the correct explanation, it seems clear that actual weapons will be used.

The List Of Other Nations Fighting With Gog

In the next two verses, five and six, we find that there will be other allies that will attack Israel with their leader Gog.

Ezekiel 38:5

Persia, Cush, and Put are with them, all of them with shields and helmets (CSB)

Persia

The identity of the first ally of Gog appears to be obvious since its ancient name is widely known down through history, even to this very day.

Persia refers to the Persian people who make up a majority of the modern country of Iran. The name Persia was changed to Iran in foreign usage in March 1935.

Cush (Ethiopia in the Septuagint)

Many English translations have transliterated it from the Hebrew into the English word "Cush." *Cush* occurs 29 times in the Hebrew Bible. Genesis 2:13 refers to a land which existed before the flood named Cush.

Three times in the table of nations it refers to Cush who is a descendant of Ham. Most of the other uses occur in Isaiah and Ezekiel (13 times) and refer to the same region mentioned in Ezekiel 28:5.

One Hebrew lexicon says that Cush refers to "the lands of the Nile in southern Egypt, meaning Nubia and Northern Sudan, the country bordering the southern Red Sea." Another tells us that Cush "refers to the region immediately south and east of Egypt, including modern Nubia, the Sudan, and the Ethiopia of classical writers."

Thus, the Bible clearly locates Cush just south of Egypt in what is the modern nation of Sudan.

Sudan Today

Today Sudan is one of the most militant Islamic nations in the world. Indeed, the modern nation of Sudan is one of only three Muslim nations in the world with a militant Islamic government.

Sudan is the largest nation in territory on the African continent. It is interesting to realize that Iran and Sudan have become the closest of allies during the last twenty years. They have entered into trade agreements, military alliances, and Iran also operates terrorist training bases in Sudan.

Sudan also is the place that protected Osama bin Laden from 1991 to 1996 until he went to Afghanistan. Based upon current alignment of nations that we see today, it is not at all surprising to think that Sudan will be a Southern ally that descends upon the land of Israel in the last days with Russia, Iran and others.

Put (Libya in the Septuagint)

Put is another transliteration from the Hebrew into English. It occurs only seven times in the Old Testament. Twice it is used in a genealogy that says that Put is a descendant of Ham (Genesis 10:6; 1 Chronicles 1:8). The other five times it is used in the Prophets to refer to Put as a nation, usually in a military context as we have in Ezekiel 38.

From the ancient *Babylon Chronicle* it seems that Putu was the “distant” land to the west of Egypt. This would be modern day Libya.

all of them with shield and helmet

Verse five ends with this statement: We saw in verse four that the Hebrew word translated “shield” refers to a large shield covering the whole body.

The Hebrew word for helmet refers to a “helmet,” that was usually made of bronze. All six uses of this word in the Hebrew Old Testament refer to a metal helmet that was worn by a soldier for military conflict.

Again, we find the emphasis that “all” of these invaders are well outfitted in their military gear for this last days invasion of the Holy Land.

In sum, this passage paints an extremely bleak picture for Israel. They will be defenseless as well as by their enemies surrounded on all sides.

Ezekiel 38:6

They are joined by Gomer with all its troops, and by Beth Togarmah from the remote parts of the north with all its troops— many peoples are with you

Gomer

The transliterated name Gomer occurs five times in the Hebrew Old Testament (this does not count the references that refer to the wife of Hosea who had the same name).

Every time we find this word, except in this instance in Ezekiel, it occurs in a genealogy (Genesis 10:2, 3; 1 Chronicles 1:5, 6).

Gomer is said to be a son of Japheth in the table of nations (Genesis 10:2; 1 Chronicles 1:5).

The question before us is where do the modern day descendants of Gomer now reside?

Today, we find that his descendants are usually identified as the Cimmerians. Gomer and his descendants settled in the area north of the Black and Caspian Seas. However, the descendants of Gomer were pushed out of that area and into the area of Cappadocia, which today is in central and north-central Turkey.

Josephus identified the people of Galatia with Gomer. He says that the people who the Greeks called the Galatians were the Gomerites. Today their descendants live in the west-central part of Turkey.

Therefore, the descendants of Gomer indicate that modern Turkey will be part of the coalition of nations who invade the land of Israel at the time of the end.

The passage says, “Gomer with all its troops.” Therefore, modern Turkey will field an army that will be part of this “last days” invasion.

Beth Togarmah (house of)

There is one final people group listed, as among those nations, who will invade Israel with the leader Gog.

Beth-Togarmah is the English transliteration of two words from the Hebrew text. “Beth” is the common Hebrew word for “house” or “place of.” It is used over two thousand times in the Hebrew Bible.

Togarmah is a noun used only four times in the Hebrew Scripture. Twice it is used in a genealogy in which Togarmah is said to be a son of Gomer (Genesis 10:3; 1 Chronicles 1:6). The final two occurrences are found in here in Ezekiel (27:14; 38:6).

The prefix “beth” occurs only in the two uses in Ezekiel. Therefore, we have the rendering as “house of Togarmah.” Ezekiel 27:14 refers to their trade and says: “Those from Beth Togarmah gave horses and war horses and mules for your wares.”

In fact, the ancient Greek historian Herodotus mentioned Togarmah as famed for its horses and mules.

Many Bible scholars, as well as scholars of ancient history, relate the biblical Togarmah to the ancient Hittite city of Tegarma. This location would be in modern day Turkey.

Gesenius, the great Hebrew scholar of the 19th century, identified Togarmah as a northern nation abounding in horses and mules which was located in ancient Armenia. The ancient area of Armenia is located in the modern nation of Turkey.

While scholars have differed slightly on the precise location of ancient Togarmah, it is *always* associated with either a city or district within the boundaries of the modern nation of Turkey.

In sum, as we examine the geographical location of these nations involved in this invasion, we discover that they represent all four directions of the compass. Rosh, modern day Russia, Gomer and Beth Togarmah, modern day Turkey come from the north, Persia, modern Iran, comes from the east, Cush, northern Sudan, from the south, and Put, modern Libya, from the west.

They Are All Non-Arab Muslims

It is interesting to note that none of the nations that will go down into Israel with Russia (assuming Rosh is the name of an ethnic people) are Arab nations. However, all of the Russian allies are Islamic nations.

from the remote parts of the north

In this passage the people of Beth-Togarmah are said to come from “the remote parts of the north.” This Hebrew phrase is composed of two words.

The word for north means the direction of north.

The Hebrew word for “remote parts” has the sense of the “extreme” or “farthest part,” or “most distant part” of whatever is being referred to in the context.

When these two words are combined in a phrase, it is found five times in the Hebrew Bible (Psalm 48:3; Isaiah 14:13; Ezekiel 38:6, 15; 39:2).

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

Interestingly, the Isaiah use is found in one of the five “I wills” uttered by the anointed cherub who became Satan, or the devil, in his revolt against God.

The psalmist says of Jerusalem:

Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion in the far north, the city of the great King (Psalm 48:3 NET)

Mount Zion was on the northern edge of the ancient city of Jerusalem.

The other three uses are found in Ezekiel 38 and 39. The other two references in Ezekiel 38 and 39 refer to Gog and say:

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 (Ezekiel 38:15 NET).

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 (Ezekiel 39:2 NET).

Therefore, Beth-Togarmah is said to come from the remote parts of the north, as will Gog.

Is This Russia?

Some think that this statement means that Beth Togarmah must come from Russia since it is the farthest geographical point north of Israel and Babylon. But this is not the case. Modern Turkey fits the description given because it is clearly to the far north of the Promised Land.

The Nations Will Come From All Directions

In sum, this seven-nation coalition represents the north (Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, Beth-Togarmah), the south/west (Cush, Put) and the east (Persia). The use of the sevenfold list suggests completeness.

If Rosh is determined to refer to a people group, then this would make an eight-nation coalition with it being another group associated with the far north.

with all its troops

The last part of verse six says that Beth-Togarmah will come from the north parts “with all its troops—many peoples with you.” The Hebrew word for “troops” is only used six times in the Hebrew Old Testament and all of them are found in Ezekiel (12:14; 17:21; 38:6, 9, 22; 39:4).

All but two uses appear in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Some scholars say that this word is related to a “wing” or “parameter,” but it clearly is a reference military troops in these contexts. Some suggest that it may connote the troops on the flank or wings of a military unit and would be a Hebrew idiom for all of one’s forces.

The point would be that if one brings his troops on the wing, then those would include all the forces one could muster. The translation of troops (i.e., military) is the clear meaning of this word.

many peoples with you

The final phrase in verse six is clear that the sum total of the house of Togarmah will include many peoples with him. This phrase is found two other times in the Hebrew Bible, both of them in Ezekiel 38 (verses nine

and 15). Verse nine refers to the entire coalition that will attack Israel, while verse 15 the many peoples refers to the coalition members that are led by Gog.

The use of “many peoples with you” in verses nine and 15 differ slightly from verse six since their constructions are prefaced with the use of the “and” conjunction. The use of the phrase in verse six does not have a conjunction, which means that the phrase “many peoples with you” is in apposition to the preceding phrase “with all its troops.”

Thus, the text is saying that the “many peoples with you” is descriptive of the troops that Beth-Togarmah will bring with them in their attack on Israel.

The breakup of the former Soviet Union included the independence of five Islamic republics: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizia, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. Turkey also shares strong linguistic and ethnic ties with these nations.

All of these nations speak Turkic languages with the exception of Tajikistan, where the language is similar to Iranian Farsi.

Summing Up The Enemies

As it stands today, this is the list of nations which will come up against Israel in the Ezekiel 38 and 39 invasion.

| Ancient Name | Modern Nation |
|---------------|--|
| Rosh | Russia |
| Magog | Russia, Turkey, Central Asia Republics |
| Meshech | Turkey |
| Tubal | Turkey |
| Persia | Iran |
| Cush | Northern Sudan |
| Put | Libya |
| Gomer | Turkey |
| Beth-togarmah | Turkey |

Writing in 1943, David Cooper reminds us that nations of the world are always in a state of flux:

In our modern world we are accustomed to seeing great and mighty changes occurring overnight. The present setup of the international situation can very easily be shifted and that which is set forth in this passage be brought about. What it took centuries and even millenniums to accomplish in former generations may be brought about in a few weeks, or even a few days. We are living in a rapidly shifting world. The unexpected occurs (Cooper p. 15).

Therefore, we can only line up present-day nations which occupy these geographical areas associated with their ancient place names at the time of Ezekiel. As we have noted, things may change.

Yet, based on these present identifications, we find that in these chapters we have a prediction of an invasion of the Promised Land by a vast confederation of nations which are on all sides of the state of Israel (though not contiguous).

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

These nations come from a variety of geographical areas. This includes peoples from north of Israel (Turkey) north of the Black and Caspian Seas (Russia), and nations from central Asia. Their allies also include Iran from the east, Libya to the west, down to the Sudan in the south.

Consequently there are five key nations, or groups of nations, which are allied with Russia in this invasion (assuming Rosh refers to a people group). They are Turkey, Iran, Libya, Northern Sudan and likely the nations of Central Asia.

Apart from Russia, these nations are dominated by Islam. In our present world setting, these would be the nations involved in the invasion led by this personage Gog.

Where And When This Will Take Place (Verses 7-9)

The first six verses of Ezekiel's prophecy in chapter 38 outlined "who" would be involved in this "last days" invasion of Israel, while verses 7-9 will tell us "where" and "when" these coming events will occur.

This new section (verses 7-9) begins with a taunt from the Lord for this leader Gog and his coalition. He encourages them to "make sure that they are really ready for their invasion of Israel."

Ezekiel 38:7

Be ready and stay ready, you and all your companies assembled around you, and be a guard for them.

Be ready stay ready

This verse begins with the same Hebrew verb used two times, back-to-back. The reason why the verb "stay ready" or "prepare" is arranged this way is to intensify their meaning.

Thus, God is telling Gog and his allies that they had better make sure that they are prepared to the utmost for their attack on His people Israel, because, for all intents and purposes, it is an attack on God. Indeed as we have been emphasizing this is the Land which the Lord gave to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Israel. It is theirs!

Charles Feinberg writes:

With consummate and telling irony, Ezekiel urged Gog to be fully prepared for the encounter, and to see to it that all was in readiness as far as his confederates were concerned (Feinberg)

you is singular

We must note that the second person *singular* forms are used here in the Hebrew text. They indicate that Gog is the one who is addressed. It is "his companies" which have gathered against the Lord. So this is directed at him.

be a guard for them

The final phrase of verse 7 says, "be a guard for them." The Hebrew noun for "guard" has the idea of being a "watch" or a "lookout." In this particular context, it seems to have the connotation of "to maintain vigilance," "post a strong watch" and "to stand at the ready."

The Lord is further taunting Gog as He challenges him, as the sole leader of this coalition of nations, to make sure that he watches over this assembled company of invader so that he may protect them against any evil that could befall them.

This, of course, is a sarcastic warning to Gog and his coalition. The irony is that even though they are gathering for the purpose of annihilating the people of Israel, it is their entire invading force that will be destroyed.

Interestingly, the Septuagint translates this verse, “be a guard *for me*.”

Ezekiel 38:8

After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come to a land restored from the ravages of war, with many peoples gathered on the mountains of Israel that had long been in ruins. Its people were brought out from the peoples, and all of them will be living securely

after many days

We begin with the Lord telling us the time frame when they invasion will occur.

The exact Hebrew phrase “after many days” is found only one other place in the Old Testament. We read:

Now it came about after many days, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies on every side, and Joshua was old, advanced in years (Joshua 23:1).

Since the context governs the length of time intended for a temporal phrase, it is clear that in Joshua, that “many days” referred to a few years because “many days” all took place within the lifetime of Joshua.

A similar Hebrew phrase is used four times in the Old Testament (1 Kings 18:1; Ecclesiastes 11:1; Isaiah 24:22; Jeremiah 13:6).

However, Isaiah 24:22 is used in a context referring to the “last days:”

So it will happen in that day, that the LORD will punish the host of heaven, on high, and the kings of the earth, on earth. And they will be gathered together like prisoners in the dungeon, and will be confined in prison; and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and His glory will be before His elders (Isaiah 24:21–23).

C. F. Keil, writing in the nineteenth century says:

The first clause reminds so strongly of Isa. xxiv. 22, that the play upon this passage cannot possibly be mistaken; so that Ezekiel uses the words in the same sense as Isaiah.

The length of time indicated by the phrase “after many days” is determined by factors in the context, which are clearly longer than the lifespan of a human. In this context, we find that the text is emphatic that the invasion and its consequences have been foreseen *a long time before it takes place*.

Keil also says, “after many days, i.e., after a long time . . . signifies merely the lapse of a lengthened period . . . is the end of day, the last time, not the future generally, but the final future, the Messianic time of the completing of the kingdom of God.”

In this context, the notion of time indicated that the attack of the enemy would not take place for a long time. The events here predicted were *not to be expected* in the lifetime of Ezekiel or his contemporaries.

you will be summoned (visited)

The sovereignty of God continues to be a major theme of this prophecy as Ezekiel begins verse 8 by saying, “After many days you will be summoned.”

Again, we stress that this entire scenario is ultimately God’s idea. Indeed, it is He who will “put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out,” (verse 4) against Israel.

Now Ezekiel says that God is summoning Gog and his coalition to attack Israel to accomplish the Lord’s purpose. This reminds us of what we read in Proverbs:

The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps (Proverbs 16:9).

in the latter years

“After many days” is not the only time indicator of when this invasion will take place. In fact, “after many days” is immediately followed in the Hebrew text by the phrase “in the latter years.”

These two phrases must refer to the same time period! Like the previous phrase, since it is not qualified by something like “in the latter years of a person’s life,” it is a phrase which is referring to the span of history.

An almost identical phrase is used in this chapter:

It will happen in the last days, Gog, that I will bring you against my land (Ezekiel 38:16 CSB).

The term “latter years” is only found in this passage in the entire Old Testament. However, the “last days,” used in verse 16, is describing the same time frame.

Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the more frequently used phrase “last days” is synonymous with the “latter years.” This conclusion is supported by the fact that “after many days” and “in the latter years” are used together in verse eight.

We Find Similar Phrases In The Old Testament

When we search the Old Testament for the use of terminology similar to “the latter years” of Ezekiel 38:8, we find three other phrases that are parallel.

The first phrase is “the latter days” (Deuteronomy 4:30; 31:29; Jeremiah 30:24; 48:47; Daniel 2:28; 10:14),

A second phrase is “the last days” (Isaiah 2:2; Jeremiah 23:20; 49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1).

The final phrase is “the time of the end” (Daniel 8:17, 19; 11:27, 35, 40; 12:4, 9, 13).

The fact that Ezekiel uses three phrases—“after many days,” “in the latter years,” and “in the last days”—provides strong support that this invasion will take place during a time far into the future.

However, we must note that while the expression the “latter days” may refer to the future Great Tribulation period, it is not a technical term for it. In other words, this invasion may, or may not, take place during this specific time period.

To the point, these various phrases may refer to: Great Tribulation, also known as the 70th week of Daniel or the “time of Jacob’s trouble. It may have reference to the “millennial kingdom.” It is also possible that it could refer to certain events that may take place shortly before the Great Tribulation period. Again, we emphasize, that these are not technical terms for a specific future time period.

The Importance Of These Phrases

While these phrases do not specifically identify the time of the invasion, they do clearly indicate that the general time period is future even from our day. Charles Feinberg writes:

The time element was distinctly stated as “in the latter years,” which is equivalent to “the latter days” of verse 16. No student of prophecy can afford to overlook this phrase in the Old Testament or its parallel in the New Testament. A wrong interpretation here will result in confusion and color the entire picture. When used by the Old Testament writers, it has reference to Messianic times, that is, the era in which Israel’s national history will find its fulfillment and climax (Feinberg p. 222).

The Seven Descriptive Phrases

We should note that verse eight is one of the longest verses in these two chapters. It describes when this invasion of the land of Israel will take place.

In doing so, there are a total of seven descriptive phrases used in this verse to tell us when this event will occur. We have already examined the first two and have seen that the invasion will take place “after many days,” “in the latter years.” We must keep in mind that this event will unfold only when all seven of these indicators are in place at the same time.

Why Future?

The main reason that we assume that this invasion is still future is that nothing even remotely similar to the events in Ezekiel 38 and 39 have ever occurred in the past.

Indeed, when has Israel ever been invaded by all these nations listed in Ezekiel 38:1–6? Or when did God ever destroy an invading army like this with fire and brimstone from heaven, plagues, earthquakes, as well as infighting among the invading armies (Ezekiel 38:19–22)?

The answer? Never. That’s because Ezekiel is describing an invasion that is still future even in our day.

you will be brought into the land

Again, it is ultimately the Lord who is doing this.

restored from the ravages of war

The next phrase literally reads in Hebrew, “you will come into the land that is restored from the sword.” The idea is that it has been restored from the ravages of war.

The land into which Gog will lead his coalition of invaders is, of course, the land of Israel—the Promised Land. Indeed, the land has been the theme of the last several chapters.

Interestingly, the land of Israel is described as a land that has been restored from the effects of repeated wars.

The Three Stages

Therefore, we have three stages. First, the people were once in the land of Israel, second, they were removed from the land, and finally they have been brought back, or restored, to the land from where they originated.

Thus, these ancient people of the Lord will be returned to the land of Israel. We should emphasize that the Jews are the only group of people in the history of the world who were removed from their homeland, dispersed among of the nations, and then have been restored to their original homeland.

gathered from many nations

The fourth phrase says, “whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations.” This verb which is translated as “gathered” is the common word for collecting something like agricultural products at harvest time.

The implication in this context is that God is the One who has gathered the inhabitants back to the land of Israel. But from where has He gathered them?

Scripture makes it clear that the Lord Himself has gathered them from many nations. The Hebrew word translated “nations” is simply the common word *amm*. It is used almost 3,000 times in the Old Testament and simply means “people, peoples, nation, or nations.”

This Is Not The Babylonian Captivity

This gathering is not from just a few nations, but said to be from “many” nations. Consequently, this cannot refer to the Babylonian captivity but to a worldwide dispersion—a dispersion that occurred with the destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the Temple in the year A.D. 70.

Keil agrees. He writes:

gathered out of many peoples, points also beyond the Babylonian captivity to the dispersion of Israel in all the world, which did not take place till the second destruction of Jerusalem (Keil)

upon the mountains of Israel

The location is again emphasized. These returnees will come “to the mountains of Israel.” Jerusalem is a city set within the mountains of Israel. Thus, since 1967, the modern state of Israel has been in control of the old city known as Jerusalem.

that had long been (continually) in ruins

The fifth phrase says, “that had long been (continually) in ruins.”

What exactly is this referring to? Well, this phrase speaks of the land of Israel, the Holy Land, which had been for a long period of time “in ruins.”

The Hebrew noun for “ruins” is used 50 times in the Old Testament. The prophets primarily used the term to speak of the ruins of Jerusalem, Israel and sometimes Egypt. Each time it was a result of God’s judgment.

The Hebrew word “continual” refers to the noun “ruins.” Therefore, it speaks “of going on without interruption, continuously,” “continual.” This signifies a long period of the exile from the land.

Again, we emphasize that it does not refer to the 70 year Babylonian exile but rather to the second exile—the 1,900 year exile to all parts of the globe.

Feinberg says:

This had in view a period of time longer than that of the seventy years in Babylon.

Keil also notes that “continual” in this text “denotes a much longer devastation of the land than the Chaldean devastation was.”

and its people were brought out from the peoples

The sixth phrase we find in this verse says, “And its people were brought out from the peoples.”

The subject “it” is in the feminine gender in the Hebrew. Thus, it can only refer to “the land.” In Hebrew, like many languages, the nouns and pronouns are either masculine or feminine. This feminine pronoun must refer back to a noun which is also feminine in gender. Here it is, “the land.” Therefore, again we are dealing with the “people of the land.”

Basically, this is what the Lord is saying: the land of Israel belongs to His people—the Jews. Hence, the Lord Himself stresses that these are the people whom God says belong in the land of Israel—the Jews.

They Were Brought Out

The Hebrew verb *yasab* is used over a thousand times in the Old Testament and means to “come out” or “go forth.” However, in this instance it is used in a passive sense and thus has the idea that the Jewish people “were brought out” from the nations by someone other than themselves. That “someone” was God Himself. He has caused them to come back to their ancient homeland.

This is another of God’s sovereign control over all people—Israel as well as the Gentile nations. We should not miss the fact that at the beginning of verse eight, Gog was “summoned” to invade Israel. In the same way, He has caused them to return to their land.

The final two of seven descriptive phrases in verse eight, will now be examined. These phrases provide a framework for determining *when* this invasion will take place.

and all of them will be living

The Hebrew verb that is used here is common. In fact, it is found over a thousand times in the Old Testament. Generally, it means to “sit, remain, live, or dwell.” Accordingly, it is translated “living” in many English translations. The idea here is that the people are back in their land, not as visitors, but actually living there.

securely

Not only are the people living again in their ancient homeland, we are told that they are living in a manner that is secure.

This final phrase is a major point of contention among commentators. In fact, there has been endless discussion about just what this word means in this particular context. The Hebrew lexicons tell us that the general meaning is “security” or “confidence.” In fact, this phrase is used in Jeremiah 49:31 in a similar invasion context as we see in Ezekiel 38. It says:

The LORD says, Army of Babylon, go and attack a nation that lives in peace and security. They have no gates or walls to protect them. They live all alone” (Jeremiah 49:31).

In this context it may speak of the nation Israel as having no defenses. This is possibly how it is used in Ezekiel 38:8. But this is a point of contention!

Is This A False Sense Of Security?

So the question arises, “In what sense are they living securely?” A number of commentators stress that quite often this general meaning “secure” has a negative ring to it. In other words, it indicates a false sense of security.

Consequently, they assume they are living in a peaceful, secure environment when actually they are not. We read of this type of situation in the Book of Amos:

Woe to those who live in ease in Zion, to those who feel secure on Mount Samaria. They think of themselves as the elite class of the best nation. The family of Israel looks to them for leadership (Amos 6:1 NET).

Here is an example of putting ones trust in the wrong object. Many believe we have the same thing here.

Why Do They Have This False Sense?

Why do they have this false sense of security? There are those who believe this to be true because Israel has signed a security agreement with this coming world ruler-the final Antichrist. Daniel wrote about this:

He will confirm a covenant with many for one week. But in the middle of that week he will bring sacrifices and offerings to a halt. On the wing of abominations will come one who destroys, until the decreed end is poured out on the one who destroys (Daniel 9:27)

In other words, this agreement guarantees their security and they are trusting in this false sense of security. They have their confidence in this world leader and not in God. Since they are not trusting God, they are still in unbelief. He is NOT the one who is protecting them in their eyes.

Now, it is one of the points of debate as to whether the context supports the false security connotation in this instance.

Others Insist It Means Living Peacefully

Other commentators equate the notion of “living securely” with the idea of “living peacefully.” It is said that what is described in this passage is a situation where Israel is at peace with all their neighbors and no one is a threat to them. The reason: they are living in the golden age of the Messiah. Ralph Alexander writes:

This section portrays Israel as living peacefully and securely in her land following her restoration to it by God (vs. 8b; cf. 36:16-37:14). God has fulfilled the covenants made with the chosen people. They are basking in the land’s fruitfulness and the unquestioned security they possess in the strength of God’s faithfulness to his Word . . .

Verses 8 and 12 indicate that this invasion is planned at a time when Israel has been restored from the sword, having been regathered from among the nations. This regathering was followed by a peace and security Israel knew in the restoration to her land (described in 36:22-37:14). She felt so safe that she did not seek to fortify herself (v. 11). Israel historically has never enjoyed such an idyllic situation since she returned from Babylon in 539 B.C. It seems plausible, therefore, to suggest that Ezekiel here has in view the future golden age at the end as the time the invasion will occur. The phrase . . . (live in safety v.8; also

vv. 11,14; cf. 39:26) is used in Ezekiel as a description of messianic security after Israel's restoration. This is seen in the context of these night messages . . . the entire context of these six messages deals with the future restoration of Israel to her homeland by the Messiah (Alexander p. 855, 856).

This view sees Israel in a spiritual relationship with God. They have been brought back to the land in unbelief, stage one, and the spirit of God has returned to them, stage two.

Therefore, we are dealing with the “golden age” when the Messiah rules.

Response

Those who hold the view that it is a “false sense of security” argue that this idea of “peacefully” is not supported by the word Hebrew *betab* or the context.

In fact, nowhere in the entire text does it speak of Israel as living in peace. Rather, Israel is merely living in security, which has the idea of “confidence,” regardless of whether it is during a state of war or peace.

Furthermore, there is no mention of the Messiah whatsoever in this entire episode. It seems strange that if the Messiah, the Davidic King, was ruling over the nation which is at peace, that He is not mentioned as coming to their aid during this invasion. Indeed, He is conspicuous by His absence.

Therefore, these commentators conclude that there is nothing in the various descriptions of Israel, which is given in this passage, that is not true of Israel today—they are in their land in unbelief of the Lord trusting in things other than Him.

all of them

The final Hebrew word is translated by the English phrase “all of them.” To whom does this refer? In this context, it can only refer to all of those living securely in the land of Israel. All of those who have returned to the mountains of Israel are dwelling in security.

Charles Feinberg makes a fitting conclusion:

Finally, they were viewed as living securely, all of them, without fear of invasion or deportation (Feinberg)

Whether it is a genuine security, or a false sense of security, it seems clear that the nation is NOT expecting this invasion.

This sets the stage for what we will find in the next verse where God again addresses Gog and his invading force.

Ezekiel 38:9

You will advance; you will come like a storm. You will be like a cloud covering the earth, you, all your troops, and the many other peoples with you.

It's important to realize that the actions we are about to consider in verse nine will take place when *all* seven conditions of verse eight are fulfilled. Thus, it is when the people of Israel least expect it that the enemy will come down upon them.

You

The “you” here is singular in Hebrew. Gog will advance; he will come like a storm . . . like a cloud cover the earth. Again, his role is emphasized.

will advance

The Hebrew verb translated “advance” also means to “go up.” It is used often in Scripture and at times speaks idiomatically of a military context. They “go up” to battle.

Also, since Jerusalem is 2,400 feet above sea level one always “goes up” to the holy city. The same holds true when the land of Israel is referenced in Scripture—one always goes up to Israel, regardless of the direction of one’s movement.

like a storm

There are two similes which are used to describe the manner of which this invasion will occur. The first one, “like a storm” seems to indicate something that happens violently and suddenly. As we all know, storms tend to break out in this manner.

Therefore, this invasion of Israel, which will be led by this evil personage Gog, will take place in a sudden and unexpected manner. In fact, it can be compared to a sudden thunderstorm that unleashes its viciousness in such a manner that it catches the people unaware as well as unprepared.

you will be like a cloud covering the earth

The next simile describes, in a graphic way, the extent, as well as the size of the invading armies. The Hebrew verb is used eleven times in the Old Testament and has the implication of not just “to cover,” but to cover something for the purpose of concealing it.

This indicates that Gog and his horde will be so numerous, that their troops will cover the land so completely, that a person would not be able to see the ground upon which they are moving upon! Basically, it is a way of describing innumerable troops.

you

You is a reference to Gog. It is emphatic in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, the Septuagint.

and all your troops

Gog of course will not be alone. He will be coming with all of his troops from these various geographical areas as we have described earlier in the chapter.

These first two similes indicate that the people of Israel are caught off guard by this huge invading army. It is totally unexpected and, as can be imagined, would be quite shocking.

However the Bible says that the Lord, Yahweh or Jehovah, the God of Israel, does not sleep nor slumber. It is He who will now fight for His ancient people at the time this great invasion suddenly comes upon them.

As we have noted in this passage in Ezekiel, it is the Lord God of Israel who had initiated all of these future events. The Lord is behind them—the Lord is in control of them while His people are spiritually dead.

The Motive Of The Invaders (Verses 10-13)

These next verses will now inform us as to why these nations are about to invade Israel. While, as we have noted, the Lord has put hooks in the jaw of Gog to bring his coalition to the Promised Land, the human motive, the secular motive from their perspective, is now revealed to us.

Ezekiel 38:10

This is what the sovereign LORD says: On that day thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil plan

This is what the sovereign LORD says:

Note that again we have the emphasis on God's sovereignty. As we have seen throughout this entire section, the God of Scripture is completely in control of all that is transpiring. This truth should be very comforting to all believers.

On that day

This phrase refers to the section that we have just dealt with. Israel is again settled in the land, living in a false sense of security, not remotely expecting this attack when it takes place.

In addition, it will occur in the far-distant future from the time that Ezekiel wrote.

thoughts will come into your mind,

The Hebrew literally says, "words will go up upon your heart." This is speaking of Gog—the wicked leader of this ungodly coalition. These are the thoughts that will come into his depraved mind.

and you will devise an evil plan

Notice that the Lord attributes personal responsibility to Gog. It is he who will devise this plan. It is his idea and he will be held responsible. Yet we also know from the context that the Lord is ultimately behind all of these events.

Here we have an example of God's sovereignty working with human responsibility. Each is true—though we do not know exactly how this can happen from our limited perspective. So, we accept both of these truths while humbly recognizing that we are unable to reconcile them completely in our finite minds.

Ezekiel 38:11

You will say, I will invade a land of unwalled towns; I will advance against those living quietly in security— all of them living without walls and barred gates

You will say

The wicked scheme of Gog is now disclosed for us. We are given insight into the evil thoughts of this leader. We are informed how he sees the land of Israel. Four things describe his perception of the people and the land.

I will invade a land of unwalled towns

To begin with, he sees it as a land of unwalled towns. This means that they have not built walls around their villages for protection as Israel did in ancient times.

Interestingly, it is only the Old City of Jerusalem has a wall around it in present-day Israel while the modern city has existed outside these walls since the 19th century.

This phrase has the likely meaning that the nation will lack protection from invasion since that was the purpose of building walls in ancient times. Thus, Israel will have made no special preparations against attack by building walls around its cities.

Again, they are not expecting this invasion to take place so they do not take any precautions.

I will advance against those living quietly

The second phrase tells of a people who are at living quietly. The Hebrew participle is used in Scripture to describe people who are “quiet, undisturbed, and at rest.”

This verb is used frequently in the books of Joshua and Judges to note the quiet or rest that resulted from Israel’s military victories over the Canaanites as they conquered the Land under Joshua. The term in these contexts refers to quiet, or rest, from military conflict.

in security

The third description is the Hebrew word *betah* which we previously encountered in verse eight. We noted that it has the idea of the nation living confidently in their circumstances—whether this confidence is real or imagined.

all of them living without walls and barred gates

Finally, Gog sees them all of them living without walls, and barred gates.

We have noted earlier that living without walls would literally mean that none of their cities or towns will have walls, as the ancients had, in order to defend itself from an invading army.

This portrait of Israel is reinforced by the comment that they will not have bars or gates—presumably in the walls that they do not have! Bars and gates were important points of defense in ancient city walls. None of this will be in place at this time.

What Can We Surmise From These Descriptions

There are a number of things that we can surmise from the descriptions given here.

First, this passage is from the perspective of Gog. He assumes that Israel has no real defenses and consequently the nation is vulnerable to a surprise attack. At least, he does not think that they have the sort of defenses that would stop his invading coalition.

Second, Israel seems to be relying on something, or someone, rather than the Lord. It is possible Israel’s sense of security may be based on the assumed strength of its military, or because of the agreement which they made with this final Antichrist.

Of course, it is also possible that they are truly dwelling in peace and security if this invasion occurs when the Messiah is ruling.

Third, we again emphasize that these conditions have never been true at any time in Israel's past. This being the case, then it must refer to a future time.

We have already noted this by the various phrases that were used to describe when this invasion would take place: "after many days" and "in the latter years" (38:8).

Keil says, "This description of Israel's mode of life also points beyond the times succeeding the Babylonian captivity."

The land of Israel is described in this passage in the following four ways:

- 1) the land of unwalled villages
- 2) those who are at rest
- 3) that live securely; and
- 4) all of them living without walls, and having no bars or gates.

Consequently, they are ripe for this unexpected invasion by Gog and his troops.

Ezekiel 38:12

to loot and plunder, to attack the inhabited ruins and the people gathered from the nations, who are acquiring cattle and goods, who live at the center of the earth.

We are now given two specific reasons as to *why* this invasion will occur—further insight into the motives of Gog. These reasons are indicated by a two Hebrew phrases, "to loot" and "to plunder."

In both instances, the Hebrew text uses the same word twice but in two different forms: a verb and a noun. As we have previously noted, when this type of literary device is in the text, it is used for emphasis.

to loot

The first phrase consists of two Hebrew words—a verb and a noun. They both have the meaning, "to loot."

Thus, since both the verb and the noun are from the same Hebrew root, it would mean something like "to loot loot." Obviously, this does not translate into English. Thus, English translations have rendered it in a number of ways, "to loot," "to capture spoil," etc.

and plunder

The second phrase is constructed like the first—to "plunder plunder." The word comes from the Hebrew root which means "to plunder, spoil, to take booty, and to rob."

Thus, Gog's motive for invasion is to gain material wealth by looting and robbing Israel.

The remainder of verse twelve reinforces these two opening declarations concerning Gog's motive for invasion.

to attack the inhabited ruins

A third phrase declares that Gog desires to attack the inhabited land that had been ruined by the ravages of war.

and against the people who are gathered from the nations

Gog desires to invade the land that the Lord has given to His people. This will be his big mistake!

After the Lord has miraculously brought Israel back from the nations of the world to their ancient homeland, and has allowed them to prosper materially, this evil personage Gog wants to thwart what the Lord has done. He wants to take something that does not belong to him, from a land that is not his. The desolate land which is now finally producing great wealth, because of God's blessing, is what he is attempting to loot and plunder.

who have acquired cattle and goods.

The nation Israel has miraculously survived over 1,900 years of dispersion among the nations. The fact that this nation still exists is one of the great miracles of history. Now God has brought them back to her land while they are still in unbelief because He has a future plan for them. In the interim, they have become highly productive and wealthy.

At this time, the wicked Gog and his forces desire to attack them to take away this newly gained wealth. In doing so, he is trying to thwart the plan that the Lord has for them.

who live at the center of the earth.

This is a fascinating phrase. Twice Israel and Jerusalem are said in Ezekiel to dwell at the center of the earth. Earlier he wrote:

This is what the sovereign LORD says: This is Jerusalem; I placed her in the center of the nations with countries all around her (Ezekiel 5:5 NET).

Is This Speaking Of The Entire Earth?

The Hebrew word translated "the earth" is the Hebrew term *ha'aretz*. It is found over 2,500 times in the Hebrew Old Testament and is used in a number of different ways. In this context it clearly is a reference to the entire earth. The emphasis here is Israel being in the center of the earth's land—the geographical navel as far as the Lord is concerned.

In fact, the Hebrew word for "center" is literally "the navel."

This brings up the question. Why is Israel's location mentioned at this point in the passage? Why is it so important?

C. F. Keil makes the following observation:

One motive of Gog for making the attack was to be found in the possessions of Israel; a second is given in the words: who dwell upon the navel of the earth. This figurative expression is to be explained from Ezekiel 5:5: "Jerusalem in the midst of the nations." This navel is not a figure denoting the high land, but signifies the land situated in the middle of the earth, and therefore the land most glorious and most richly blessed; so that they who dwell there occupy the most exalted position among the nations. A covetous desire for the possessions of the people of God, and envy at his exalted position in the center of the world,

are therefore the motives by which Gog is impelled to enter upon his predatory expedition against the people living in the depth of peace (Keil)

The Source Of The Ancient Belief

This ancient belief about Israel's special location explains another well-known statement which is derived from these two passages in Ezekiel:

As the navel is set in the center of the human body, so is the land of Israel the navel of the world . . . situated in the center of the world, and Jerusalem in the center of the land of Israel, and the sanctuary in the center of Jerusalem, and the holy place in the center of the sanctuary, and the ark in the center of the holy place, and the foundation stone before the holy place, because from it the world was founded.

Therefore, from the human perspective, we discover that economic gain was not the only reason for Gog's invasion.

Indeed, Israel's special status in the world, its geographical location, is another reason as to why these evil people invade the country in the "last days."

Ezekiel 38:13

Sheba and Dedan and the traders of Tarshish with all its (young warriors young lions, or villages) will say to you, Have you come to loot? Have you assembled your armies to plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away cattle and goods, to haul away a great amount of spoils?

We are now told of the response by some of Israel's neighbors to this impending invasion.

Sheba and Dedan

Who are Sheba and Dedan? Again, we must go back to the table of nations in Genesis 10 for the answer:

The sons of Ham were Cush, Mizraim, Put, and Canaan. ⁷ The sons of Cush were Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The sons of Raamah were Sheba and Dedan (Genesis 10:6,7 NET)

From this list we discover that Sheba and Dedan are descendants of Ham. Consequently, we continue to find the origin of almost every people-group recorded in this chapter as having been listed in the Table of Nations.

In addition, earlier in Ezekiel we find that Sheba and Dedan were "trading nations."

Speaking of the ancient city of Tyre, we read:

Dedan was your client in saddlecloths for riding (Ezekiel 27:20).

Tyre also traded with Sheba:

The merchants of Sheba and Raamah engaged in trade with you; they traded the best kinds of spices along with precious stones and gold for your products. Haran, Kanneh, Eden, merchants from Sheba, Asshur, and Kilmad were your clients They traded with you choice garments, purple clothes and embroidered work, and multicolored carpets, bound and reinforced with cords; these were among your merchandise (Ezekiel 27:22-24).

In this context, it is speaking of these nations trading with ancient city of Tyre—a city which the Lord pronounced judgment upon!

Where Are They Located?

Most commentators believe that Sheba and Dedan are located in the modern country of Saudi Arabia or somewhere in that locale. There is also the view that ancient Sheba is located today in what is now Yemen, in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, while Dedan is Saudi Arabia.

In sum, no matter where their precise location, there seems to be little doubt that this is a reference to the general geographical area that is in the vicinity modern day Saudi Arabia.

As indicated in the context, Sheba and Dedan were known for their commercial trading. Consequently, this is the reason for their interest in the Gog invasion of nearby Israel.

the traders (merchants) of Tarshish

We next consider a highly debated phrase. Sheba and Dedan are said to be in alignment with “the traders, or merchants, of Tarshish.” What does the phrase “the traders of Tarshish” mean?

Tarshish In The Old Testament

As was true of Sheba and Dedan, Tarshish is said to be made up of merchants or traders. From the various descriptions in Scripture we can make a number of conclusions.

To begin with, we read in the Old Testament about the “ships of Tarshish” which were large oceangoing vessels. We read earlier in Ezekiel:

The ships of Tarshish were the transports for your merchandise. “So you were filled and weighed down in the heart of the seas” (Ezekiel 27:25 NET).

Furthermore, these ships would carry valuable cargo including gold and silver. We are told the following about King Solomon:

The king had a fleet of trading ships at sea along with the ships of Hiram. Once every three years it returned, carrying gold, silver and ivory, and apes and baboons (I Kings 10:22 NET).

“Trading ships,” in Hebrew has the literal meaning of, “a fleet of Tarshish [ships].” This probably refers to large ships either made in Tarshish, or capable of traveling to the distant western port of Tarshish.

Elsewhere the Bible states that the ships of Tarshish brought people from afar. Isaiah wrote:

Surely the islands look to me; in the lead are the ships of Tarshish, bringing your children from afar, with their silver and gold, to the honor of the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has endowed you with splendor (Isaiah 60:9 NET).

Thus, we can conclude that Tarshish was a distant port from Israel. These merchants also traded in iron, tin, and lead as Ezekiel had earlier written:

Tarshish did business with you because of your great wealth of goods; they exchanged silver, iron, tin and lead for your merchandise (Ezekiel 27:12 NET).

From these various passages in Scripture, we discover that the ships of Tarshish were the largest seagoing vessels known to the Ancient Near East. Furthermore, the name was eventually applied to any large ocean-going vessel. Indeed, the ships of Tarshish became a proverbial as an expression of sea power.

Where Was Tarshish?

From Scripture we can deduce that Tarshish was some distant seaport from the coast of Israel. But exactly where in the ancient world was Tarshish located? Many answers have been given.

Option 1: The Septuagint: Carthage (Modern Day Tunisia)

The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, renders Tarshish with the Greek word which refers to ancient Carthage. Today this would denote the modern North African country of Tunisia. Many of the ancient Hebrew lexicons, or dictionaries, agree with this designation.

Option 2: The Location Is Uncertain

However, many contemporary lexicons assume that we do not know the location with any certainty. One of the modern Hebrew lexicons had this to say about Tarshish.

The actual site within the lands of the Mediterranean has not been established” (KB)

Thus, while the older lexicons accepted the identification with Carthage, the modern ones are more skeptical. Other commentators also take this same position—the exact location is unknown.

Option 3: Britain

In the past, there has been the suggestion that Tarshish can be identified with modern day Great Britain. However, this identification has not convinced many scholars though it is still popular in some circles.

Option 4: Spain

The best answer seems to be that Tarshish was a wealthy trading community on the extremity of the Mediterranean world. It is the ancient Tartessus which is in the present-day nation of Spain. Ralph Alexander writes:

Tarshish is . . . commonly thought to be located in southern Spain. An inscription from Esharhaddon’s reign implies that it is located at the west end of the Mediterranean Sea (Alexander p. 794).

The Ancient Phoenicians

If this view is correct, then the merchants of Tarshish are in some way connected with the seafaring Phoenicians of 3,000 years ago. These Phoenicians merchants established trading posts that were scattered along their various routes in the Ancient Near East during the time of Solomon and thereafter.

with all its (young warriors, leaders, young lions, villages)

Along with Tarshish we have the phrase that has been variously translated, “with all its young warriors” “leaders,” “with all its young lions,” “with all its villages.” Why do we find these different translations?

In a nutshell, here is the issue.

The Reasons As To Why The Verse Is Variousy Translated

The present Hebrew text reads, “with all its young lions.” Yet this does not solve the question. The original Hebrew text consists of consonants only—there are no vowels. The vowel points were added in the seventh century A.D. by Jewish scribes known as the Masoretes.

The vowel points the Masoretes placed in this verse makes the text read, “young lions.”

However, the same set of consonants could be repointed with other vowels to read “with all its villages.”

In fact, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, has translated the Hebrew as, “with all its villages.” The ancient Syriac version also has this reading.

The NIV 2011, as well as the RSV, follow this understanding of the Hebrew text. This explains why certain translations, and certain commentaries, will refer to the traders of Tarshish “with all its villages.”

Young Lions Is Obviously Symbolic

Now if one believes that “young lions” is the best way to understand the original text, then the question becomes what do these words mean? Obviously, “young lions” is used symbolically in this context. But what is it symbolic of?

There is no agreement on this. This is why we find certain translations interpret the phrase “young lions” to be something like its “young warriors,” or “leaders,” or something like that. In these cases, there is usually a note in the margin which says the Hebrew word literally reads, “young lions.”

Thus, if we accept “young lions” as the proper reading then who is it referring to?

Option 1: It Represents Strong Leaders Or Greedy Rulers

Young lions could refer to the *nature* of the rulers. Charles Feinberg writes:

The young lions of Tarshish are taken to mean either strong leaders or princes or greedy rulers of these commercial communities (Feinberg p. 223)

Young lions are often used as figures of energetic rulers (Alexander).

A strong or energetic ruler is not necessarily the same as a “greedy ruler.” This is why English Standard Version safely translates the verse, “all its leaders.”

Option 2: It Represents Other Western Nations

Some see the phrase “the young lions” not referring to individual leaders but rather to the nations that came out of ancient Tarshish—namely Spain. However, the identity of the nations is debatable.

Some view this as a reference to the nations of Central and South America and possibly the United States since Spain was involved in discovering North America and ruling over parts of it for a time.

Others think that Tarshish, the farthest known land to the west of Israel, could be referring to all the nations of Western Europe. Either way, these commentators believe that certain nations of the western world are identified here rather than specific leaders.

It has also contended that this reference to the far western colony of Tarshish was meant as a representation of the large “last days” empire of the Final Antichrist.

Consequently, it has been suggested that Tarshish, or modern Spain, could have been used by Ezekiel to represent all of the western nations which join with the Persian Gulf states in responding to this invasion.

If Villages Is Accepted As The Correct Reading

Now, if “all its villages” is accepted as the proper reading here, then one could seemingly argue the same way. And this is exactly what we find with many commentators. They believe the text is telling us that some of the countries, or villages, that come out of Tarshish will be involved in this “last days” scenario.

Not All Agree

However, a number of commentators do not think that the phrase “with all its young lions” or “with all its villages” has any such meaning. All it is saying is that the leaders of Tarshish are involved in these questions to Gog. In other words, it has nothing to do with any nations that might have sprung from the location of ancient Tarshish. Hence, the meaning of Tarshish in this context is anything but settled.

have you come to loot?

We know that Sheba, and Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish are not part of the invading force. As to why, we are not told. However, they are clearly a community of nations which are involved in trade.

When they see the invasion beginning to take place they ask a number of questions. The first one is, “Have you come to loot?”

have you assembled your armies to plunder

The next question is repeating the previous question in a different form, which is typical in Hebrew.

to carry away silver and gold,

Now the specifics are given. This phrase explains some of the booty Gog and his forces are likely after—precious metals.

to take away cattle

The Septuagint renders the Hebrew word as “possessions” or “acquisitions” rather than cattle. The Hebrew word can mean possessions—although it usually refers to livestock as possessions.

and goods

This Hebrew word translated “goods” has the idea of “possessions” also. Interestingly, the Septuagint uses only one term here to describe the cattle and goods—possessions. There is no word for cattle in the Greek text.

to haul away a great amount of spoils?

Now we are told that this wealth consist of a “great amount.” Therefore, it is clear that the human motive of Gog and his invading forces is to steal this great wealth of Israel. But what exactly will they be after?

What Is The Wealth They Are After?

Over the years, many Bible students have speculated about what Gog will be attempting to plunder. Some have said that it is likely the mineral wealth of the Dead Sea. It is well-known that this is the richest on earth.

There is also the possibility that the valuable oil fields that have recently been discovered will be the object of their invasion. Nobody knows for certain—perhaps they are after both.

Whatever the particulars may be, one thing is certain, Israel in the last days will have considerable wealth. The fact that the Promised Land possesses these riches will motivate the leader of this coalition, Gog, along with his allies, to invade the Holy Land in order to steal that wealth. This we can know for certain.

Israel Today

There is no doubt that Israel is by far the richest country in the region. For one thing, the nation has developed a highly productive economy.

Therefore, Israel is rightly considered one of the most advanced countries in that part of the world in economic and industrial development. Consequently, what we find in Israel today is consistent with what the nation will be like when Gog invades. The stage has indeed been set.

Thus, regardless of the specific incentives of Gog and his coalition, this passage makes it very clear that the land of Israel is invaded for the purpose of stealing her great wealth. There is no doubt about this.

What Do These Questions Mean?

We have seen that Sheba and Dedan ask a number of questions of the invading armies of Gog. But it is not clear as to *why* these questions are asked. Again, many suggestions have been given.

Option 1: Will These Nations Come To Israel's Defense?

There is the view that these nations will actually attempt to come to Israel's defense when these armies begin their invasion. They are disgusted at what they see is taking place, so they attempt to help.

However, this does not seem to be the case as Feinberg notes:

Some interpreters have inferred from verse 13 that these nations will befriend Israel and come to her defense, but this cannot be maintained with certainty (Feinberg p. 223).

Furthermore, if this takes place during the seventieth week of Daniel, the Great Tribulation period, we know that Israel will be isolated in the world at that time. Thus nobody will come to her aid. Nobody, that is, but God!

Option 2: Are These Nations Protesting?

A number of commentators see this as a lame protest of the invasion of Gog and his coalition. In other words, in their asking of these questions they are protesting what is about to take place.

Often it is assumed that they are remaining neutral in this conflict. Either they are not able to get involved or they are not willing to get involved. In either case, they do not get involved.

Option 3: Do They Want A Part Of The Spoil?

Another view sees these nations as actually wanting to participate in the spoiling of Israel. Taylor writes:

The force of verse 13 seems to be that Gog's enterprise has roused the greed of other nations to join the plunder, or to traffic in the stolen goods. They are typical of those who will not initiate wrong-doing, but are eager to cash in on the proceeds of it (Taylor p. 239).

This is possible. However, there does not seem to be enough information to be certain as to the motivation of the questions.

Ezekiel 38:14

“Therefore, prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog: ‘This is what the sovereign LORD says: On that day when my people Israel are living securely, you will take notice

Therefore, prophesy, son of man, and say to Gog:

Ezekiel is once more addressed as “son of man” and is yet again commanded to prophesy directly to this personage Gog.

This is what the sovereign LORD says:

Let us not miss the fact that the Lord again adds the term “sovereign” to His identity. He is not only the Lord; He is the sovereign one—the One in control over all things.

on that day

Here we have another emphasis of the future time when this event will take place. The fact that we have so many indicators in this passage of the time element such as, “the latter days,” “the last days,” should not be missed.

when my people Israel are living securely

We also have further emphasis that the people of Israel are HIS people. They are living in some type of security; either real or imagined.

You will take notice

This refers to Gog. He will understand the situation on the ground. He will view them as a defenseless nation ready to be invaded.

Ezekiel 38:15

and come from your place, from the remote parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a vast army.

and come from your place

As the Lord continues to address the leader Gog, He tells him to come from his own place. In other words, you, Gog, are leaving the place where you belong and are going to a place where you do not belong.

from the remote parts of the north

Where is Gog's place? It is said here, as we have already seen in verse six, to be "the remote parts of the north." We will find this phrase will also be used again in Ezekiel 39:2.

Interestingly, three times we find the Lord emphasizing the fact that Gog will come from the remotest parts of the North to lead this invasion of Israel.

As we have mentioned, the country that resides in the farthest north from Israel is modern day Russia. This is true whether we use as starting point as Israel, or Babylon—the place where Ezekiel was given this prophecy.

you and many peoples with you

As already noted, Gog will come with a huge army of its own, along with many allies from other countries which are on the north, south, east and west of Israel.

all of them riding on horses, a great company and a vast army.

This repeats what we read earlier. This vast army is said to be riding on horseback. This does not mean that the invaders are limited to horseback.

Ezekiel 38:16

You will advance against my people Israel like a cloud covering the land. It will happen in the last days, Gog, that I will bring you against my land so that the nations may know me, when I show myself holy through you in their sight.

Now we have the explanation as to why God has allowed these things to happen. This verse plainly states that the Lord God of Israel views this Gog-lead invasion as a direct attack upon Him.

You will advance

The "you" is singular. Again, the Lord emphasizes that Gog is leading this coalition. He is personally responsible.

against my people Israel

The Lord again emphasizes that Gog will "come up against *My people* Israel." This will be his fatal mistake—attacking His people in His land. The fact that the Lord repeats this—that Gog is attacking His particular people—is something which should not escape our notice.

like a cloud covering the land

This is also repeating what we read earlier in verse nine. As they begin their advance it seems that nothing can stop this innumerable army. However, they are in for a huge surprise.

it will happen in the last days Gog

Again, the time frame is emphasized. This would further indicate to Ezekiel's contemporaries in Babylon that this particular prophecy is not directed at them. These events will take place in the far off future.

I will bring you

Though evil thoughts have arisen in the heart and mind of Gog, it is the Lord who is ultimately directing these events. Charles Feinberg gives a good explanation:

Nowhere in Scripture will it be found that God instills in the heart of any man any evil purpose or device. He is the Promoter of good and never evil. However, the Old Testament presentation is always intended to show that God is the sovereign Ruler and Overruler of all. Thus it is stated that God will bring the enemy against His land. He actually will bring these nations to the doom which will already be in their wicked hearts. It is parallel to the condition of Pharaoh in Egypt in the time of the exodus. God does not, and did not implant stubbornness in the heart of the Egyptian king, but he did allow him to be surrounded by circumstances which called forth the wickedness in that heart (Feinberg p. 224).

against my land

Again we discover the emphasis—it's against HIS land. Thus, Gog is attacking His people and His land; so Gog is attacking Him!

This is crucial to appreciate if we are going to have a proper understanding of the events recorded in these two chapters of Ezekiel. In the last days, after the nation has rejected Jesus as their Messiah, as they are in back in their land while remaining in unbelief of their Messiah, we find that they are still His people in His land. Therefore, the physical descendants of Abraham have not been rejected by the Lord. Indeed He still has a purpose for them.

so that the nations may acknowledge me

Now the purpose of this invasion is made clear—that the nations of the world may acknowledge the Lord, the God of Israel. Why will they acknowledge Him? It is because the Lord is still lovingly looking after His ancient people. In fact, He demonstrates this by His supernatural protection of them.

when I show myself holy through you in their sight.

In fact, the Lord tells Gog that it is through him that He will be acknowledged. Thus, we discover that it is the intent of the Lord, through all of this, is to demonstrate who He is, and what is important to Him—His people and His land. The Lord does this by using Gog as his instrument. Consequently, we have been given the divine purpose for the attack.

Ezekiel 38:17

This is what the sovereign LORD says: Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied (in those days) (for years) that I would bring you against them?

This is what the sovereign LORD says:

Now for the final time in this chapter, the prophecy is again said to be the word of the Lord.

NOTE: There Are Some Difficulties Here With The Translation

The rest of this verse has been translated and interpreted in a number of different ways. They include the following.

Option 1: A Statement Assuming: Yes, You Are The One

The NIV translates this as a statement from the Lord where the answer is a resounding, “yes.” It reads:

You are the one I spoke of in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel. At that time they prophesied for years that I would bring you against them (Ezekiel 38:17 NIV)

Option 2: A Question Assuming A Yes Answer

Other translations, such as the New English Translation, translate it as a question, not a statement, which also assumes a “Yes” answer:

This is what the sovereign LORD says: Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days that I would bring you against them? (Ezekiel 38:17 NET).

Option 3: A Question Assuming A No Answer

Yet others see this as a question assuming a “no” answer.” It would be translated as follows.

You are not the one of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days that I would bring you against them.

This perspective says Gog was never predicted as the one who would come down from the north and attack Israel.

So the issue is as follows: Has Gog’s appearance been predicted by the earlier prophets, or is the Lord saying that Gog has *not* been prophesied previously in Scripture? We will examine the various options.

Option 1 And 2: Gog Is The One Who Was Prophesied

We will group option 1 and 2 together because the end result is the same; it assumes Gog’s coming was predicted.

Are you (you are) the one of whom I spoke in former days

Whether we see this as a statement or a question, most translations assume the answer here will be yes.

If it is a question asked by the Lord, it is not asked because He does not know the answer. Indeed, as we always discover in Scripture, when the Lord asks a question, it is not because He attempting to discover something He does not know! .

If it is a statement, it is saying that his coming has been long-awaited. Again, each of these ways of translating the text assumes a “yes” answer.

by my servants the prophets of Israel

This assumes somewhere in written Scripture that Gog has been predicted as arriving.

who prophesied (in those days) (for years) that I would bring you against them?

The Hebrew text reads “for years” but many translations believe this is not correct so they translate it who prophesied “in those days.”

If This Is A Question

This verse has been interpreted in a couple of different ways.

Some argue that the Hebrew grammar demands that the question is to be answered in the affirmative.

Yes, Gog, the leader of this coalition that will invade Israel is the one whom the prophets previously wrote about. In other words, this campaign of Gog has ultimately been orchestrated by the Lord. The prophets foretold this.

Where Is This Prediction Found?

So if this is the correct understanding, whether by the Lord asking a question or making a statement, then, we ask the obvious question: Where are these other Old Testament predictions that the Lord mentions in this passage? Are there specific prophecies that single out Gog?

The answer to this last question seems to be, “No.” There is no specific prophecy that names Gog as the leader of this “last days” confederation which will invade Israel.

While there is no direct reference to the personage of Gog and his confederacy there are predictions by the prophets of the Lord protecting His people and destroying invading enemies. Charles Feinberg writes:

It is possible that there is no direct reference to any specific group of prophecies but to a general concept that permeates prophecy. Earlier prophets, in speaking of eschatological times, foretold catastrophic events and God’s judgment on Israel’s enemies, though the specific name of Gog did not appear in their prophecies (Feinberg p. 225).

Thus, Gog is representative of the evil individuals and nations that have attempted to invade God’s land and harm God’s people. Since this happens at the end of the present age, Gog’s invasion and subsequent destruction will be climatic of all that has gone before.

Option 3: Gog Is Not The One

The last option believes the answer should be no—Gog is not the one. The reasons are as follows.

First, Gog is never mentioned by name as a future leader who will attack Israel. As we just stated, all agree that there is no direct prophecy naming him.

Second, the past predictions of foes coming to Israel from the north had already been fulfilled in by Ezekiel’s time. This includes those by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. There was no other future prediction of an enemy which will come from the north that remained unfulfilled.

However, the main reason is that all previous nations that we predicted to come down against Israel were agents of God’s judgment on His people!

In other words, they were sent by the Lord to come down to Israel to punish the wicked nation. In this instance, Gog is coming down on his own volition, not to do the will of God, but to attack a defenseless people that have been supernaturally brought back to their land by the Lord.

Therefore, he is not the one who has been predicted in former times.

Consequently, the verse should not be translated as a question but rather as a statement of the Lord: You are not the one of whom I spoke . . . If he is not God's instrument, then he is there by his own evil doing.

Ezekiel 38:18

On that day, when Gog invades the land of Israel, declares the sovereign LORD, my rage will mount up in my anger.

On that day

These words refer to the time when Gog crosses the borders of Israel as can be seen by the next phrase.

when Gog invades the land of Israel

Therefore, this verse tells us that the invading army will actually enter the Promised Land. Interestingly, the Lord waits until the army crosses the border before He will respond to their invasion. As we will see, His response will be devastating.

declares the sovereign LORD

Again we have this expression about His sovereignty. He is in complete control—no matter what the circumstances may look like at the time.

my rage

The Hebrew noun which is used here can have a variety of meanings. These include, “heat, poison, rage, or wrath.” It is translated “rage” in this passage. This word is used 110 times in the Hebrew Bible to refer to either human rage or divine rage. It is mostly used of divine rage. Interestingly, the greatest number of these occurrences of this usage is found in Ezekiel (31 times).

will mount up in my anger

The Hebrew expression found in this phrase illustrates the strongest kind of anger that one can have. In fact it is the picture of the breath of an angry person who inhales and exhales through his nose. The psalmist wrote.

Smoke ascended from his nose; fire devoured as it came from his mouth; he hurled down fiery coals (Psalm 18:8 NET).

The message is clear: the hot anger of the Lord, which will result in His judgment, is about to come upon Gog and His allies. The patience of the Lord has reached its limit.

Ezekiel 38:19

In my zeal, in the fire of my fury, I declare that on that day there will be a great earthquake in the land of Israel.

We now come to the last section of this chapter (verses 19-23). It begins with the Lord revealing His attitude by which He will defend His people Israel.

Once again, we have two phrases that describe the anger of the Lord toward this personage Gog.

In my zeal

The Hebrew noun translated “zeal” occurs some seventeen times in the Old Testament being found mostly in Ezekiel (seven times). The basic meaning is “God’s activity in a punitive sense; anger, wrath.” (KB)

His anger is directed toward Gog and his hordes who are attempting to enter His land and plunder the wealth of His chosen people.

This is consistent with what the Lord had said earlier through the prophet Ezekiel. He is protective over His people and His land:

Therefore this is what the sovereign LORD says: Surely I have spoken in the fire of my zeal against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who with great joy and utter contempt have made my land their property and prey, because of its pasture.’ “Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and hills, the ravines and valleys, ‘This is what the sovereign LORD says: Look, I have spoken in my zeal and in my anger, because you have endured the insults of the nations (Ezekiel 36:5-6 NET).

Again, the Lord expresses His anger towards those individuals and nations who desire to take from Israel that which does not belong to them. The insults from the various nations are about to stop.

in the fire of my fury

The next two words in Hebrew—translated here by “fire” and “fury”—emphasize the absolute anger of the Lord. In fact, it is the strongest way in which grammatically the Lord could state His intent!

Indeed, His fury, His wrath, is on fire! It is blazing against Gog and his invading armies. This type of anger from the Lord is unparalleled in any other portion of Ezekiel and perhaps anywhere in the Old Testament!

I declare that on that day

This anger causes Him to make a solemn declaration. He predicts when it will happen, “on that day.” Again we find the emphasis of the timing of this event; when Gog crosses the border of the Promised Land.

there will be a great earthquake in the land of Israel.

Now we arrive at the specific prediction. When Gog and his hordes begin their invasion of the land of Israel the Lord will do two things.

First, He will send a great earthquake.

Second, this earthquake will be centered in one geographical spot—the Land of Israel.

Therefore, we have two specific predictions as to what will happen at the moment of this invasion.

Ezekiel 38:20

The fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the wild beasts, all the things that creep on the ground, and all people who live on the face of the earth will shake at my presence. The mountains will topple, the cliffs will fall, and every wall will fall to the ground.

The fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the wild beasts, all the things that creep on the ground

We are now told the affect that this earthquake will have on all living creatures. First, the Lord singles out the animal kingdom. Notice it is complete, the land, the sea, and the air. Everything in nature will be affected.

and all people who live on the face of the earth will shake at my presence.

And of course, humanity will also be affected as well. Nothing will escape.

The last three phrases explain the enormity of this quake.

The mountains will topple, the cliffs will fall, and every wall will fall to the ground.

One can only imagine how frightened this invading army will be when the earthquake hits them as they are entering the Promised Land.

Yet the earthquake is just the beginning!

Ezekiel 38:21

I will call for a sword to attack Gog on all my mountains, declares the sovereign LORD; every man's sword will be against his brother.

To begin with, we have a translational issue in the first part of the verse. The Hebrew text is difficult. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, recognized the difficulty and translated the first part differently.

This is reflected in the Revised Standard Version. It says:

I will summon every kind of terror against Gog, says the Lord GOD; every man's sword will be against his brother (RSV).

Compare this to this translation which reflects most ancient and modern versions:

I will call for a sword to attack Gog on all my mountains, declares the sovereign LORD; every man's sword will be against his brother.

Therefore, in the Septuagint, followed by the RSV, we have the Lord summoning, or calling for, "every kind of terror against Gog" instead "for a sword to attack Gog on all my mountains."

Most commentators believe that the traditional Hebrew text, though difficult, is preferred here. Taylor writes:

But despite the difficult Hebrew, the AV (KJV) rendering is fully consonant with passages such as 5:17; 6:3; 11:8; 12:14 etc., and it alone makes sense of the consequent every man's sword is against his brother (Taylor p. 240).

We will proceed by assuming that the traditional text has it right.

I will call

Again the absolute control of the Lord over everything is again expressed. He will make a call—that is a summons or a decree. We also have this emphasis—this entire thing is the Lord’s doing even though Gog is personally responsible for his actions. Taylor writes:

Whereas the previous oracle regards Gog as fully responsible for planning the operation, these verses . . . show that God is bringing him against Israel. There is no inconsistency here. . . The same paradox marks Isaiah’s teaching on the Assyrian invasion (Isa. 10:5-19) and Habakkuk’s attitude toward the Chaldean menace (Hab. 1:5-11). It does not mean Gog is in the hand of an immoral God. Gog freely acts according to the evil dictates of his lust for conquest and easy spoil (Taylor pp. 239,240)

for a sword (to attack Gog)

His decree is that a sword will attack Gog and His coalition. Oftentimes in Scripture we find that the term “sword” is used as a metaphor for violent death. As we will discover, the sword will be from Gog’s own army *against* his own army!

on all my mountains

We should not miss this! The Lord emphasizes where this takes place. It is when Gog and his armies are on “His mountains.” In other words, they have now entered “His land,” the Promised Land, in an attempt to steal the wealth of His people. Gog’s calculations of what would happen could not have been more off the mark!

declares the sovereign LORD; every man’s sword will be against his brother.

According to the sovereign Lord, much of the destruction of the army of Gog will be a result of “friendly fire.”

It seems that this divinely appointed earthquake will be so severe that it will disorient Gog and his forces. The result is complete confusion to the point that they will begin killing one another. Consequently, the sword that the Lord would summon to defeat Gog would be that of his own allies destroying themselves.

This Is Nothing New

This type of killing by “friendly fire,” where armies are killing their own soldiers, is not something new as far as the Scriptures are concerned.

Indeed, we find examples of this with the account of Gideon and the Midianites (Judges 7:22), Saul and the Philistines (1 Samuel 14:20) and the prophecy of Haggai where the Lord said:

I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of the foreign kingdoms. I will overthrow chariots and their drivers; horses and their riders will fall, each by the sword of his brother (Haggai 3:22 NET).

Yet, in this instance, there will be something new! Indeed, never has there in the past brother killing brother, which can be compared to the slaughter which will take place at the time of this invasion.

The Judgment On Gog

God’s punishment on this leader Gog is indeed poetic. Instead of taking a huge spoil from the land of Israel, the Promised Land, and coming out with great riches, Gog and this allies, which looked seemingly unstoppable, will, for the most part destroy, themselves!

The arrogance of this evil “last days” leader when he first started out on this campaign will be in direct contrast to the ultimate embarrassment and humiliation that he will now suffer! The writer to the Hebrews said it well:

It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:31 NET).

Gog will indeed learn this lesson. Yet the earthquake, the confusion of the armies, their disorientation, and the friendly fire in which they kill one another, is not everything that this evil coalition will suffer. There is further punishment to be experienced.

Ezekiel 38:22

I will judge him with plague and bloodshed. I will rain down on him, his troops and the many peoples who are with him a torrential downpour, hailstones, fire, and brimstone.

I will judge him

Notice the first person singular. This explains it all—the evil Gog and his company will now experience the judgment of the Living God. One Hebrew lexicon explains the words in this manner:

I will enter into judgment with him for the treason he has committed against me (KB).

The idea, of course, is the treasonous offense of Gog is the basis for this judgment which is about to come.

The Specifics Of The Coming Judgment

The details are now given to us.

with plague and bloodshed

With the soldiers of Gog’s army killing one another, and countless dead bodies lying around unattended, one of the results will be a plague. This is biblically consistent with how God has punished His enemies in the past.

We have an example in plagues that the Lord brought upon Egypt during the time of the Exodus:

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Get up early in the morning, confront Pharaoh and say to him, This is what the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, says: Let my people go, so that they may worship me, or this time I will send the full force of my plagues against you and against your officials and your people, so you may know that there is no one like me in all the earth” (Exodus 9:13-14 NET).

In another instance, we find that the Lord brought a plague upon the Philistines when they took the Ark of the Covenant:

The LORD attacked the residents of Ashdod severely, bringing devastation on them. He struck the people of both Ashdod and the surrounding area with sores (1 Samuel 5:6 NET).

I will rain down on him, his troops and the many peoples who are with him

Note the punishment will be comprehensive. Indeed, neither Gog, his army, nor the coalition army will escape. All will die!

a torrential downpour

The rain is described as being torrential. But it is NOT mere rain that is descending.

hailstones

The hailstones will remind us of some of the Lord's past punishment as recorded in Scripture. There was the judgment upon the people of Egypt during the time of the Exodus:

When Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, the LORD sent thunder and hail, and lightning flashed down to the ground. So the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt; hail fell and lightning flashed back and forth. It was the worst storm in all the land of Egypt since it had become a nation (Exodus 9:23-24 NET).

Scripture tells us that the Lord also sent hailstones to aid Joshua in his battle with the Gibeonites:

As they fled before Israel on the road down from Beth Horon to Azekah, the LORD hurled large hailstones down on them, and more of them died from the hail than were killed by the swords of the Israelites (Joshua 10:11 NET)

We also discover from the Book of Revelation that there will be another horrific judgment of hailstones upon the people of the earth:

From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible (Revelation 16:21 NET).

fire, and brimstone

The fire and brimstone, or burning sulfur, echoes what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah:

Then the LORD rained down sulfur and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah. It was sent down from the sky by the LORD (Genesis 19:24 NET).

In addition, it also reminds us of other future judgments of the Lord that are recorded in the Book of Revelation:

Now this is what the horses and their riders looked like in my vision: The riders had breastplates that were fiery red, dark blue, and sulfurous yellow in color. The heads of the horses looked like lions' heads, and fire, smoke, and sulfur came out of their mouths. A third of humanity was killed by these three plagues, that is, by the fire, the smoke, and the sulfur that came out of their mouths (Revelation 9:17,18 NET).

This Is Divine Judgment!

One thing that is absolutely clear in all of this is that this is the Lord's supernatural judgment on Gog and his armies.

In addition, we should also note what we do not find here.

There is nothing said about Israel having anything to do with the defeat of Gog, or that they received any help from other countries.

To the contrary, what we have here is a complete supernatural judgment by the Lord, the God of the Bible, against this invasion by Gog and his armies.

Ezekiel 38:23

I will exalt and magnify myself; I will reveal myself before many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD.'

Interestingly, when this leader Gog will attack Israel in his arrogance, he believes that the end result will be accumulated wealth, along with glory. As we discover, this evil personage will get neither. In fact, it will be the living God who will be glorified by this attack!

This verse tells us that three specific things will be accomplished by the Lord as a result of the defeat of Gog.

I will exalt and magnify myself

First, God shall “magnify” Himself through these predicted events. The root word has the idea of, “to become great.” Here it has the sense of “to make oneself great” or “to prove to be great.”

This is precisely what the Lord, the God of Israel, will do when He will defeat, by Himself, this entire vast army that will descend upon unsuspecting Israel in the last days.

I will reveal myself before many nations

The Lord will reveal Himself to “many nations.” Note the wordplay here. These “many nations” of the invading force (verse six) would find themselves as “many nations” under the Lord’s judgment (verse 22) which would prove His holiness in the sight of many nations (vs. 23).

Then they will know that I am the LORD.

Third, the entire world will “come to know” that the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, is indeed God!

In fact, one of the results of these miraculous events is that the people of our world will begin to understand the great power of God. In other words, they will be without excuse.

Also note the wordplay here. Earlier the Lord talked about the “great” amount of spoil (verse 13) that Gog’s “great” forces (verse 15) were after.

Well, these great forces are going to be met with a “great” earthquake (verse 19) which will prove the Lord’s “greatness” (verse 23).

So who is the greatest after all?

Summary Of Ezekiel 38

Before we begin to consider Ezekiel Chapter 39 let us summarize what we have discovered so far. Ezekiel the prophet, in exile in Babylon, has been writing to encourage those who are away from their homeland, their destroyed capital of Jerusalem, and their destroyed temple.

In chapter 38, the prophet writes of a future invasion of Israel which will happen in the “last days.” This will take place after the nation has returned to their ancient homeland which has lain desolate for a long time. In other words, this particular prophetic scenario is for the distant future.

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

We are told that a personage named Gog, from the land of Magog, will lead a coalition of nations which will invade Israel. These nations will come against the inhabitants of the Promised Land from every direction.

The purpose will be to plunder the wealth of the country. This wicked leader Gog believes he can achieve this goal because Israel at that time is unsuspecting of any invasion. In fact, they are living in some type of security—either real or imagined. While Gog has these evil thoughts of invasion and plunder in his mind, it is ultimately the Lord who is orchestrating this entire episode.

Once Gog and his forces enter the land, then the Lord begins His judgment for this unprovoked invasion. Scripture emphasizes the unparalleled anger of the Lord for what Gog and his armies are attempting to do.

First, the Lord sends a great earthquake which will shake every living thing. Gog's army, which is seemingly disoriented by the great quaking, will begin to kill one another.

Other judgments, including plague and hailstones, are then sent from the Lord to further decimate his army.

The end result is that Israel, along with all the nations, understands that the Lord is God when they observe the complete and thorough destruction of Gog's forces. Indeed, this entire episode displays His power and glory.

With this in mind, let us now consider what is written in the next chapter.

EZEKIEL 39

The Hebrew language is fond of repetition and often reverts back to previous statements and enlarges upon them. This is why most Bible students see this chapter as another portrayal of the same events described in Chapter 38.

Hence the destruction of Gog and his coalition is retold in different language and with greater detail. This is typical of the practice in the Ancient Near East—a story is first told in broad detail then enlarged with more details filled in. This is seemingly what we have here.

Therefore, it seems best that we do *not* look at Chapter 39 as picking up where Chapter 38 left off. It is not continuing the story with new events which happen consecutively after what was previously described.

Instead, we should see it as filling in further details to that which was formerly given by the Lord to the prophet Ezekiel.

We should note that there are those Bible students who do see this as a separate battle from the one recorded in chapter 38. While this is a minority view, before we make any final conclusions as to the timing of the events in these two chapters, we should keep this option open.

The Mistake Of God's Enemies

As we will observe, this chapter outlines the serious missteps made by Gog and his coalition—mistakes often made by the enemies of the Lord.

As has been true in the past, the adversaries of the Lord have often relied upon their sheer numbers of combatants for victory over Israel. They have compared their superior military strength to what they viewed as a weakness of Israel's.

Of course, they forget that there is someone else who is fighting on the side of Israel—the Living God. He is never into account when these military excursions are planned. This is a huge mistake—for as Paul would later write to the Romans:

What then shall we say about these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? (Romans 8:31 NET).

As Martin Luther stated:

“One with God is a majority.”

Gog and his armies will discover this biblical truth once they enter the land which the Lord has promised to His people Israel. Indeed, it belongs to them and them alone.

Ezekiel 39:1

As for you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say: ‘This is what the sovereign LORD says: Look, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal! or (chief prince of Meshech and Tubal!)

Now the Lord speaks again to the prophet as he did at the beginning of this episode. In fact, verses one and two repeat chapter 38 verses two and three.

As for you, son of man,

As we noted, the title “son of man” is a phrase meaning “human being.” The Lord is contrasting Himself with the prophet.

prophesy against Gog,

Again the Lord tells him to prophesy directly against Gog.

and say: This is what the sovereign LORD says:

This is what the prophet is to say to Gog. The words of the biblical prophet were ultimately the words of God.

To sum up what the phrase “the Word of God” means—the Word of God consists of:

- (1) God’s direct speech recorded in Scripture, His own words
- (2) the words of the prophets who were inspired of God
- (3) the written word which records what the Lord has said and done whether through His own words or the words of His prophets.

All three of these have the same divine authority.

Look, I am against you, O Gog,

Gog is to pay attention to what the Lord is telling him. These sobering words “I am against you” should make Gog tremble.

prince of Rosh (or chief prince)

We have already looked at the difficulty here with respect to how the Hebrew word “Rosh” should be translated—whether it is a proper name or a noun describing a prince or leader—the chief prince. Our first appendix will look at this issue in detail.

of Meshech and Tubal

The place of origin is again emphasized.

Ezekiel 39:2

I will turn you around and drag you along; I will lead you up from the remotest parts of the north and bring you against the mountains of Israel.

There are four verbs in this sentence which will explain what the Lord is doing.

I will turn you around

First, He will turn Gog around. Again, we should note that this is entirely the Lord’s doing.

and drag you along

As we mentioned, the first two verses repeat what was said in 38:2,3. However, instead of saying He will put “hooks in your jaw” a new phrase is added in verse two.

Now we find Him saying the same thing but in a little different way—the Lord will “drag Gog along.”

The Translation Issue

There is a translation issue with respect to the meaning of the verb. The Hebrew root occurs only here in the Old Testament and there has been much discussion as to its meaning. The King James Version reads:

And I will turn thee back, and leave but the sixth part of thee (Ezekiel 39:2 KJV).

Instead of “drag you along” the KJV says, “leave but the sixth part of thee.” From this translation, many Bible students assume that five sixths of Gog’s army will be destroyed which, of course, means that one sixth will remain after the slaughter is over.

In addition, there are those that see the number “six” here as having some reference to the number of the Final Antichrist. The Book of Revelation says:

This calls for wisdom: Let the one who has insight calculate the beast's number, for it is man's number, and his number is 666 (Revelation 13:18 NET).

Although the root of this Hebrew word is similar to the Hebrew word for “six,” this is not the meaning of the verb here. Therefore, contrary to popular opinion, **NOBODY** from Gog’s army will be left alive! The destruction will be complete.

Other suggested translations are, “strike with six plagues,” or “draw with a hook of six teeth.” Yet, these do not seem to be correct either. The number “six” is not what is highlighted here.

Therefore, the equation that some have made with the Final Antichrist, whose number is 666, is unwarranted.

The best answer seems to be translating the verb as “lead on” or “drag along.” One scholar suggested it means to “lead along on a rope.”

Again, it is similar to what was said in the last chapter by the Lord—He will put “hooks in their jaws.” Now we are informed that the hooks are to “drag them along.”

Thus, the Lord will not only turn Gog around, He will actually “drag him along” to his destiny—to destroy him and his entire coalition of nations.

I will lead you up from the remotest parts of the north

The third verb tells us that the Lord is doing the leading. This is consistent with what He has been saying during this entire episode. He will lead Gog from his place in the remote north to where this evil personage will meet his doom.

A number of Bible teachers have equated Gog with the “King of the North” as recorded in Daniel 11:40,41,45 because of this geographical reference “the remotest parts of the north.”

As we have noted, this identification of Gog is one of the many issues which arises in these two chapters.

and bring you

Finally, the fourth verb tells us that the Lord will bring Gog to exactly where He wants him to be.

against the mountains of Israel.

Where is this place? It is the mountains of Israel—the Promised Land. It is here where the Lord will bring Gog.

Gog Is Under Compulsion

These four verbs, turn around, drag along, lead up, and bring, each carry the idea of compulsion. Indeed, three of these verbs in Hebrew are used in what is known as the Hiphil form.

Basically this form is used when someone, or something, is “caused” to do something. Hence it is often termed the “causative form.”

Thus we could translate these verbs, “I will cause you to be turned around” “I will cause you to be led up,” “I will cause you to be brought.”

The other verb translated “drag along” is in the intensive form in Hebrew known as Piel. It also has the idea of an intense compulsion.

In other words, we should appreciate that the selection of the forms of these verbs reveal that this is something that the Lord has orchestrated from the very beginning. He alone has caused all of this to happen even though Gog is the one who is ultimately held responsible for his own evil thoughts and evil plan.

Thus, while Gog thinks this huge military campaign is actually *his* idea, it is the Living God who is ultimately behind all of these events. The fact that we have so much repetition here only emphasizes this truth. Let us not miss this!

Ezekiel 39:3

I will knock your bow out of your left hand and make your arrows fall from your right hand.

In the last chapter, in verses 17-23, it describes the Lord as using nature in a supernatural way to judge Gog and his hordes. This includes earthquakes, plague, and hailstones. These punishments will destroy Gog and his horde.

Now we have further details about this judgment in verses 3-8. First, we are told that Gog will be completely disarmed by the Lord.

I will knock your bow

We also find more “I will’s” in this verse. The Lord now promises to knock the bow that Gog is carrying. Interestingly, at the time of Ezekiel, warriors from the north were known to be skilled bowmen.

out of your left hand

First, the left hand is addressed. This of course would be the hand that would hold the bow. As is true today, most people were right handed.

and make your arrows

Now he addresses the arrows that are to be shot from the bow.

fall from your right hand.

The result is that everything is gone from his right hand—the hand that would be holding on to the arrows.

The picture that we find here is that the Lord will lead Gog and his armies from his place in the far north with the ultimate purpose of disarming him. The idea is that the Lord will render Gog and his military coalition powerless. Therefore, the mighty Gog and his innumerable army will be humiliated when their weapons are cancelled out.

The fact that the Lord will completely disarm Gog and his hordes seems to indicate that no battle between Israel and Gog will take place. In other words, the Lord alone will fight for Israel!

Ezekiel 39:4

You will fall dead on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the people who are with you. I give you as food to every kind of bird and every wild beast.

Once these enemies of the Lord have been disarmed, they will then be completely destroyed.

Furthermore, not only will this evil Gog and his entire army will be killed, we note that Gog and his troops will suffer the ultimate indignity—their dead bodies will be made into food for the birds and the wild beasts.

You will fall dead

First, it is emphasized that they will die. The word “dead” is not in the Hebrew text but is understood by the context.

on the mountains of Israel

Let us not miss this! The Lord then gives a specific prediction as to where Gog will fall—the mountains of Israel, the Promised Land.

Again we have the emphasis that these invaders are on His Land. As we observe in the last chapter, the punishment occurs once these armies enter the borders of Israel.

This assumes they have crossed the borders of the Promised Land. It seems that the Lord allows them all cross the border before His punishment begins.

Gog’s fatal mistakes will consist of entering a land that does not belong to him, as well as attempting to plunder from a people who have been specially chosen by the Lord.

you and all your troops

The annihilation is total—nobody from Gog’s army will survive.

and the people who are with you.

This refers to all of the other armies in this coalition that have joined Gog in this invasion. They too will die in the Promised Land.

Where Are These Borders?

An interesting question concerns the precise location of the borders of Israel that the Lord is making reference to. We know the destruction of Gog and his hordes will take place somewhere inside the Promised Land after his army crosses the borders. But where exactly are these borders?

Will they be the borders of Israel at that time? Or will they be the original borders of the land which Israel never has had under their control? The question is seemingly not answered for us.

Feinberg writes:

Ezekiel was explicit as to the place of the encounter taking place near the city of Jerusalem on the mountains of Israel. This was the testimony of Joel (chap. 3) and Zechariah (chap. 14) also (Feinberg p. 229).

Thus, it appears that the Lord will allow them to get somewhat close to their desired goal within the borders of the Promised Land before His catastrophic judgment destroys them all.

I give you as food

The bodies of the dead will then experience the ultimate indignity. Indeed, in the ancient world, the absence of burial was something that was universally considered to be repugnant.

to every kind of bird and every wild beast

These soldiers, arrayed in the finest battle gear, instead of being victorious over Israel, will actually be served as food for the animals.

Since there will be so much carnage, so many corpses, the burial of all of the bodies will be impossible. Hence, the Lord, who is in charge over the entire the natural world, will call upon the animal kingdom to remove the need for mass burial.

The carnage will be explained in even greater detail later in this chapter (verses 17-20).

This would remind Ezekiel's initial readers of what Scripture documents what took place with the Philistine giant Goliath.

His great power, that was seemingly invincible, was shown to be absolutely nothing when He was the presence of the Lord through His servant David.

Like Goliath, we are told that the dead from this coalition of nations will have their lifeless bodies left exposed for the birds of the air, as well as for the beasts of the field. Again, it reminds us of what David said this to Goliath:

This very day the LORD will deliver you into my hand! I will strike you down and cut off your head. This day I will give the corpses of the Philistine army to the birds of the sky and the wild animals of the land. Then all the land will realize that Israel has a God (1 Samuel 17:46 NET)

The account recorded in First Samuel informs us that this is what did indeed happen.

Therefore, as has been true from the very beginning, those who attempt to defy the Living God, the God of Israel, will suffer the ultimate in humiliation.

In sum, instead of filling up their own bodies with the stolen goods from the Promised Land, we find that Gog and his allies will themselves become food to satisfy the hunger of the birds as well as the wild beasts.

Ezekiel 39:5

You will fall dead in the open field; for I have spoken, declares the sovereign LORD.

The Lord will now declare where they will meet their doom.

You will fall dead in the open field

They will die before they get to the cities. In other words, they will never reach their desired goal. They will die before this happens.

for I have spoken, declares the sovereign LORD.

So let it be done!

Again, we have the emphasis that the Lord is controlling all things. The fact that this truth is repeated so many times should not be missed.

Ezekiel 39:6

I will send fire on Magog and those who live securely in the coastlands; then they will know that I am the LORD.

I will send fire on Magog

While the destruction of Gog and his army takes place within the border of Israel, the judgment of God will extend far beyond its borders.

We are told fire will be sent on Magog—the land of Gog. Thus, the land from which Gog came from will also be judged.

Thus, this area of the world will experience God's judgments that are similar to the judgments which their own armies received.

and those who live securely in the coastlands

The judgment will not be limited to the land of Magog—those living in the coastlands will also receive God's wrath.

This seems to refer to the allies of Gog that are part of this invasion. If this is the case, then all of these countries would suffer some type of supernatural judgment of God.

In addition, if it is literal fire coming down from heaven, then it could be targeting certain elements of these countries that encouraged the invasion. This would include their religious centers, as well as their governmental and the military installations.

Whatever the case may be, the armies that these countries sent out will not be the only ones experiencing the full wrath of God. Indeed, the countries themselves will partake in the Lord's punishment.

What does seem to be clear from the text, is that this further devastation upon these countries, which is supernaturally caused by the Lord, will exclude these nations from launching any type of further attack against Israel. Simply put, militarily, they are finished!

then they will know that I am the LORD.

The result will be obvious to all: when these supernatural judgments occur everyone will indeed know that the God of Israel is the Lord! As we have noted, this truth is emphasized repeatedly in this entire episode (Ezekiel 38:23; 39:6,7,28).

This is consistent with the past judgments that Scripture records that the Lord has meted out against His enemies. In fact, the emphasis is always the same. Indeed, when He judged these pagan nations, as well as their non-existent gods, the Lord always let it be known that He is the only God who exists.

For example, when the Lord sent the various plagues upon Egypt at the time of the exodus, He let it be known that it was to testify to both Israel and Egypt of His great power. Speaking to Israel the Lord said.

I will take you to myself for a people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from your enslavement to the Egyptians (Exodus 6:7 NET).

He also had a message for the Egyptians.

Thus says the LORD: By this you will know that I am the LORD: I am going to strike the water of the Nile with the staff that is in my hand, and it will be turned into blood (Exodus 7:17 NET)

In a similar manner, these future judgments recorded in Ezekiel will demonstrate the fact that the Lord alone is God—not the false, non-existent god of Islam, Allah.

In fact, the shouts of *Allahu-Akbar*—Allah is greater than all gods—will no longer be heard from these armies, or from the Muslim countries that sent them to plunder and loot from Israel! Indeed, all will know that Allah is not greater than any other God!

Israel In God's Eternal Plan

As we noted, while the punishment upon Gog and his armies will occur in Israel, the fallout will extend far beyond the Promised Land. In doing so, it will accomplish the purpose of God.

This is another important truth of the Bible—the Lord's purpose for Israel is never limited to Israel alone. In fact, in the last chapter we were told that Israel dwells at the center of the earth. Here we see the Lord's judgment radiating out from the center of the earth and extending to far distant lands.

Ezekiel 39:7

I will make my holy name known in the midst of my people Israel; I will not let my holy name be profaned anymore. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.

I will make my holy name known

The Lord, Yahweh or Jehovah as He is called, will use these supernatural events to cause to make His name, His Holy Name, to be known. This verb is also found in the Hiphil form—the causative form. Consequently, this shows the purpose of His mighty works.

in the midst of my people Israel

This tells us specifically where His holy name will be made known. It will occur among His chosen people—Israel.

As we just indicated, when the Lord had judged Israel's enemies in the past, it was always to make known to His people, as well as to their enemies, who the God of Israel is.

I will not let my holy name be profaned anymore.

Something else will happen! The profaning of the name of the Lord will finally stop! When these other false gods are worshiped, the name of the Lord—His character—is profaned.

These nations, who assumed that Allah is the all-powerful God, have blasphemed the character of the Lord by doing so—for He alone is God.

This sums up the message of the entire Scripture—there is only one God who exists, the God of Israel, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. All others are false gods, they are non-existent gods.

Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.

The nations will learn this vital truth. According to this statement they will now know. Nobody will doubt who the Lord is any longer.

Allah, as well as all other false gods, will be recognized for what they are—non-existent.

On the other hand, the Lord will be recognized by Israel and the nations. Ralph Alexander writes:

The purpose of Gog's defeat is to demonstrate to the nations that the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, is the only true God, and is faithful to his covenantal people, heirs of the promised eternal peace and security in the covenant of peace (cf. 34:25-31; 37:24-28). God would not permit the divine holy name to be profaned again through a conquest and dispersion of Israel. Israel, in turn will make the Lord's name holy in her midst, for she will see God's immutable faithfulness by protecting her in the final attempt to invade her land (vv.6b-7). (Alexander p. 859).

Ezekiel 39:8

Realize that it is coming and it will be done, declares the sovereign LORD. It is the day I have spoken about.

Realize that it is coming

The Lord then gives a warning which must be heeded.

Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you must give them a warning from me. When I say to the wicked, "You will certainly die," and you do not warn him – you do not speak out to warn the wicked to turn from his wicked deed and wicked lifestyle so that he may live – that (Ezekiel 3:17,18 NET).

We know that the job of Ezekiel the prophet was to be a watchman for the people of Israel. His calling was to warn the people about the coming judgment.

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

As we previously noted, the watchmen were men who stood on the towers of walls in ancient cities and scanned the horizon for potential enemies.

If they saw an enemy coming, they would blow their trumpet, the shophar, a ram's horn. This would warn the people who were outside of the city walls to take refuge in the walled city.

The message is clear: judgment is indeed coming! The believer today, like Ezekiel, is to be a "watchman." Indeed, are to warn others that God's judgment, though seemingly delayed is truly coming. Peter wrote:

Above all, understand this: In the last days blatant scoffers will come, being propelled by their own evil urges and saying, "Where is his promised return? For ever since our ancestors died, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation." For they deliberately suppress this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water. Through these things the world existing at that time was destroyed when it was deluged with water. But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, by being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly (2 Peter 3:3-7 NET).

Awesome words indeed!

and it will be done,

If the Lord says it, then it will be accomplished. There is nothing that can stop it. In a similar context, Jesus said:

I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overpower it (Matthew 16:18 NET).

Nothing can thwart His will—NOTHING!

declares the sovereign LORD.

It is because the sovereign Lord has said so. The Apostle Paul described the Lord as follows:

. . . the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not (Romans 4:17 NET).

This is the God of the Bible!

It is the day I have spoken about.

This is the specific time which He has predicted will come, and come it will. The Bible, from the beginning to the end, contains predictions by the Lord of coming events.

Sooner or later, these events do come to pass just as He has said. In this case, this monumental judgment against the enemies of God will also come to pass in His timing.

The Claims Made By The Lord

In fact, over one hundred years before Ezekiel lived, Isaiah the prophet recorded the Lord making these claims about Himself:

I announced events beforehand, I issued the decrees and made the predictions; suddenly I acted and they came to pass. I did this because I know how stubborn you are. Your neck muscles are like iron and your forehead like bronze. I announced them to you beforehand; before they happened, I predicted them for

you, so you could never say, ‘My image did these things, my idol, my cast image, decreed them.’ You have heard; now look at all the evidence! Will you not admit that what I say is true? (Isaiah 48:3-6 NET).

Look at these claims that the Lord makes! He has announced events and has made decrees before certain events have taken place! And they came to pass exactly as He said they would.

Why did He do this? It is because of the stubbornness of the people. Instead of honoring Him, they praised their worthless idols. The Lord then challenged them to look at all the evidence.

Earlier the Lord had made this challenge to these idols which Israel worshipped:

Let them produce evidence! Let them tell us what will happen! Tell us about your earlier predictive oracles, so we may examine them and see how they were fulfilled. Or decree for us some future events! Predict how future events will turn out, so we might know you are gods. Yes, do something good or bad, so we might be frightened and in awe. Look, you are nothing, and your accomplishments are nonexistent; the one who chooses to worship you is disgusting (Isaiah 41:22-24 NET).

These idols cannot produce the evidence because they do not exist. However, the God of Israel does indeed provide more than enough evidence to know that He exists and that He is in control of all things.

How does He do this? It is through fulfilled prophecy.

Setting The Stage For Fulfillment In Modern Times: The Mountains Of Israel

Not only do we find specific predictions being literally fulfilled in the past we also see the Lord setting the stage for future fulfillments. One example would be in “the mountains of Israel.”

We have noticed that the Lord has emphasized over and over again that Gog’s army would come down to the mountains of Israel to “take a spoil” and then find themselves defeated on these mountains. Interestingly, the mountains of Israel have only recently come into the hands of the Israelis.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum explains:

They extend the length of the center of the country 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 town north of Beersheba 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 (Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, p. 114).

Therefore, we not only have examples of specific prophecies being fulfilled in the past, we also find the stage being set for other predictions to be fulfilled in the near future!

To sum up, the God of Scripture distinguishes Himself from all the false gods by the fact that He is able to tell us what will happen in the future. When it does occur, it provides humanity with no excuse to reject Him as the only God who exists. He said it and it will be done!

Ezekiel 39:9

Then those who live in the cities of Israel will go out and use the weapons for kindling – the shields, bows and arrows, war clubs and spears – they will burn them for seven years.

We now come to a much discussed verse. How are we to understand it? How does it fit with our view of the timing of this campaign with respect to the “end times?”

Then those who live in the cities of Israel

Now the Lord addresses those living in Israel’s cities—the cities that were never attacked!

will go out and use the weapons for kindling –

They will be able to use the weapons of the dead for kindling. In other words, they will be able to burn them.

the shields, bows and arrows, war clubs and spears –

The various weapons are named. We note that they are all described as ancient weapons of war—not modern ones. Thus, all of them are able to be burned and can be used as kindling.

they will burn them for seven years.

Now we come to one of the main difficulties in this passage. Are these the literal weapons that Gog’s army will use? Or perhaps they are representative of modern weapons but are merely explained in terms that Ezekiel and his contemporaries would understand.

In addition, how are we to understand the weapons and the seven years? Will they literally burn for seven years? If so, then when does the seven years begin and when does it end?

What We Do Know About The Timing

There are several things that we do know about the timing of this episode.

First, it will take place when Israel will be back in their ancient homeland.

Second, it will happen after they have been away for a long time.

Third, since they have been away for a long time, the land will have been laid waste, desolate.

Fourth, the desolate land will become wealthy—which is the main cause for this attack.

And finally, Israel will be dwelling in some type of security, whether real or imagined.

Whatever we conclude on this issue of the weapons and the time of their burning, it seems clear that we are dealing with a huge army with a huge amount of weaponry that has been defeated. This we can conclude.

Ezekiel 39:10

They will not need to take wood from the field or cut down trees from the forests, because they will make fires with the weapons. They will take the loot from those who looted them and seize the plunder of those who plundered them, declares the sovereign LORD.

The subject of the burning of the weapons continues.

They will not need to take wood from the field

Since there will be so much left over from the battle, the people of Israel will have no need to gather wood for their needs.

or cut down trees from the forests,

And there will be no need to cut down trees.

Why the emphasis on wood and trees? There is something which we must remember. If this takes place during the Great Tribulation period wood will be a precious commodity.

Indeed, we are told that after the first trumpet judgment one third of all the trees will be burned up. The Bible says:

The first angel blew his trumpet, and there was hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was thrown at the earth so that a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up (Revelation 8:7 NET).

This may be the reason why we have so much emphasis here on the lack of Israel's need to cut down the trees during this period.

because they will make fires with the weapons.

The weapons will go for other uses than that which was intended.

There are a number of commentators who believe that this passage indicates that the weapons of warfare will be made of wood—old fashion weapons. How can this be in our modern world with the weapons of warfare that are known to exist?

One possibility concerns the catastrophic devastation that the world will experience during the Great Tribulation period. With so much of the earth and its resources destroyed, armies and possibly modern weapons, will be rendered useless, Gog's forces will have to use whatever weapons are available to them. This would include those made of wood. In other words, the world is back to primitive conditions.

Should We Understand It Literally?

As we have noted, some very good commentators on Ezekiel do not accept the idea that we should interpret these events as literally occurring in the future. We have noted this and we respectfully disagree.

However, even among those who believe this is referring to a literal battle with literal armies from these precise geographical areas, there are those who believe the seven years is symbolic. In other words, not everything about this battle is to be understood literally.

They Do Not Have To Find A Time Frame For The Seven Years

Why do they say this? Basically it is the problem of fitting the seven years into some type of "last days" scenario.

To overcome this difficulty the seven years is said to be symbolic. It is well-known that the number seven is used in Scripture as the number of completeness. Consequently, they view the “seven” here as symbolic of the complete victory of the Lord.

Thus, the point being made in this passage is not that the weapons used in this battle will be made of combustible material that can be used instead of wood for seven literal years.

Rather it speaks of the completeness of the Lord’s divine judgment upon His enemies. This view relieves the interpreter of trying to fit a literal seven years in the end time scenario.

Response

However, there does not appear to be any reason to view the seven years as symbolic since it describes the aftermath of this great destruction on the army of Gog. Indeed, with all of the specific details we find in the text, a normal reading of this passage would indicate that we are dealing with a literal time frame. Therefore, we must find a timeframe to place this seven years of burning the weapons.

They will take the loot from those who looted them

Note the irony. The looters are looted. The law of reciprocity.

and seize the plunder of those who plundered them,

This emphasizes that those who attempted to plunder will be plundered.

Alexander notes:

Though Gog and his entourage sought spoils from Israel, it is Israel that will take spoils from him. This is judgment “in kind” (Alexander p. 860).

declares the sovereign LORD.

The emphasis again is that the Lord has made His declaration.

Ezekiel 39:11

On that day I will assign Gog a grave in Israel. It will be the valley of those who travel east of the sea; it will block the way of the travelers. There they will bury Gog and all his horde; they will call it the valley of Hamon-Gog.

The sheer number of dead bodies will cause an overwhelming problem from those in the land. What are they to do with all these corpses?

On that day

This is the moment that Gog will meet his end.

I will assign Gog a grave in Israel.

This is the Lord’s doing. Notice Gog will be “assigned” a grave in the Lord’s land. Instead of plundering and looting the Promised Land, it will be the place where Gog is unceremoniously buried.

It will be the valley of those who travel east of the sea;

The specific location of his grave is given to us. There is some question, though, as to where this is.

For one thing, which sea is it referring to? Is it the Dead Sea or the Mediterranean Sea?

The Dead Sea?

Those who argue for the Dead Sea take the view that when the invaders come down from the north they will travel south down the Jordan Valley and then move toward the northern edge of the Dead Sea. Their goal will then be to move west toward Jerusalem.

However, when they attempt to make that westward turn the Lord will strike them dead at that moment. In other words, they will never reach the Holy City.

Mediterranean Sea

Others believe this valley will be east of the Mediterranean Sea. Ralph Alexander writes:

If the sea were the Dead Sea. . . the valley would be east of that sea and therefore out of the normal boundaries of Israel. Since the valley is in Israel, it must be east of the Mediterranean Sea. The specific valley could be any valley in the land of Israel east “of” that sea. Though one might see the Esdraelon Valley as essentially an east-west valley that was well-traveled throughout history and would fit the text well, none of the theories of identification of this valley can be substantiated without question because of the sparse data (Alexander p. 861).

In response to this, Charles Dyer notes the following:

The valley where Gog’s army will be buried is “on the east side of” the Dead Sea in what is today Jordan. The phrase “those who travel east” could be taken as a proper name. It might refer to the “mountains of Abarim” east of the Dead Sea that Israel traversed on her way to the Promised Land (cf. Num. 33:48). If so, Gog’s burial will be in the Valley of Abarim just across the Dead Sea from Israel proper in the land of Moab. Yet the burial will be in Israel because Israel controlled that area during some periods of her history (cf. 2 Sam. 8:2; Ps. 60:8). (Charles H. Dyer, “Ezekiel” in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), p. 1302.

it will block the way of the travelers.

We are given further information. The burial will be so huge that it will be an obstacle for travelers. The text says that it will block off those who attempt to pass by.

There they will bury Gog and all his horde

Note the specifics. Gog and his coalition will be buried in this explicit place in Israel.

they will call it the valley of Hamon-Gog.

The people will give it a name: Hamon-Gog. The Hebrew word “Hamon” means “the multitudes of Gog” or the “hordes of Gog.”

Ezekiel 39:12

For seven months Israel will bury them, in order to cleanse the land.

For seven months Israel will bury them,

Notice that the people of Israel will bury the dead. This is consistent with what we saw earlier—there is nobody left in Gog’s army to bury those who have fallen. Normally an army buries its own dead after a major battle. In this instance there is no one left to do this.

The fact that it takes seven months to bury all the corpses indicates the overwhelming number of bodies that will be left. The fact that this will be a “mass burial” rather than an individual burial further highlights the enormity of the carnage.

Are The Seven Months Literal Or Symbolic?

Earlier we were told the weapons would burn for seven years, now we have the statement that the burial will take seven months. As can be imagined, this statement has led to a number of different interpretations.

We have already noted that many commentators see this entire episode as symbolic with no literal fulfillment to be found. This includes some of those who interpret the majority of this passage in a straightforward manner. As was true with the seven years, they see seven here as a symbolic number.

Yet the next statement seems to clearly contradict any idea that this is meant to be understood in any manner except literally.

in order to cleanse the land.

According to this phrase, the purpose of the burial is to cleanse the Promise Land. If there is no actual burial, then there seems to be no need to cleanse the land! However, the fact that the cleansing of the land is emphasized certainly assumes that the land has been defiled.

Early in Israel’s history, the Lord gave laws to the people that dealt with ceremonial uncleanness. We read.

When there is a person who touches anything ceremonially unclean, whether the carcass of an unclean wild animal, or the carcass of an unclean domesticated animal, or the carcass of an unclean creeping thing, even if he did not realize it, but he himself has become unclean and is guilty (Leviticus 5:2 NET).

In the case of this invasion listed here in Ezekiel, the land will become ceremonially unclean—it will be defiled with the dead bodies of Gog and his hordes. Cleansing of the land, therefore, will be absolutely necessary.

Ezekiel 39:13

All the people of the land will bury them, and it will be a memorial for them on the day I magnify myself, declares the sovereign LORD.

All the people of the land will bury them,

We are now given further information as to who will bury the dead—it will be all of Israel. The people of Israel will bury these invaders. As mentioned, there will be nobody left in Gog’s army to take part in the burial seeing that they all are destroyed.

and it will be a memorial for them

The graves will remind the people of what the Lord has done. The idea of establishing some type of memorial is consistent with the way the Lord has worked with Israel in the past:

Now Joshua set up in Gilgal the twelve stones they had taken from the Jordan. He told the Israelites, “When your children someday ask their fathers, ‘What do these stones represent?’ explain to your children, ‘Israel crossed the Jordan River on dry ground.’ For the LORD your God dried up the water of the Jordan before you while you crossed over. It was just like when the LORD your God dried up the Red Sea before us while we crossed it. He has done this so all the nations of the earth might recognize the LORD’s power and so you might always obey the LORD your God (Joshua 4:20-24 NET).

Thus, as in the past history of Israel, future events will contain a reminder of what the Lord has done.

on the day I magnify myself, declares the sovereign LORD.

God will cause Himself to be magnified through all of this.

The verb here in Hebrew is in what is sometimes known as a “benefactive construction.” This means the subject acts for his or her own benefit.

Therefore, we could translate this phrase, “He achieves glory for himself.” Consequently, the Lord is doing this with the end result of achieving the glory He so rightly deserves.

Ezekiel 39:14

They will designate men to scout continually through the land, burying those who remain on the surface of the ground in order to cleanse it. They will search for seven full months.

(Or Alternative Translation)

After the seven months they will carry out a more detailed search. They will designate men to scout continually through the land,

With the size of the destruction, there will be certain individuals who will be constantly going throughout the land of Israel. These men will be separated from the rest of the country. Their employment consists of looking for the bones.

burying those who remain on the surface of the ground.

Their responsibility is given. Because Israel has mountainous regions the remains of the some of the dead may be difficult to find—falling into ravines, crevices, etc. That is why this first group needs to search out all of the land.

in order to cleanse it.

And now the purpose it revealed—the complete cleansing of its defilement.

They will search for seven full months (After the seven months they will carry out a more detailed search).

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

There is some question as to how this verse is to be translated. The New English Translation has the scouts doing this search for seven months while the NIV has these specific individuals carrying out a more detailed search *after* the seven months of burying is over.

According to the NIV, after the seven month burial, these designated individuals begin a mop up operation.

From the NET translation the time frame is ambiguous but it seems to say that these two groups are working up to seven-month period of burial, but not afterward.

Ezekiel 39:15

When the scouts survey the land and see a human bone, they will place a sign by it, until those assigned to burial duty have buried it in the valley of Hamon-Gog.

These men who are continually employed in the burial process will consist of two groups. One group finds and marks the bones and body parts while the second group comes along and buries what remains.

When the scouts survey the land and see a human bone,

The first of the two groups is the scouts. Their job is to traverse the land to discover any human bones which have not been buried.

they will place a sign by it

When any bone is discovered, they will mark it for the second group.

until those assigned to burial duty have buried it in the valley of Hamon-Gog.

The second group consists of those who will bury the dead. They will pick up the bones and dispose of them bones in a one specific place—the valley of Hamon-Gog.

Ezekiel 39:16

(A city by the name of Hamonah will also be there.) They will cleanse the land.

A city by the name of Hamonah will also be there.

This parenthetical remark informs us of the name of the city that will be in the vicinity where the bones are housed. It is Hamonah, which means, “the multitude” or “the horde.”

Again, it is to be a continuous reminder to the people of Israel of God’s miraculous deliverance from their enemies seeing that multitudes of them are buried there.

As to the exact nature of the city, we are not told. Perhaps because the burial will be such a huge undertaking a city will necessarily arise in that place. It will be overlooking the valley where the bodies are buried. Yet we do know that this city will also serve as a memorial to the faithfulness of the Lord who destroyed this evil enemy and his hordes.

They will cleanse the land

This is the end result—the Lord has cleansed His Promised Land of all defilement.

A New Heaven And New Earth

This looks forward to the day when everything on this planet has been made clean!

For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind (Isaiah 65:17 NET).

What a wonderful promise this is. Everything from this present world will pass away. In fact, they won't even be remembered.

The Lord has also predicted this to happen in the future:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying: "Look! The residence of God is among human beings. He will live among them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death will not exist anymore—or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the former things have ceased to exist. And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true (Revelation 21:5 NET).

The words are indeed trustworthy and true! All things are going to be "made new!"

(Verses 17-20) Further information On The Cleanup

Interestingly, we find that the Lord spends considerable space detailing the aftermath of this judgment upon Gog and his hordes. He has already spoken about the disposal of the weapons (verses 9-10) which are to be burned, and the disposition of the bodies of the army of Gog (verses 11-16).

We are told how they are to be collected and buried, as well as where they are to be buried.

These verses (17-20) give further instructions on the cleanup. With such an emphasis by the Lord on the aftermath of the battle the obvious question is why? Why spend this seemingly inordinate amount of time on the outcome?

We do know that this invasion will result in unparalleled anger from the Lord which will be directed at Gog and his hordes.

Ezekiel 39:17

As for you, son of man, this is what the sovereign LORD says: Tell every kind of bird and every wild beast: 'Assemble and come! Gather from all around to my slaughter which I am going to make for you, a great slaughter on the mountains of Israel! You will eat flesh and drink blood.

The Great Feast: Is This The Campaign Referred To In Revelation?

When the Lord says this is the "day" or "time" that He has spoken about, what is He referring to? Which day? Is it the Great Feast that is recorded in the Book of Revelation? The Bible says:

Then I saw one angel standing in the sun, and he shouted in a loud voice to all the birds flying high in the sky: "Come, gather around for the great banquet of God, to eat your fill of the flesh of kings, the flesh of generals, the flesh of powerful people, the flesh of horses and those who ride them, and the flesh of all people, both free and slave, and small and great!" Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to do battle with the one who rode the horse and with his army. Now the beast was seized, and along with him the false prophet who had performed the signs on his behalf – signs by which

he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. Both of them were thrown alive into the lake of fire burning with sulfur. The others were killed by the sword that extended from the mouth of the one who rode the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves with their flesh (Revelation 19:17-21 NET).

Is this the same event that Ezekiel is referring to? This is one of the many issues we have to deal with in this passage. Feinberg believes this is a clue as to the timing of this invasion. He writes:

Now there is presented a third emphasis of the greatness of the invasion and the subsequent slaughter at the hand of the Lord. Incidentally, the figure gives a clue for the time setting of the entire passage. It is the same scene as that of Revelation 19, the great supper of God, and the chronology is clear. The events will transpire at the end of the great tribulation and just before the millennial reign of the Messiah (Feinberg pp. 230,231).

As for you, son of man,

We again have the emphasis that the Lord is speaking to Ezekiel. However, on this occasion we will find something unique taking place.

this is what the sovereign LORD says:

The Lord has a command to give to the prophet.

Tell every kind of bird

First, the prophet is to speak directly to the birds. Why birds?

We know that there are a number of types of birds who were ritually unclean. We read in Deuteronomy:

All ritually clean birds you may eat. These are the ones you may not eat: the eagle, the vulture, the black vulture, the kite, the black kite, the dayyah after its species, every raven after its species, the ostrich, the owl, the seagull, the falcon after its species, the little owl, the long-eared owl, the white owl, the jackdaw, the carrion vulture, the cormorant, the stork, the heron after its species, the hoopoe, the bat, and any winged thing on the ground are impure to you – they may not be eaten (Deuteronomy 14:11-19 NET).

In addition, we have the mention of unclean birds in the Book of Revelation:

After these things I saw another angel, who possessed great authority, coming down out of heaven, and the earth was lit up by his radiance. He shouted with a powerful voice: Fallen, fallen, is Babylon the great! She has become a lair for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detested beast (Revelation 18:1-2 NET).

We note here that these unclean birds haunt “Babylon the Great.” The unclean city is filled with unclean birds! Many birds, of course, are scavengers—as we see in the list in Deuteronomy. It seems that these are the ones which Ezekiel will speak to.

and every wild beast:

Ezekiel is also to address the “wild beasts.” As was true with the birds, Scripture makes the distinction between the domesticated beasts and the wild beasts, or unclean beasts, of the field.

Ezekiel Is To Speak To The Future Birds And Beasts

This is an interesting command. Ezekiel is supposed to directly speak to the birds and the wild beasts.

Obviously, it is not the birds and beasts of his day that will be the fulfillment of this prophecy for it will not take place “until the time of the end.” Evidently, he spoke to those animals at his time as representative of the future generation of birds and beasts who will be involved in this carnage.

Assemble and come!

Ezekiel is to tell them to assemble together, and, as we discover, they will obey his command. It again reminds us that nature is under the control of the Lord.

This reminds us that the Lord had gathered the animals for Adam to name them:

The LORD God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a companion for him who corresponds to him.” The LORD God formed out of the ground every living animal of the field and every bird of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man named all the animals, the birds of the air, and the living creatures of the field, but for Adam no companion who corresponded to him was found (Genesis 2:18-20 NET).

As was true in the very beginning of the creation of the human race, the same holds true at the end—the God of the Bible controls all things.

Again, we find what occurs in this invasion and its aftermath will remind us of God’s workings in the past. This is another indicator that everything recorded in the Bible is for a specific purpose and that the truths established at the very beginning of human history remain true throughout the entire history of our race on this planet.

gather from all around

It seems the specific call for their gathering of these birds and wild beasts will go out “far and wide.”

to my slaughter

The specific purpose for the gathering is now given to us. Notice the slaughter is “His.” This is God’s doing.

The word translated “slaughter” can also be rendered “sacrifice.” In fact, a number of English translations understand the word in this manner. For example, the NIV says:

Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Call out to every kind of bird and all the wild animals: ‘Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood’ (NIV).

The Hebrew Lexicon, Koehler Baumgartner, writes the following about the meaning of this word:

communal sacrifice = sacrifice of slaughtered sheep, goat or cattle to create communion between the god to whom the sacrifice is made and the partners of the sacrifice, and communion between the partners themselves . . . particular instances . . . God effects the slaughter of his adversaries

So, as we will note, this is more than a mere slaughter of an invading army. It is a sacrifice of sorts that the Lord will arrange.

which I am going to make for you,

We again find the continued emphasis that the Lord is going to do this. He is going to make this sacrifice for the birds and the wild beasts.

a great slaughter

Not merely a slaughter, or sacrifice, but rather a “great slaughter.” Again we note that the same word is repeated again in this verse. The repetition is for emphasis.

on the mountains of Israel!

Once more we find the repetition that this slaughter will take place upon the mountains of Israel—in the Promised Land. Of course, we have seen this phrase over and over again in these final chapters of Ezekiel

You will eat flesh and drink blood.

This is reminiscent of what we read in the Book of Revelation. Indeed, there are many who believe that it speaks of the same event.

The Spoilers Are Spoiled

Again, we note the irony. The army of Gog came to the Promised Land to “take a spoil.” However they will end up becoming a spoil for the unclean birds and wild beasts.

Furthermore, as we have seen, the people of Israel will take a spoil of their weapons to use for fuel. This idea of “spoiling the spoiler” is also found in Jeremiah:

But all who destroyed you will be destroyed. All your enemies will go into exile. Those who plundered you will be plundered. I will cause those who pillaged you to be pillaged (Jeremiah 30:16 NET).

This sounds like an appropriate explanation of what will happen here.

Verses 18-20: The Two Phase Disposal Of The Bodies of Gog’s Army

Some commentators have suggested that these verses actually take place before the aforementioned burial.

In other words, the birds and wild beasts are used to reduce much of the need for burial. Once the scavenger birds and wild beasts have their fill of the dead corpses of the army, the burial of what is left of the remains can begin.

Therefore, the disposal of the corpses is recorded in two phases with the first phase chronologically mentioned second.

Again, it is important to realize that we are not dealing with chronology here. This chapter is filling in some of the details of what was previously recorded in Chapter 38.

Ezekiel 39:18

You will eat the flesh of warriors and drink the blood of the princes of the earth – the rams, lambs, goats, and bulls, all of them fattened animals of Bashan.

The Lord will now give details as to who is on the menu!

You will eat the flesh of warriors

The wild animals will feast on the bodies of the dead warriors or “mighty men.” In other words, these include the elite military personnel of these armies. In our modern day parlance, it seems to be talking about “special forces.”

Consequently, the emphasis is that these scavengers will eat the “best of the best” of the troops of Gog, his armies, and the armies of his coalition.

and drink the blood of the princes of the earth

Not only will the best of their fighting forces be consumed by the wild beasts and the scavenger birds, the leadership will also be part of this “great feast.”

Note the contrast: these “earthly leaders” will be judged by the “God of Heaven.”

the rams, lambs, goats, and bulls,

These animals are representative of the slain soldiers of Gog’s army. What is fascinating here is that these are animals which the Old Testament has designated for “sacrifice.”

Therefore, the language of sacrifice continues. The enemies of the Lord become a “sacrificial feast.” Instead of animals being used for this sacrifice to the Lord, it is Gog’s army that we be a sacrificial offering.

all of them fattened animals

This phrase refers to a fattened animal that is relatively young. Usually they come from the bovine species. They are actually bred for the purpose of consumption.

of Bashan

Bashan is a fertile geographical region which was used for the raising and grazing of livestock. In biblical times, Bashan was famous for its beautiful pastures and well-fed cattle. It includes what we today call the “Golan Heights.” Presently, it is still an area where cattle will be seen grazing on the fertile land. Therefore, the picture that we have here is of animals which are fed for the specific purpose of slaughter, or sacrifice.

Hence, Gog’s army, made up of the “best of the best” will become the slaughtered sacrifice to the Lord. The ironies never cease.

Ezekiel 39:19

You will eat fat until you are full, and drink blood until you are drunk, at my slaughter which I have made for you.

You will eat fat until you are full

It seems there will be more than enough human flesh for these animals to partake. In other words, there will be excess even after these animals have eaten to their capacity. Such is the extent of the carnage that will take place.

and drink blood until you are drunk,

The metaphor here is striking. These animals are drunk with the blood of the captains and rulers of this invading force. Feinberg writes:

In the law of Moses the fat and the blood of animals, considered the most holy portions, were offered to God and were not allowed the worshippers (see Lev. 3:11-17; Ezek. 44:15 for the same idea of sacrifice (Feinberg p. 231).

at my slaughter which I have made for you.

Again, this is the Lord's slaughter, the Lord's sacrifice, which He has made for His people.

Ezekiel 39:20

You will fill up at my table with horses and charioteers, with warriors and all the soldiers,' declares the sovereign LORD.

You will fill up at my table

The Lord continues to emphasize the great feast these creatures will have. They are said to eat at "His table." Not merely eat—the verb translated "fill up" can also mean "glutted." In other words, they eat their fill with more left over.

Hence, the sacrificial feast of the Lord will turn the tables on the invaders. Instead of them partaking of the "fat of the land" they will be the main course for all types of foul creatures of both the sky and of the land.

with horses and charioteers

It seems that the horses they ride upon will also be part of the feast of these birds and wild beasts.

with warriors and all the soldiers

The warriors who thought they were going to plunder the wealth of a land that did not belong to them find themselves as food, or plunder, for the wild animals of that land.

declares the sovereign LORD

The Lord further punctuates these words as truly belonging to Him. He said, so it will indeed be done—the prophet Ezekiel is merely His mouthpiece.

Once again, the sovereign Lord, the Lord that controls all of history, has spoken. This is the last verse that explains the details of the invasion of Gog and his hordes. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the results of this carnage as well as the future restoration of God's people.

The Result Of This Sacrificial Meal: His Divine Purpose (Verses 21-22)

Now that the Lord has informed us on what will happen with this invasion of Gog and his allies, He will then explain the results that this carnage will have on the unbelieving world. They will realize the power and majesty of the God of Israel. Their non-existent gods will not be able to help them. In fact, no power on heaven or earth will be able to stop the judgment that will be inflicted upon these evil armies.

Ezekiel 39:21

I will display my majesty among the nations. All the nations will witness the judgment I have executed, and the power I have exhibited among them.

I will display my majesty among the nations.

Now the result: the majestic character of the Lord will be on display for all of the nations of the earth. Nobody will be able to ignore what has taken place.

All the nations will witness the judgment I have executed,

This will not be missed by anyone. Everyone will know what He has done. Indeed, the entire world will be talking about it.

and the power I have exhibited among them.

The all-powerful Creator God will exhibit His unique power once again. This reminds us of certain events in the past where the Lord exercised His mighty power. The flood in Noah's day and the exodus from Egypt are two previous events that are similar to what we see happening here. In those cases, as here, everyone could see the power of the God of the Bible.

Ezekiel 39:22

Then the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God, from that day forward.

Then the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God,

Here is the result of this divine intervention—Israel will finally understand who has done this. Time and time again in their history the Lord has shown Himself by His powerful deeds. In all of the previous cases the Lord instructed His people to “remember” what He had done.

from that day forward.

Now we are told that they will never again forget who He is and what He can do. It seems this event will forever be a game-changer for the people of Israel.

Ezekiel 39:23

The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile due to their iniquity, for they were unfaithful to me. So I hid my face from them and handed them over to their enemies; all of them died by the sword.

The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile due to their iniquity,

This will also be a history lesson to the nations of the world. Israel has been sent into exile twice in their past. The first time, the Babylonian captivity, was for seventy years.

This duration literally fulfilled the prophecy of Jeremiah who spoke of the exact duration in which the people would be held captive in Babylon.

The second exile, predicted by Jesus, began in the year A.D. 70 and lasted almost 1,900 years! On this occasion, like the previous one, they were supernaturally brought back to their land after the judgment the Lord rendered to them.

for they were unfaithful to me.

The cause of their past exiles is again emphasized—unfaithfulness to the Lord. The prophets made it clear to those who were sent into exile that God’s patience had run out with them. Time after time they were warned about what would happen but they remained unfaithful.

So I hid my face from them

What a horrible outcome of their sin! God was hiding His face from His people because of their disobedience.

Herein lies a great lesson for each and every one of us. Our sin can cause the Lord to hide His face from His people. Hence there is the need for genuine confession and repentance.

and handed them over to their enemies;

This sin of disobedience caused the Lord to deliver Israel to their enemies. In the first instance, it was the Babylonians, at the second exile it was the Romans.

all of them died by the sword.

Terrible carnage took place in Israel when they were sent into these exiles. Death and destruction were the order of the day on each occasion when the city of Jerusalem, along with the temple, were destroyed.

Ezekiel 39:24

According to their uncleanness and rebellion I have dealt with them, and I hid my face from them.

According to their uncleanness and rebellion

The rebellious nature of the people is noted. Let us not miss the emphasis on their “uncleanness.” At the time of the first exile, they had defiled the Lord’s commandments and polluted His land with idols.

The second exile was a result of rejecting the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. The destruction of the city of Jerusalem and the temple, as well as the exile of the people happened less than forty years after their rejection of Him.

This is why this passage emphasizes “cleansing the land” from the pollution brought into it. In this case, it will be from the invaders rather than from faithless Israel.

I have dealt with them

God did indeed deal with them as the prophets warned. In His time, He sent them away from the land that had been promised to their ancestors.

and I hid my face from them.

This repeats what He just said; the Lord hid His face from them for turning their backs upon Him and His commandments.

Ezekiel 39:25

Therefore this is what the sovereign LORD says: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and I will have mercy on the entire house of Israel. I will be zealous for my holy name.

Therefore this is what the sovereign LORD says:

With all of this bad news in the past, the Lord now has some good news for them! As always, whenever the Lord pronounces judgment upon the people there is always the hope for future mercy. Indeed, as long as we are alive there is hope.

Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob,

Restoration is what the Lord does. Judgment is His strange work. Praise Him for that!

and I will have mercy on the entire house of Israel.

The God of mercy will extend mercy to those who deserve judgment—the entire house of Israel. They will not get what they deserve. This is the definition of mercy.

I will be zealous for my holy name.

We have the continual emphasis of the Lord's concern for His name, or character, in all of this. The fact that He made promises to the likes of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob about the future of the nation is central to His dealings with the nation. Although He would judge them for disobedience the Lord would never totally turn His back upon them.

Ezekiel 39:26

They will bear their shame for all their unfaithful acts against me, when they live securely on their land with no one to make them afraid.

They will bear their shame for all their unfaithful acts against me,

We reap what we sow. The history of Israel testifies to this. Indeed, they have been shamed like no other nation. With the advantages they have had over other nations come much responsibility. Jesus said.

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:48 NET).

This is an important truth. Each of us will be held responsible for the light from God which we have received.

when they live securely on their land with no one to make them afraid.

There is a promise of genuine security. The day will come when they fearlessly dwell in the Land of Promise. That day has not yet come but it is indeed coming! This is the promise of the Living God to His people.

Ezekiel 39:27

When I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will magnify myself among them in the sight of many nations.

When I have brought them back from the peoples

This is a prediction that He will bring them back. Remember, at that time, the people were in captivity in Babylon and captivity would still be in the future after their first return. Yet this was a message of the hope that they desperately needed.

and gathered them from the countries of their enemies,

The returns from exile will be supernatural. The first would be after seventy years—the second after 1,900 years. This has never happened to any other nation in the history of the world. Never!

I will magnify myself among them in the sight of many nations.

The Lord repeats what He had previously said. His name, or character, will be magnified before the entire world.

Ezekiel 39:28

Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will not leave any of them in exile any longer.

Then they will know that I am the LORD their God,

Nationally, the people of Israel will realize that the Lord is God. He does exist, He has made promises to them, and His promises have indeed come true!

because I sent them into exile among the nations,

Note that the exile was His idea. He did this to punish them, but not to abandon them.

and then gathered them into their own land.

Though He sent them away, He also gathered them back. As we have emphasized, the Lord has done this not once, but twice during their history.

I will not leave any of them in exile any longer.

The exile of the people from the Promised Land will end once and for all. God has said it and He has never rescinded His promise.

We now come to a fitting conclusion of these two chapters. It is the promise of God of a future outpouring of His spirit upon His people.

Ezekiel 39:29

I will no longer hide my face from them, when I pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the sovereign LORD.

I will no longer hide my face from them,

The hiding will now be over. It will never happen again. From that time forward they will be His people and He will be their God.

when I pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel,

This will take place when the Spirit of the Lord will be poured out upon Israel. At that time, all of them will acknowledge the Lord.

declares the sovereign LORD.

The Lord has spoken! It will happen. Charles Feinberg offers a fitting conclusion:

Throughout Ezekiel, as in the rest of the Bible, the major theme is the purpose of God to bring glory to his name. To this end, God wrought his plan of salvation at Calvary at infinite cost. It is good spiritual exercise to examine whether his purpose is being fulfilled in our lives (Feinberg p. 232).

Appendix 1

The Meaning Of Rosh In Ezekiel 38,39

One of the major interpretive issues in the Ezekiel 38,39 invasion narrative is the proper translation of the Hebrew word *Rosh*. There are basically two possibilities.

The Issue Simply Stated

Rosh is either a proper noun, the name of the country where the leader Gog comes from, or it is an adjective that means “chief” which describes the word prince.

In other words, is Gog the “prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal” or is he the “the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal?”

We will examine evidence for each possibility.

Option 1: The Case For Taking Rosh As An Adjective

The primary meaning of the root of the Hebrew word “Rosh” is “head.” It is a word that is common to all Semitic languages. In fact, Rosh appears in its root forms and derivatives nearly 750 times in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Among other things, Rosh is used for the “head” as part of the body (Genesis 3:15) and by extension for the notion of “chief” of a family (Exodus 6:14). It is also used for the “chief officer” of the divisions of Israel (Exodus 18:25).

As we previously noted, most English translations render the Hebrew word “Rosh” as an adjective in Ezekiel 38,39 since “head” or “chief” is the normal meaning of the term when applied to leaders.

Some of the other reasons which have led commentators to this conclusion can be stated as follows.

The Accent System And Grammatical Construction Favors It Being An Adjective

The way in which this Hebrew word is accented, as well as the grammatical construction of the sentence, are also used to argue for Rosh being an adjective. Alexander writes:

The accentual system and syntactical construction of the Hebrew language strongly indicate an appositional relationship between the words “prince” and “chief.” Both terms are related equally, then, to the two geographical words Meshech and Tubal. Grammatically it is best to render the phrase as “the prince, the chief [head, ruler] of Meshech and Tubal” (Alexander p 854).

The Conjunction Argues For Non-Proper Name

Daniel Block provides another grammatical argument:

This interpretation [of Rosh as a proper name] is difficult (though not impossible) from a grammatical point of view. If Rosh is to be read in the first of a series of names, the conjunction should precede “Meshech.” . . . it is best understood as a common noun appositional to and offering a closer definition of *nasi* (prince) (Block p. 435).

In sum, the general meaning of the term as “head” and the way the words were accented indicate that it is best to take “Rosh” as an adjective in this context.

In addition, the grammatical construction seems to favor this conclusion. Add to this the conjunction is seemingly in the wrong place if Rosh is to be understood as a place name. Thus, the translation “chief prince,” or something like this, is best according to these commentators.

Is The Rejection Of Newspaper Exegesis Guiding Conclusions?

Newspaper exegesis can be defined as allowing modern events, as reflected in the daily newspaper, to guide ones interpretation of the Bible. Those who believe that these chapters are actually speaking of literal future events are often accused of “newspaper exegesis.”

While it may be true of some Bible teachers, it certainly is not true of all of them. Indeed, there are many careful Bible interpreters who warn about doing this type of interpretation.

Apart from the grammatical arguments, there are also those commentators who appear to have a disdain for people who see anything future and literal in these two chapters. Perhaps because of their viewpoint on the interpretation of these chapters they seemingly don’t even consider the possibility of Rosh being a proper name.

While this is not true of every commentator, there is the suspicion that this may guide some of them. Note the following comments:

In the nineteenth century, against the background of the tensions in Asia Minor that culminated in the Crimean War, Wilhelm Gesenius identified Rosh as Russia. This view was subsequently popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible, along with the idea taken from other sources that “Meshech” and “Tubal” are the Russian cities of Moscow and Tobolsk. During the first World War, Arno Gaebelin argued that Gomer was Germany.

More recently, in response to the rise of Communism, these ideas have become the staples of popular dispensational end-times literature . . . With its vivid imagery and pictorial language, apocalyptic, (or more precisely proto-apocalyptic) literature such as Ezekiel 38-39 lends itself to a flexible application of whatever the contemporary dangers of world peace are perceived to be. In a world of much tribulation, there will always be a plausible explanation of why these times in particular fit the description of the biblical “end times.”

There are numerous factual flaws in these identifications . . . It is etymologically unrelated to the Hebrew term and modern lexicons have universally rejected Gesenius’s claim (Duguid, pp. 452,453).

The disdain for any type of end-time view of these chapters is obvious. Note also that the great scholar Gesenius is accused of using current events to color his interpretation of the translation of the Hebrew word “Rosh” in this context.

The Case For Rosh Being A Proper Name (Proper Noun)

While the majority of English translations, and many Hebrew scholars, see Rosh as an adjective in this context, there are others who believe that “Rosh” is actually a proper name in this particular section of Scripture.

There are a number of arguments that which are put forth to support this view. They are as follows.

1. The Septuagint

To begin with, the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, translates Rosh as the proper name *Ros*. This is especially significant since the Septuagint was translated a mere three centuries after Ezekiel was written.

Thus the earliest translation of the Hebrew into another language assumed it was a proper noun. We should not underestimate this evidence!

In addition, the ancient Greek translations of Symmachus and Theodotion also translate Rosh as a proper noun. This gives us further evidence that those in antiquity saw Rosh as referring an actual place name and not as an adjective further explaining the word prince (chief prince).

2. Grammatical Arguments

Contrary to what others have said, there are a number of grammatical arguments that can be put forward substantiate Rosh as a proper name.

First, eminent Hebrew scholars of the 19th century, such as Wilhelm Gesenius and C. F. Keil, held that the better translation of Rosh in Ezekiel 38:2-3 and 39:1 is as a proper noun referring to a specific geographical location.

Gesenius, who died in 1842, is considered one of the greatest scholars of the Hebrew language. He believed that Rosh in Ezekiel was a proper noun identifying Russia. He says that *Rosh* in Ezekiel 38:2,3; 39:1 is a...

“pr. n. of a northern nation, mentioned with Meshech and Tubal; undoubtedly the *Russians*, who are mentioned by the Byzantine writers of the tenth century, under the name *the Ros*, dwelling to the north of Taurus . . . as dwelling on the river Rha (*Wolga*).”

In his original Latin version of the lexicon, Gesenius has nearly one page of notes dealing with the word Rosh and the Rosh people mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39. These notes gave further substantiation to his claim.

Contrary to what we just read; nowhere do we find him attempting to allow the current events of his day to dictate his conclusion. C.F. Keil wrote:

Gog is still further described as the prince of *Rosh*, *Meshech*, and *Tubal*. It is true that Ewald follows Aquila, the Targum, and Jerome, and connects ראש (Rosh) with נשיא (Nisi [prince]) as an appellative in the sense of . . . chief prince. But the argument used in support of this explanation, namely, that there is no people of the name of *Rosh* mentioned either in the Old Testament or by Josephus, is a very weak one; whilst, on the other hand, the appellative rendering, though possible, no doubt, after the analogy of הכהן ראש (the high priest) in 1 Chronicles 27:5, is by no means probable, for the simple reason that the נשיא (Nisi) occurs again Ezekiel 38:3 in and Ezekiel 39:1, and in such repetitions circumstantial titles are generally abbreviated (Keil).

To sum up, Keil argues that it is significant that Rosh is mentioned the first time in Ezekiel 38:2 and then repeated in Ezekiel 38:3 and 39:1.

He concludes that if Rosh were simply a title (chief prince) it would probably be dropped in these two places because in Hebrew when titles are repeated, they are generally abbreviated.

In the 19th century, William Kelly wrote:

But it may be well to clear away some mistakes which have long, and for most readers, overhung the translation of verse 2 to the detriment of the sense. Happily, the oldest version (the Septuagint) gives the true meaning; and the Greek versions of Theodotion and Symmachus did not abandon but confirm it. It is impossible on any just principles to deny that the Septuagint and those who hold with it rightly give (the ruler of Rosh) . . .

There can be no doubt therefore that it must be taken as a proper name, and here not of a man as in Genesis 26: 2, if the common reading stand, but of a race. This at once furnishes a suitable sense, which is strengthened by the term which precedes it as well as by those that follow (William Kelly, *Notes on Ezekiel*, London, Blackheath, 1876, pp. 191-193).

In the twentieth century, G. A. Cooke, in the *International Critical Commentary*, translates Ezekiel 38:2, “the chief of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal.” He calls this “the most natural way of rendering the Hebrew.”

This is from another scholar who was merely rendering the Hebrew in the way that he believed was the most accurate.

Daniel Block, who has written an excellent commentary on Ezekiel, wrote.

“The issue revolves around whether *ro’s* is the name of an ethnic group or a common noun. Both LXX and the construct pointing of the Masoretes argue for the former.”

Though Block notes the ancient evidence, he instead argues for Rosh being an adjective.

There is something else. Modern day scholar Clyde Billington wrote a series of three articles titled “The Rosh People In History And Prophecy,” (Michigan Theological Journal (1992-1993).

As far as the grammatical arguments go, he came to the following conclusions:

The features of Hebrew grammar . . . dictate that Rosh be translated as a proper noun and not as an adjective, . . . It should be noted that the grammatical arguments for the translation of ‘Rosh’ as a proper noun in Ezekiel 38–39 are conclusive and not really open for serious debate.”

Bible Dictionaries

Add to this, there are a number of Bible dictionaries and Bible Encyclopedias who assume Rosh is a proper name here. They include the New Bible Dictionary, Wycliffe Bible Dictionary, and International Standard Bible Encyclopedia.

Therefore, the view that Rosh is a proper name is certainly not without its scholarly advocates. Even those who disagree with this rendering admit that it is certainly possible.

Billington made this conclusion:

1. Ezekiel 38–39 does mention a people called the “Rosh” who will be allies of Meshech, Tubal, and Gog in the Last Days.
2. There were Rosh peoples who lived to the north of Israel in the Caucasus Mountains and to the north of the Black and Caspian Seas.
3. Some of the Rosh people who lived to the north of Israel came in time to be called “Russians.”
4. The name Russian is derived from the name Ros/Rosh which is found in Ezekiel 38–39.
5. And, in conclusion, it is clear that Russian peoples will be involved along with Meshech, Tubal, and Gog in an invasion of Israel in the Last Days.

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

This summarizes some of the arguments for Rosh being a proper name, the name of an ethnic people, which refers to the land that is modern day Russia.

David Cooper notes:

The prophet stated that this prince and his land are in the uttermost parts of the north-north from Babylonia, where Ezekiel was when he issued this prophecy (see 38:15 and 39:2). The country that meets the conditions of these statements can be none other than Russia, because she occupies the country which is north of both Babylonia and Palestine (Cooper p. 11).

In sum, a case can be made for Rosh referring to an actual geographical area in the ancient world which today lies in the country of Russia.

Appendix 2

Factors That May Help Us Date The Timing Of The Invasion

Chapter 38

1. Placement of chapter. Is it chronological (before the Millennium) Chapter 40-48 speak of millennial temple
2. Makeup of Coalition (vs. 1-3) Russia and Iran aligned, never before in history.
3. Terms which indicate the last days; “after many days” “latter years.” (vs. 8)
4. Land restored; Return from 2nd exile (vs. 8)
5. People gathered after there had been a continual desolation (vs. 8)
6. They are dwelling securely (vs. 8)
7. The size of invading army; cloud covering the earth (vs. 9)
8. The phrase, “On that day” (vs. 10)
9. Unwalled towns; no bars, gates (vs. 11)
10. Living quietly in security (vs. 11)
11. Take a spoil; Israel has great wealth (vs. 12)
12. They dwell at the center of the earth; prime position (vs. 12)
13. Sheba, Dedan not part of group (vs. 13)
14. Israel has gold, silver; Is this literal? (vs. 13)
15. Emphasis of dwelling in security (peace?) (vs. 14)
16. Innumerable soldiers (vs. 15)
17. Israel still exists as a political entity; 1948 fulfilled (vs. 16)
18. Great earthquake (vs. 19). Is this the 2nd shaking of the earth? Hebrews 12:26-19. Mountains of Israel in their control; only since 1967 (verse 21)

Chapter 39

20. King of the North? (vs. 2)
21. Peace in the islands (vs. 6)
22. His name is no longer His name profaned among nations (vs. 7)
23. This is the “day” He spoke of. (vs. 8)
24. A 7 year burning (vs. 9)
25. Wood scarce? Is this the Great Tribulation? (vs. 10)
26. Seven month burial (vs. 12)
27. The memorial valley (vs. 13)
28. Land cleansed (vs. 14)
29. Bird feast; Revelation 19? (vs. 17)
30. All nations finally know He is the Lord (vs. 21)
31. The purpose for exile revealed (vs. 23)
32. Israel will never again be removed (vs. 28)

What’s Missing?

1. Contiguous nations joining in battle. Where are they?
2. No superpower to stop the attack. Where is the USA?

Issues For A Futuristic Interpretation

1. Weapons are ancient
2. Army is on horseback
3. Wood is needed for fuel

Appendix 3

Two Prophets: Two Sets Of Predictions

Undeniable Proof That The Bible Is True

About 610 years before the time of Christ, there were two men who lived in the city of Jerusalem. One, a prophet named Jeremiah, would predict an imminent exile of the people from the Promised Land into Babylonian captivity. He also predicted, among other things, that they would return to their land some seventy years later.

There was also a young priest by the name of Ezekiel, whom the Lord would later call to be a prophet. Ezekiel would predict a return to the Promised Land from a second exile; one that would take place in the far distant future. He also predicted a “last days” invasion of the nation of Israel by a coalition of nations after their return.

Their stories are undeniable proof that the Bible is true . . .

The Predictions Of Jeremiah

We find that Jeremiah made a number of specific predictions that have come true. Let's look at only eight of them.

Prediction 1 The City Of Jerusalem Would Be Destroyed

First and foremost, because of the sin of the people of Judah, Jeremiah predicted that the holy city of Jerusalem would be destroyed. He recorded these words of the Lord:

Run for safety, people of Benjamin! Get out of Jerusalem! Sound the trumpet in Tekoa! Light the signal fires at Beth Hakkerem! For disaster lurks out of the north; it will bring great destruction. I will destroy Daughter Zion, who is as delicate and defenseless as a young maiden. . . So take warning, Jerusalem, or I will abandon you in disgust and make you desolate, a place where no one can live (Jeremiah 6:1-2,8 NET).

The prediction was clear: Disaster was coming to Jerusalem if they did not heed the warning of the Lord. Sadly, they did not.

Prediction 2 The Entire Promised Land Would Be In Ruins

Furthermore, Lord also predicted that the Promised Land itself, like the city of Jerusalem, would also be in ruins:

The Lord said, “I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins. Jackals will make their home there. I will destroy the towns of Judah so that no one will be able to live in them” (Jeremiah 9:11 NET).

The entire country would not be livable.

The Lord stated that Babylon would be His instrument in judging the people of Judah:

Therefore, the Lord who rules over all says, 'You have not listened to what I said. So I, the Lord, affirm that I will send for all the peoples of the north and my servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. I will bring them against this land and its inhabitants and all the nations that surround it. I will utterly destroy this land, its inhabitants, and all the nations that surround it and make them everlasting ruins. I will make them objects of horror and hissing scorn. I will put an end to the sounds of joy and gladness, to the glad celebration of brides and grooms in these lands. I will put an end to the sound of people grinding meal. I will put an end to lamps shining in their houses. This whole area will become a desolate wasteland (Jeremiah 25:8-11 NET).

In sum the Lord specifically predicted that the entire area would be a desolate wasteland.

Prediction 3 The Temple Would Also Be Destroyed

Since everything was to be destroyed in the Promised Land, this would also include the temple in Jerusalem. In fact, the Lord gave this warning:

If you do not obey me, then I will do to this temple what I did to Shiloh. And I will make this city an example to be used in curses by people from all the nations on the earth (Jeremiah 26:6 NET).

The Lord gave the reason for the destruction:

They have turned away from me instead of turning to me. I tried over and over again to instruct them, but they did not listen and respond to correction. They set up their disgusting idols in the temple which I have claimed for my own and defiled it. They built places of worship for the god Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom so that they could sacrifice their sons and daughters to the god Molech. Such a disgusting practice was not something I commanded them to do! It never even entered my mind to command them to do such a thing! So Judah is certainly liable for punishment (Jeremiah 32:33-35 NET).

The result of this sinful behavior would be the destruction of the temple along with everything else

Prediction 4 The People Would Be Taken To Babylon

The Lord said that the people of Judah would be exiled to Babylon. However, they had to make a choice. Those who surrendered to the Babylonians would live, but if they stayed in Jerusalem and fought against the Babylonians, they would die:

But tell the people of Jerusalem that the Lord says, 'I will give you a choice between two courses of action. One will result in life; the other will result in death. Those who stay in this city will die in battle or of starvation or disease. Those who leave the city and surrender to the Babylonians who are besieging it will live. They will escape with their lives. For I, the Lord, say that I am determined not to deliver this city but to bring disaster on it. It will be handed over to the king of Babylon and he will destroy it with fire (Jeremiah 21:8-10 NET).

The choice would be simple: either go into exile to Babylon as the Lord had commanded, or stay and die.

Prediction 5 They Would Experience A Seventy Year Captivity

When this whole area of the Promised Land would become a desolate wasteland, the people of Judah, along with the various nations, would be subject to the king of Babylon for seventy years:

These nations will be subject to the king of Babylon for seventy years (Jeremiah 25:11 NET).

This subjection would include a seventy year captivity of the southern kingdom of Judah in the land of Babylon.

**Prediction 6 They Would Return To The Promised Land After
Seventy Years Were Completed**

Once the seventy years were fulfilled, the Lord predicted that the people would be allowed to return to their land:

The Lord said to me, “I, the Lord, the God of Israel, say: ‘The exiles whom I sent away from here to the land of Babylon are like those good figs. I consider them to be good. I will look after their welfare and will restore them to this land (Jeremiah 24:4 NET).

For the Lord says, ‘Only when the seventy years of Babylonian rule are over will I again take up consideration for you. Then I will fulfill my gracious promise to you and restore you to your homeland. For I know what I have planned for you,’ says the Lord. ‘I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope (Jeremiah 29:10-11 NET).

Restoration was promised after the seventy year captivity would be completed!

Prediction 7 Babylon Would Be Punished When The Seventy Years Were Over

Not only would the people return to their homeland from Babylon, the Babylonians themselves would be punished:

But when the seventy years are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation for their sins. I will make the land of Babylon an everlasting ruin. I, the Lord, affirm it! (Jeremiah 25:12 NET).

The punishers would themselves be punished.

Prediction 8 Hananiah The False Prophet Would Die Within A Year

These predictions of Jeremiah incensed the people and angered the false prophets. Jeremiah himself was actually put on trial for being a false prophet.

Ironically, one particular false prophet named Hananiah was singled out by Jeremiah. In fact, he made a specific prediction about the death of this false prophet. We can sum up what took place as follows:

Recall that the people of Judah were warned through Jeremiah the prophet that Babylon was God’s instrument to take them captive. In fact, in 606 B.C. the deportation to Babylon had already begun. The King of Judah, Jehoiachin, had been deported to Babylon, along with some of the people, as well as with some of the vessels of the temple.

At this time, a false prophet named Hananiah arose and publicly contradicted Jeremiah’s prophetic message to the people of Judah. We read about it as follows:

In the fifth month of that same year, the fourth year, early in the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, the prophet Hananiah son of Azzur, who was from Gibeon, said to me in the house of the Lord in the presence of the priests and all the people: “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: ‘I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon. Within two years I will bring back to this place all the articles of the Lord’s house that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon removed from here and took to Babylon. I will also bring back to this place Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and all the other exiles from Judah who went to Babylon,’ declares the Lord, ‘for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon’ (Jeremiah 28:1-4 NIV).

Note the specifics of the predictions of this false prophet. Within two years the articles of the temple would be brought back to Judah, Jehoiachin, the king, would return from Babylon along with the captives that had already been taken.

Clearly, this so-called prophet, this false prophet, contradicted the message of the genuine prophet Jeremiah. Jeremiah responded in this manner:

Then the prophet Jeremiah responded to the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests and all the people who were standing in the Lord's temple. The prophet Jeremiah said, "Amen! May the Lord do all this! May the Lord make your prophecy come true! May he bring back to this place from Babylon all the valuable articles taken from the Lord's temple and the people who were carried into exile. But listen to what I say to you and to all these people. From earliest times, the prophets who preceded you and me invariably prophesied war, disaster, and plagues against many countries and great kingdoms. So if a prophet prophesied peace and prosperity, it was only known that the Lord truly sent him when what he prophesied came true (Jeremiah 28: 5-9 NIV).

We should note well what Jeremiah said. Previously, the prophets that arose would pronounce judgment upon the people for their sins against the Lord. If indeed someone prophesied peace and prosperity, then this person would not be considered a genuine prophet of the Lord unless his prediction came true.

This rebuke of Jeremiah caused Hananiah to do the following:

The prophet Hananiah then took the yoke off the prophet Jeremiah's neck and broke it. Then he spoke up in the presence of all the people. "The Lord says, 'In the same way I will break the yoke of servitude of all the nations to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon before two years are over.'" After he heard this, the prophet Jeremiah departed and went on his way (Jeremiah 28:10-11 NIV).

Hananiah "doubled-down" on his previous predictions. He claimed the Lord would take away the yoke of servitude of all nations to King Nebuchadnezzar, and He would do it within two years.

Obviously, the Lord was not pleased with these false predictions of Hananiah. Indeed, he was giving deceitful comfort to the sinful inhabitants of Jerusalem. Soon all of them would be deported to Babylon. In fact, the Lord had made abundantly it clear that King Nebuchadnezzar was God's instrument of judgment upon the people of Judah.

The Prediction Of The Death Of Hananiah

Jeremiah would not let this false prophesy stand. Note the specific prediction that Jeremiah gave toward this evil man Hananiah:

Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, "Listen, Hananiah! The Lord has not sent you, yet you have persuaded this nation to trust in lies. Therefore this is what the Lord says: 'I am about to remove you from the face of the earth. This very year you are going to die, because you have preached rebellion against the Lord (Jeremiah 28:15-16 NIV).

While Hananiah predicted the return of the exiles, the return of the king, and the return of the temple vessels within two years, Jeremiah gave his own prediction of an event that would take place within one year— Hananiah, the false prophet, would die!

This sums up eight specific predictions that the Lord gave through the prophet Jeremiah to the people of Judah.

The Fulfillments Of The Eight Predictions

The evidence will show that each of these eight predictions was literally fulfilled:

Fulfillments One Through Five

The Book of Second Chronicles records the literal fulfillment of the first five predictions:

The Lord God of their ancestors continually warned them through his messengers, for he felt compassion for his people and his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his warnings, and ridiculed his prophets. Finally the Lord got very angry at his people and there was no one who could prevent his judgment. He brought against them the king of the Babylonians, who slaughtered their young men in their temple. He did not spare young men or women, or even the old and aging. God handed everyone over to him. He carried away to Babylon all the items in God's temple, whether large or small, as well as what was in the treasuries of the Lord's temple and in the treasuries of the king and his officials. They burned down the Lord's temple and tore down the wall of Jerusalem. They burned all its fortified buildings and destroyed all its valuable items. He deported to Babylon all who escaped the sword. They served him and his sons until the Persian kingdom rose to power. This took place to fulfill the Lord's message delivered through Jeremiah. The land experienced its sabbatical years; it remained desolate for seventy years, as prophesied (2 Chronicles 36:15-21).

We should note that the city was destroyed, fulfillment one, the entire land was devastated, fulfillment two, the temple was also destroyed, fulfillment three, the people were taken to Babylon, fulfillment four, and they remained there for seventy years as the Holy Land lay desolate, fulfillment five.

Fulfillment 6 The People Did Return To The Land After Seventy Years

As the seventy years were about to expire, we find that Daniel the prophet, who was in exile in Babylon, was reading the words of the prophet Jeremiah. When doing so, he realized that the captivity was about to end:

In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, who was of Median descent and who had been appointed king over the Babylonian empire - in the first year of his reign I, Daniel, came to understand from the sacred books that, according to the word of the LORD disclosed to the prophet Jeremiah, the years for the fulfilling of the desolation of Jerusalem were seventy in number (Daniel 9:1-2 NET).

The seventy years were about up and it was time for the people to return.

This was accomplished by the decree of a Persian king by the name of Cyrus:

In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in order to fulfill the Lord's message spoken through Jeremiah, the Lord stirred the mind of King Cyrus of Persia. He disseminated a proclamation throughout his entire kingdom, announcing in a written edict the following:

Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The Lord God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth. He has instructed me to build a temple for him in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Anyone from his people among you (may his God be with him!) may go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and may build the temple of the Lord God of Israel - he is the God who is in Jerusalem. Anyone who survives in any of those places where he is a resident foreigner must be helped by his neighbors with silver, gold, equipment, and animals, along with voluntary offerings for the temple of God which is in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1-4 NET).

The people were indeed allowed to go back to their Promised Land; just as the Lord had previously predicted.

Fulfillment 7 Babylon Was Punished

Babylon, the great empire, fell to the Medes and the Persians. This is recorded in the fifth chapter of the Book of Daniel when the prophet interpreted the famous “handwriting on the wall.” Daniel explained:

This is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEQEL, and PHARSIN. This is the interpretation of the words: As for mene - God has numbered your kingdom’s days and brought it to an end. As for teqel - you are weighed on the balances and found to be lacking. As for peres - your kingdom is divided and given over to the Medes and Persians.”

Then, on Belshazzar’s orders, Daniel was clothed in purple, a golden collar was placed around his neck, and he was proclaimed third ruler in the kingdom. And in that very night Belshazzar, the Babylonian king, was killed. So Darius the Mede took control of the kingdom when he was about sixty-two years old (Daniel 5:25-30; 6:1 NET).

The Babylonian Empire, the instrument of God’s judgment, was now itself judged by the Lord.

Fulfillment 8 Hananiah The False Prophet Did Die

The prediction given to the false prophet Hananiah did indeed come true. Recall that Jeremiah predicted that he would die within a year. The prediction was literally fulfilled just as the man of God predicted:

Two months later the prophet Hananiah died (Jeremiah 28:17 NLT).

At that time, it should have then become obvious to all, as to who was the genuine prophet of God! We should note the specifics of the fulfillment of these predictions concerning Hananiah.

First, Hananiah, the false prophet, did die.

Second, it was within the time period predicted by Jeremiah.

Third, the false predictions of Hananiah did not come true.

Indeed, the people did not immediately return from Babylon, nor was Nebuchadnezzar stopped from subduing the nations, as Hananiah falsely predicted.

All in all, Jeremiah was vindicated as a genuine prophet of God.

Conclusion On Jeremiah’s Predictions

Eight specific prediction, eight literal fulfillments from this prophet who lived at the time of the destruction of the first temple.

But that’s not the end to the story ...

Enter Ezekiel

As we have just seen, Jeremiah made a number of predictions about the first exile that were all literally fulfilled soon after they were given.

Another prophet, Ezekiel, looking into the far-distant future, made predictions about a return from a second exile. He also predicted a “last days” invasion of Israel by a number of nations.

Ezekiel was one of the exiles in Babylon who was taken in first deportation (606 B.C.). In captivity, this priest was appointed to be a prophet to the people of Judah who were in the Babylonian exile.

While in Babylon, the people heard of the literal fulfillment of Jeremiah's predictions; the city and the temple had been destroyed, and the remainder of the people, who had been in Judah, were now in captivity in Babylon. The Lord had raised up Ezekiel to provide a message of hope to the captives.

Ezekiel Looks Beyond The Return From Babylon To The Time Of The End

Ezekiel predicted the return from a second exile . . . one that would take place in "the Last days" (before the kingdom of God comes to the earth)

Also, by the word of the Lord, he predicted a "Last Days" invasion of Israel (36-39) led by a personage named Gog.

We read the following words directed to Gog:

Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal (Ezekiel 38:2 NKJV).

Then the Lord made these predictions:

After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come to a land restored from the ravages of war, with many peoples gathered on the mountains of Israel that had long been in ruins. Its people were brought out from the peoples, and all of them will be living securely. You will advance; you will come like a storm. You will be like a cloud covering the earth, you, all your troops, and the many other peoples with you (Ezekiel 38:8,9 NET).

Notice this invasion takes place "after many days" "in the latter years."

In the 19th century, William Kelly observed that this prediction was indeed to take place in the "last days. He put it this way:

Next follow two chapters which contain a prediction of God's judgment to fall in the last days, when Israel is restored, on a great north-eastern chief with his vast array of satellites and allies on the mountains of the Holy Land. . . The great questions are, what, where, and when, they are viewed when the vision applies, not when it was written. And of this the place it occupies in the prophetic series, the precise language of the vision and the character of the judgment pronounced, ought to leave no doubt for any believer. It can apply only in the last days when the chosen nation are peacefully restored to their land, and it speaks of such a judgment on their enemies, countless though they may be, as has never been witnessed since Ezekiel prophesied, nor anything approaching to it . . . It will be noticed that the downfall of Gog is here expressly set down to "the latter days," as well as to "that day when my people Israel dwell safely." Not only was none of this true in the days of Zerubbabel . . . or when Antiochus persecuted the returned remnant, but the scale of destruction is wholly inapplicable. In no case whatever since Ezekiel's time is there so much as a point of contact. The prediction, therefore, beyond just question, awaits its fulfilment in days to come (William Kelly, *Notes on Ezekiel*, London, Blackheath, 1876, pp. 191,194, 198,199).

Indeed, it does wait to be fulfilled in "days to come."

What Exactly Was Predicted?

If we read these chapters, 36-39, and we assume it is predicting a literal last days invasion that will take place before the kingdom of God comes to this earth, then what conclusions can we make from interpreting this prophecy literally?

Our first question: What does the Bible assume as to how the world look like at that time?

This is not rocket science, anyone can do this . . . In fact, the author got out a yellow pad, went through the chapters, and jotted down the various assumptions recorded in Ezekiel concerning what the world would look like at the time of the return from this second exile, as well as the situation surrounding the predicted “last days” invasion.

Here’s what we discover when we look at these chapters. . .

A Personage Named Gog Will Lead A Coalition To Invade Israel

We begin by reading the words that the Lord directed to this leader, Gog who will lead this coalition of nations to invade Israel:

Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, “Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you (Ezekiel 38:1-6 NKJV)

In the 19th century, William Kelly made the following observations about these verses:

Let us now look into the opening of this remarkable prediction. Who can deny that the rapid and immense development of the Russian empire bears its unmistakable witness to the judgment that is coming, as here declared so long before? . . . Here the case stands clearly defined in all but the name, which seems to be probably symbolic. It is the last enemy of Israel who confronts us. He dwells in the land of Magog, that son of Japhet who overspread in due time the vast steppes of what was anciently called Scythia. He is autocrat of all the Russias, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. Thus we have himself, his land, and his people (William Kelly, *Notes on Ezekiel*, London, Blackheath, 1876, pp. 194,195).

This last days invasion is described in detail in chapters 38,39.

There Are At Least 11 Assumptions Prior To The Invasion, As To What This Part Of The World Will Look Like

Before the invasion will take place, there are, at least, eleven predicted things that are assumed to be true about the nation of Israel as well as the condition of the land. They are as follows:

Assumption 1 The Nation Of Israel Will Exist In The Last Days

This is primary. In fact, it is their country that will be invaded by this coalition of nations led by Gog.

Before the invasion, we read the following in Ezekiel 37:

Then he said to me, “Son of man, these bones are all the house of Israel. Look, they are saying, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope has perished; we are cut off.’ Therefore prophesy, and tell them, ‘This is what the sovereign Lord says: Look, I am about to open your graves and will raise you from your graves, my people. I will bring you to the land of Israel (Ezekiel 37:11-12 NET)

After describing the results of the invasion the Lord says:

I will display my majesty among the nations. All the nations will witness the judgment I have executed, and the power I have exhibited among them. Then the house of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God, from that day forward (Ezekiel 39:21-22 NET)

Specifically, the nation of Israel will exist in the last days. This is the first assumption.

Assumption 2 Gog, With His Armies Will Come To The Land Of Israel; A Land That Had Been Ravaged By Wars

Scripture says:

After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come to a land restored from the ravages of war (Ezekiel 38:8 NET)

Assumption 3 The Promised Land Will Have Been In Ruins For A Long Time

Ezekiel 38:8 tells us that this land had suffered for a long period of time:

... with many peoples gathered on the mountains of Israel that had long been in ruins (Ezekiel 38:8 NET).

Assumption 4 The People Of Israel, However, Will Be Numerous

... with many peoples gathered on the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 38:8 NET)

Earlier, in Ezekiel 37, we are told the people would be “like a great army.”

So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army (Ezekiel 37:10 ESV)

Assumption 5 The People Of Israel Had Previously Been Scattered

... its people have returned from many lands to the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 38:8 NLT)

Assumption 6 Yet, The People Will Have Returned To Their Ancient Homeland (In The Last Days)

We are specifically told that these events will take place in the “last days,” in the “distant future:”

A long time from now you will be called into action. In the distant future you will swoop down on the land of Israel ... after its people have returned from many lands to the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 38:8 NLT).

At that time in the distant future, I will bring you against my land as everyone watches, and my holiness will be displayed by what happens to you, Gog (Ezekiel 38:16 NLT).

We should note that Ezekiel had earlier recorded the Lord predicting this return:

I will bring them out from among the peoples and gather them from foreign countries; I will bring them to their own land. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams and all the inhabited places of the land (Ezekiel 34:13 NET).

William Kelly explained the prediction in this manner:

The prophecy then supposes the return of the people as a whole to their land, not of a remnant only, as after the Babylonish captivity. But there is more. It supposes a condition of unsuspected quiet such as differs from any period of Israel's history in the past (William Kelly, *Notes on Ezekiel*, London, Blackheath, 1876, p. 197).

Assumption 7 But Only After Being Away For A Long Time

The land had long been in ruins . . .

without the people of Israel (Ezekiel 38:8 NET)

Assumption 8 The Devasted Land Would Be Restored, Israel Would Then Create Great Wealth

Though they would return to a desolate land, once back in the land they will create great wealth. In fact, it is this great wealth that will cause this personage named Gog, along with his allies, to invade the land. The Lord said to him:

A long time from now you will be called into action. In the distant future you will swoop down on the land of Israel, which will be enjoying peace after recovering from war . . . This is what the Sovereign Lord says: At that time evil thoughts will come to your mind, and you will devise a wicked scheme. . . You will say, 'Israel is an unprotected land filled with unwalled villages! I will march against her and destroy these people who live in such confidence! I will go to those formerly desolate cities that are now filled with people who have returned from exile in many nations. I will capture vast amounts of plunder, for the people are rich with livestock and other possessions now (Ezekiel 38:8-12 NLT).

When he invades, the land will have been restored from the ravages of war, the cities will be populated and the ruins rebuilt. Gog will then invade to take a spoil, to plunder.

Assumption 9 When The People Return, They Will Form A State (Some Political Entity)

Gog and his allies will attack a nation, not just a mob of people.

Assumption 10 Their Borders Will Include The Mountains Of Israel

...with many peoples gathered on the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 38:8 NET).

Assumption 11 They Will Come Back In Unbelief In Jesus As Their Messiah

How do we know this to be true? Scripture tells us that it is only when the Lord destroys these invading armies do the people begin to recognize that the Lord is working on their behalf. This assumes that they were in a state of unbelief until that time.

Summing Up

The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

According to the Prophet Ezekiel, there are at least eleven predictions, or assumptions, as to what the world will be like in the “last days” when this invasion takes place.

- Prediction 1 The nation of Israel will exist in the last days
- Prediction 2 Gog, with his armies will come to the land of Israel, a land that will have been ravaged by wars
- Prediction 3 The land had long been in ruins
- Prediction 4 The people of Israel, however, are numerous
- Prediction 5 The people of Israel will have been scattered
- Prediction 6 Yet the people will have returned to their homeland (in the last days)
- Prediction 7 But only after being away for a long time
- Prediction 8 The land is now restored though they initially returned to a desolate land. Once back in the land they will create great wealth.
- Prediction 9 When they return, they will form a state (some political entity).
- Prediction 10 Their borders will include the mountains of Israel
- Prediction 11 They will come back in unbelief in Jesus as their Messiah.

Let us now look at these eleven predictions (assumptions), made about 2,600 years ago, which must be fulfilled before the invasion can occur.

The Fulfillment Of The 11 Things Which Must Be In Place

Did you notice, every single one of them has now been fulfilled! Let’s go down the list.

Fulfillment 1 The Nation Of Israel Does Indeed Exist In The Last Days

They do indeed exist. In fact, at the beginning of 2020, the population of Jews worldwide was about 14.6 million

Fulfillment 2 The Land To Which They Returned Had Been Decimated By War

Fulfillment 3 The Land Had Long Been In Ruins

We will look at fulfillments two and three together.

The Promised Land did not look anything like a “land of milk and honey” when the Jews returned to it.

In fact, when he visited the Holy Land in the nineteenth century, American writer Mark Twain described it this way:

A desolate country whose soil is rich enough, but is given over wholly to weeds... a silent mournful expanse.... a desolation.... we never saw a human being on the whole route.... hardly a tree or shrub anywhere. Even the

olive tree and the cactus, those fast friends of a worthless soil, had almost deserted the country” (Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*).

In 1867, we find that the Holy Land was a country that was desolate. Indeed, no humans, no vegetation.

These descriptions of the Holy Land were a literal fulfillment of the predictions of the Lord. Fortunately, the desolation was not to last forever.

Fulfillment 4 They Have Come Back In Large Numbers

We find that the people have indeed returned to their ancient homeland, in the millions.

Fulfillment 5 The People From The Nation Israel Had Indeed Been Scattered Throughout The World

This was not speaking of the Babylonian captivity since the people, at that time, were captives in the empire of Babylon.

This prediction has been literally fulfilled. There is scarcely a nation that does not have, or has not had, descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

In the appendix of our book, *25 Signs We Are Near The End*, we give about a dozen examples of past commentators living anywhere from one hundred to four hundred years ago. They noted this scattering of the people, yet they all predicted their future return to their ancient homeland.

For example, F.J. Horsefield wrote the following in 1920:

The history of all the great empires of the Old Testament times bear witness to the fact that the truth of prophecy has, in all ages, been fully vindicated, however, improbable the fulfillment may have seemed whilst the present condition of the Jewish race bears absolutely irrefutable testimony to the same effect. . . It has been frequently pointed out that the present condition of the Jews, is, in itself, a proof of the fulfillment of prophecy. Our Lord foretold it when He said, “They shall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all the nations: and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles be fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). And in this emphatic statement Christ was only confirming a multitude of Old Testament prophecies which speak of the desolation of the land of Israel; of the people being scattered amongst the heathen; and of the becoming “an astonishment, a proverb, and a by-word amongst all nations whither the Lord should lead them (Deuteronomy 28:37). Yet they were preserved as a separate people, and after the conclusion of the times of the Gentiles, to be brought back to their own land. . . . For the moment we simply notice that after 2,000 years of dispersion the Jews are as distinct as when they were first scattered from Jerusalem. Other races blend and mingle with each other, and in time lose their separate identity, but for twenty centuries that little nation of Israel, scattered all over the world, has been kept separate and distinct from every other nation and race, waiting for the time when they shall be restored in Palestine (F.J. Horsefield, *The Return of the King*, Fifth Edition, Good Books Corporation, Harrisburg, Pa., 1920, pp. 20, 27-28).

Notice the last sentence, “waiting for the time when they shall be restored to Palestine.” They have indeed been restored!

Fulfillment 6 They Did Return To Their Ancient Homeland

As we have emphasized, this would have been a rather amazing prediction when first made. Indeed, the nation had been removed from their homeland to Babylon. Humanly speaking there was no guarantee that they would ever be able to return to their own land—let alone re-form their nation in their homeland.

Yet all this has happened, not once, but twice in their history!

In fact, in our book *25 Signs We Are Near The End*, under sign number three, we list some eleven specific predictions found in Scripture of their promised return!

Fulfillment 7 The People Had Been Away From Their Homeland For A Long Time

Indeed, it was almost 1,900 years from the time that Jerusalem and the Second Temple were destroyed, and the people were scattered throughout the world, until they returned to their homeland.

Again, this is not the Babylonian Captivity. Ezekiel 38:8 is clear about this. All of this takes place in the “distant future.”

Fulfillment 8 Yet, Once Back In The Land They Have Indeed Created Great Wealth

When one looks at the land of Israel at the beginning of the twentieth century, and then compares it to what we see today, it is truly like “night and day.” The desert has been built up and waste areas have been beautified. Modern Israel is indeed a wealthy country.

Interestingly, writing in 1840, Hugh McNeile predicted this based upon the Scripture:

The present condition of the land of Palestine is well known to be one of extreme barrenness and desolation; whereas it was a land of flocks and herds, a land flowing with milk and honey, the glory of all lands. In this way we recognize the literal fulfillment of that clause of the prophecy which predicts desolation; and from the next clause of the prophecy, we confidently anticipate a literal renovation of beauty and fertility, accompanied by a multiplication of beasts upon it, as well as men, for the consumption of its produce. In the present condition of the Jewish people, divided and dispersed, we recognize the literal fulfillment of those claims of prophecy which imply division and predict dispersion; and from similar clauses, similarly interpreted, we confidently anticipate a similar literal fulfillment of the promised restoration and reunion (Hugh McNeile, *Popular Lectures on the Prophecies relative to the Jewish nation*, London, J. Hatchard and Son, 1840, pp. 156,157).

His reasoning was simple. At his time, there was a literal fulfillment with respect to the desolation of the land. Based upon Scripture, he predicted a literal fulfillment of the predictions concerning the renovation of the land.

While he did not live to see it, the predictions have literally come true. Israel today is indeed a wealthy country.

Fulfillment 9 The Modern State Of Israel Has Indeed Formed

Not only have the people returned to their ancient homeland modern state of Israel was formed on May 14,1948.

Fulfillment 10 Their Borders Now Include The Mountains Of Israel

This was not true in 1948 when the modern state of Israel was reborn. It was only in 1967, as a result of the Six-Day War, that this geographical area became under their control.

We have noticed that the Lord has emphasized over and over again that Gog's army would come down to the mountains of Israel to "take a spoil" and then find themselves defeated on these mountains. Interestingly, the mountains of Israel have only recently come into the hands of the Israelis.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum explains:

They extend the length of the center of the country 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 town north of Beersheba 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 (Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah*, p. 114).

Fulfillment 11 They Are Still In Unbelief In Jesus

The nation today has certainly not accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Indeed, many of the Jews are secular, having no form of religion whatsoever.

In fact, according to Ezekiel 39, it will not be until the Lord supernaturally intervenes on their behalf, and destroys the invading armies, that the people will realize that the God of Israel has been fighting for them. Scripture says:

In this way, I will demonstrate my glory to the nations. Everyone will see the punishment I have inflicted on them and the power of my fist when I strike. And from that time on the people of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God (Ezekiel 39:21 NLT)

In sum, each of these eleven things, that must be in place before the invasion can occur, are now in place!

A Second Set Of Assumptions: The Invasion And The Aftermath

We now look at what the Bible says about the invasion itself as well as what takes place after it occurs.

Prediction 1 Seven Or Eight Nations Will Invade Israel

While this part of the prophecy has not yet been fulfilled, we can certainly see it taking shape. Indeed, three of the nations mentioned, Russia, Turkey and Iran are working together militarily with Russia taking the lead.

Turkey, a member of NATO, a secular country for a century, has now become controlled by Islam. The former friendship they had with Israel is now a thing of the past.

Iran is the largest state sponsor of terrorism in the world.

Add to this, northern Sudan, is controlled by Islamic extremists as are the central Asian countries that were formerly part of the old Soviet Union.

Prediction 2 Israel Has Something These Countries Want, As Well As What They Need

Something will exist in Israel that these nations desire, as well as need. This will be the reason for the invasion. This assumes that which we already know— Israel is a wealthy country with a strategic location.

Prediction 3 None Of These Nations That Border Israel Are Part Of The Invading Force.

While each of the nations that border Israel; Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt have attacked the modern state of Israel in the past, none of them are involved in this last days invasion.

Today, Syria is controlled by Iran and Russia, Jordan is neutral, Lebanon is controlled by Hezbollah, and Egypt has a treaty with Israel.

Prediction 4 The Leader Of This Coalition, Gog, Will Desire To Take Something That Does Not Belong To Him.

This has been the consistent behavior of the leaders of Russia in the past, as well as in the present.

Prediction 5 Their Invasion Will Raise A Protest From Sheba And Dedan (Modern Saudi Arabia And The Gulf States).

Interestingly, like the nations bordering Israel, as well the Gulf States will not participate either in this invasion. There will however be a protest from the gulf states.

Among other things, it shows that they are not aligned with the invading nations.

Prediction 6 The People Of The Land Will Be Living In Relative Security

They will believe themselves to be safe, or secure, at the time of the invasion.

Prediction 7 There Will Be No Superpower Who Can Or Will Intervene On Their Behalf

Gog, the leader of this invading force, does not have a second thought when he chooses invade Israel along with his coalition of nations.

This means that the United States, as a superpower is not a player on the world scene.

Prediction 8 When These Nations Enter The Promised Land, Then God Will Supernaturally Intervene And Completely Destroy Their Armies (Ezekiel 39:2).

This will be clear to everyone:

I will knock the bow from your left hand and the arrows from your right hand, and I will leave you helpless. You and your army and your allies will all die on the mountains. I will feed you to the vultures and wild animals. You will fall in the open fields, for I have spoken, says the Sovereign Lord (Ezekiel 39:3-5 NLT).

Prediction 9 The Countries From Where These Armies Came Will Also Suffer Destruction.

It will not only be the invading armies that will be destroyed. Indeed, the countries that sent these soldiers will also suffer the Lord's punishment:

And I will rain down fire on Magog and on all your allies who live safely on the coasts. Then they will know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 39:6 NLT).

Prediction 10 The World Will Then Know That The Lord, The God Of Israel Is Indeed Fighting On Their Behalf.

It will be obvious that the destruction of these armies will be a supernatural work of God; Israel's armies will do nothing. This will cause the nations of the world to realize that the God of Israel, the Lord, did all of this:

At that time in the distant future, I will bring you against my land as everyone watches, and my holiness will be displayed by what happens to you, Gog. Then all the nations will know that I am the Lord (Ezekiel 38:16 NLT).

The Lord also said:

In this way, I will make known my holy name among my people of Israel. I will not let anyone bring shame on it. And the nations, too, will know that I am the Lord, the Holy One of Israel. That day of judgment will come, says the Sovereign Lord. Everything will happen just as I have declared it (Ezekiel 39:7-8 NLT).

Summing Up What The Bible Says

As we look at these specific predictions made by the Lord through the prophet Ezekiel, we are struck by the remarkable fulfillments.

Just think about this . . .

The nation of Israel exists today while most of the nations that are mentioned in the Bible no longer exist. As predicted, the land of Israel was desolate and barren for countless years. However, the people have miraculously returned to their ancient homeland after being away for a long time. They have formed the modern state of Israel, and have turned this former desolate country into a country of great wealth.

The people, who are also numerous, have control over the specific geographical areas describes in Ezekiel, the city of Jerusalem and the mountains of Israel. Yet, nationally, there are still in unbelief of the One who died for them, Jesus their Messiah.

These are all fulfillments of what the Lord predicted this part of the world would be like before Israel experienced this "last days" invasion.

These are indeed undeniable proofs that the God of the Bible exists, that He knows the future, predicts the future, and is ultimately in control of all future events.

Appendix 4

The Russian Invasion Of Ukraine: What Does It Mean Biblically?

On Wednesday, February 23, 2022, Russia, led by Vladimir Putin, illegally invaded a sovereign country, Ukraine. The reasons Putin gave for the necessity to invade were patently false.

Putin did not limit his incursion to the two Russian-speaking regions that supposedly needed independence from Ukraine. Instead, his attack is upon the entire country.

Scores of refugees have left Ukraine and have gone to neighboring countries such as Poland, Romania, and Moldova. In essence, this is an attack on the free world.

Questions Abound

So, are his intentions limited to Ukraine? What about other nearby countries, Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia? He has already threatened any country or organization that stands in his way.

Will this cause a World War? Is this the Ezekiel 38,39 invasion? Will the world be destroyed with the threats Russia has made to use their nuclear weapons against any country who helps Ukraine?

At the outset, two important observations are in order.

Observation 1: This Is Not The Ezekiel 38,39 Invasion

This incursion has nothing to do with the Ezekiel 38,39 invasion. Scripture is clear that the Ezekiel 38,39 is a “last days” invasion of Israel, and Israel alone. There are no other countries targeted.

Add to this, the invasion consists of a “group of nations” invading. Only Russia is involved in this conflict with Ukraine.

Observation 2: The World Will Not Be Destroyed

While the Russians have threatened to destroy the world with nuclear weapons if the West does not give in to their demands, this will not happen. The Bible makes it clear that the Lord will intervene before something like this occurs.

Jesus, in speaking of the time of the end, said the following:

For then there will be great suffering unlike anything that has happened from the beginning of the world until now, or ever will happen. And if those days had not been cut short, no one would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short (Matthew 24:21,22 NET).

Jesus has promised to return before the world finds a way to destroy itself.

Scripture also records the Lord returning to a world that still exists. Upon His return, He sets up His eternal kingdom. We read about this in the Book of Revelation:

Then I saw heaven opened and here came a white horse! The one riding it was called “Faithful” and “True,” and with justice he judges and goes to war. His eyes are like a fiery flame and there are many diadem crowns

on his head. He has a name written that no one knows except himself. He is dressed in clothing dipped in blood, and he is called the Word of God. The armies that are in heaven, dressed in white, clean, fine linen, were following him on white horses. From his mouth extends a sharp sword, so that with it he can strike the nations. He will rule them with an iron rod, and he stomps the winepress of the furious wrath of God, the All-Powerful. He has a name written on his clothing and on his thigh: “King of kings and Lord of lords.” (Revelation 19:11-16 NET).

The promise of Scripture is that Jesus will return someday as “King of kings” and “Lord of Lords.” Indeed, there will be a world, filled with people, to return to.

So What Does This Mean Biblically?

If this is not the Ezekiel 38,39 invasion, and the world will not be destroyed by nuclear weapons, then how shall we view this event of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in light of the Scripture? What should we conclude?

There are a number of things that are necessary for us to understand as we indicate in the following nine points.

Point 1: The Lord Is In Control of All Things

This first point is essential. Above all, we must evaluate all the events taking place in our world in light of what the Scripture has to say. The Bible is very clear on this matter. The Lord, the God of the Bible, is indeed in control of all things.

An Illustration From The Life Of Daniel

To illustrate this truth, we can look at an episode recorded in the second chapter of the Book of Daniel. King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a vivid dream that he knew meant something. He called all of his magicians and astrologers to tell him two things. First, exactly what he had dreamt, and second, what did it mean.

Obviously, they could not tell him what he had dreamt so they continued to ask him to tell them the dream and then they would interpret it for him. Nebuchadnezzar would have none of this. Since they could not tell what he had dreamt the king ordered them to be put to death.

When Daniel heard about this he asked if the authorities would give him time to pray to the Lord for answers to these two questions. Time was granted, and Daniel was indeed given the answers. Scripture then explains what happened when Daniel was brought into the presence of the king:

The king asked Daniel, who was also called Belteshazzar, “Are you able to tell me what I dreamed and what it means?” Daniel answered, “No wise man, magician, or fortune-teller can explain to the king the secret he has asked about. But there is a God in heaven who explains secret things, and he has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at a later time. This is your dream, the vision you saw while lying on your bed: O king, as you were lying there, you thought about things to come. God, who can tell people about secret things, showed you what is going to happen. God also told this secret to me, not because I have greater wisdom than any other living person, but so that you may know what it means. In that way you will understand what went through your mind (Daniel 2:26-30 NCV).

There is indeed no human being who can know what will take place in the future, nobody. But there is God in heaven who certainly does know! When He chooses, the Lord reveals these mysteries to human beings. The God of the Bible is able to reveal the future because He knows all things.

This should be our starting point as we seek to understand what is taking place with Russia and how it may fit in to what the Lord has said will happen in the “last days.” We go to Him and His Word, and it alone, for the answers!

Point 2: Bible Believers Can Understand What Is Taking Place

This brings us to our next point. Scripture is clear that believers, living in the last days, will be able understand what is going on.

In fact, later in the Book of Daniel we read about a conversation that Daniel had with a heavenly being. The prophet had heard certain truths revealed to him, but he did not understand the meaning. He said:

I heard the answer, but I did not really understand, so I asked, “Master, what will happen after all these things come true?” He answered, “Go your way, Daniel. The message is closed up and sealed until the time of the end. Many people will be made clean, pure, and spotless, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. Those wicked people will not understand these things, but the wise will understand them” (Daniel 12:8-10 NCV)

Three things stand out in this passage.

This Portion Of Scripture Is Specifically For The Time Of The End

Daniel was told that it would be impossible for anyone to understand these predictions “until” the time of the end. In other words, neither he, nor anyone else could understand the meaning of the events at any earlier time in history.

The Wicked Will NOT Understand

The second point is one that we cannot emphasize enough. Unbelievers will *never* understand what is taking place. While they will attempt to derive some meaning from earth-shattering events, at the end of the day, they will have no idea as to what is really happening.

There Will Be Those Who Do Understand

The third thing that we learn is that these biblical predictions can be understood. Daniel was told that the wise, those who take God’s Word seriously and humbly study it, will be able to understand the meaning of the events that are occurring. Again, this is a specific promise for only those who are living at “the time of the end.”

Accordingly, we need to view the entire episode of this Russian invasion of Ukraine in light of what Scripture has to say about the time of the end. Otherwise, we will be groping in darkness.

We Should Be Confident

Knowing these first two points, that the Lord is in control of all things and that He had revealed certain things about the future to us, should cause believers to be encouraged, confident and fearless. Indeed, our God has prepared us for days like this!

Let’s now look at some of the specifics as to what the Bible tells us about end time events.

Point 3: The Bible Indicates There Will Be A Strong Russian Leader At The Time of the End

We read about a “last days” invasion of Israel in the Book of Ezekiel. The passage begins with the Word of the Lord addressing a particular man who will lead this invasion:

Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal (Ezekiel 38:1-3 NKJV).

What Do We Know About This Man?

From a look at Ezekiel 38 and 39, we can make a number of observations about this evil individual.

Observation 1:

He is not named, but given a title—Gog.

Observation 2:

He is from the land of Magog. This region would seemingly be in what is now parts of southwestern Russia, Georgia, eastern Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan (see what we have written earlier about this, page 112).

Observation 3:

Gog is directly addressed by the Lord in this passage. He is singled out as a person that the Lord is “against.” So obviously he is an important character in the scheme of events as far as the Bible is concerned.

Observation 4:

He is a leader who will arise from modern day Russia (see Appendix 1)

Observation 5:

This assumes Russia is a leading nation at this time in that part of the world.

Observation 6:

Gog alone puts together this coalition of nations that will invade Israel. They are named for us in Scripture:

I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and bring you out with all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them fully armed, a great company with shields of different types, all of them armed with swords. Persia, Ethiopia, and Put are with them, all of them with shields and helmets. They are joined by Gomer with all its troops, and by Beth Togarmah from the remote parts of the north with all its troops - many peoples are with you (Ezekiel 38:4-6 NET).

When we look at an ancient map, we find that the geographical areas include modern day Iran and Turkey. Note that there are many people involved with this coalition.

Observation 7:

He will obviously be a powerful leader to be able to put together such a large group of nations.

Observation 8:

These nations obey him. Obviously, Gog has some type of sway over them. This further indicates his power.

Observation 9:

This next observation is crucial! He only arises in the “last days.” In other words, we should NOT expect him to come on the scene before the time of the end. The Bible says:

After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come to a land restored from the ravages of war, with many peoples gathered on the mountains of Israel that had long been in ruins. Its people were brought out from the peoples, and all of them will be living securely. You will advance; you will come like a storm. You will be like a cloud covering the earth, you, all your troops, and the many other peoples with you (Ezekiel 38:8-10 NET).

Observation 10:

He has evil thoughts, namely, to take something from Israel that does not belong to him. He has no problem doing this:

This is what the sovereign LORD says: On that day thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil plan. You will say, “I will invade a land of unwalled towns; I will advance against those living quietly in security - all of them living without walls and barred gates - to loot and plunder, to attack the inhabited ruins and the people gathered from the nations, who are acquiring cattle and goods, who live at the center of the earth” (Ezekiel 38:10-12 NET).

Observation 11:

Ezekiel 38:8 tells us that the people of Israel will be living securely, or living in confidence at that time. One translation puts it this way:

But they have been taken out from the peoples, and they will be living in confidence (Ezekiel 38:8 The First Testament)

This tells us that they are NOT expecting to be invaded. Since this individual will catch the people of Israel unaware, it seems like he will have some type of relationship with them to the place where Israel thinks that they can trust him to protect them.

These are some of the basic observations that we can make about this man from what the Bible tells us.

Is Vladimir Putin Gog?

Because of the events in Ukraine, as well as his past actions in Crimea and Georgia, the question arises if Putin is the Gog of Ezekiel 38,39.

We can make this conclusion at the outset: It is NOT possible for us to know! While a case could be made for Putin, there are a few things that we must remember.

Though he has the characteristics of this evil individual, he could be deposed and replaced by someone else, or he could die, or he could lose his power.

Also, at the time of this invasion he is 69 years of age. Some have speculated that he has some debilitating disease, although we cannot say this for certain. Though he is the “President for Life” in Russia, we simply do not know if he is the personage that Scripture is speaking of!

Hence, we do not want to make the same mistake with the “Gog” of Ezekiel that others in the past have made who have tried to identify the “final Antichrist.” As we are well aware, all of them were proven to be wrong (see our book “The Final Antichrist” for documentation).

So let’s be careful out there about any speculation we may make!

Point 4: By Default, The Bible Assumes Weak American Leadership. There Is No Superpower To Combat The Invading Force

This is assumed by the lack of response from any country coming to the aid of Israel. There are none! While a few nations protest, none will come to their aid.

Indeed, it seems that Gog doesn’t even give a second thought about anyone coming to the aid of Israel. He is not worried that the world will rise up in defense of this tiny country. And from Scripture, we know that nobody does back them militarily.

This tells us that there is no superpower in the world that Russia is afraid of. The current Biden administration certainly fits the scenario. They have caused our energy independent country to now become energy dependent. Indeed, we now have to buy oil from other countries, including Russia.

Add to this the debacle in Afghanistan where the world learned that the United States, at least this administration, cannot be trusted to follow through with their promises of protection for those who have helped them. The list goes on and on.

From a position of strength in the previous administration, the United States has become a weak, laughingstock in the eyes of the world.

Of course, Gog doesn’t count on the Lord, the God of the Bible, coming to the defense of Israel!

Point 5: There Is No World Leader Who Can Guide Us Out Of This Dilemma

One thing that becomes obvious is that there is no “world leader” who can or will solve these types of international problems. Consequently, the world is “hungering” for someone who can be the “guiding light” when problems like this arise. In other words, someone who will provide real leadership.

The Bible says that such a man is coming—one that the world will listen to will arise who seemingly will have all of the answers. Jesus said:

I have come from my Father and speak for him, but you don’t accept me. But when another person comes, speaking only for himself, you will accept him (John 5:43 NCV)

We have explained in great detail what the Scripture has to say about this coming world leader in our book, *The Final Antichrist*.

Point 6: The Move Toward Digital Currency

There is another fallout that we will see from this invasion. In the future, nations, who wish to do such adventurism as Russia, need to be somewhat invulnerable financially. In other words, the world banks must NOT be able to totally shut them down economically.

The sanctions against Russia from the major banks will cause these despots to do more things with digital money that nobody can trace.

This further sets the stage for what is assumed in Revelation 13 where nobody can buy or sell without the “mark of the beast.” To monitor something like that, some type of digital currency, is a must.

Point 7: The Trickle-Down Effect...China

There is also the possibility that such an invasion by Russia, and the lack of any real response from a powerful USA, will cause China to feel that they can invade Taiwan. There are many who predict that if Ukraine falls to Russia, Taiwan is next.

If so, this will cause greater chaos in the world than the invasion of Ukraine. While this is not a certainty, it is indeed a much greater possibility with this weak U.S. administration.

Point 8: Russia Rejects Israel's Right To Golan and Jerusalem

Since Israel did not side with Russia when they invaded Ukraine, we find that the Russians showed their true colors. Consider the following headline and story.

Russia takes issue with Israel's sovereignty over Golan Heights and Jerusalem

Russia doesn't recognize Israel's sovereignty over Golan Heights that are part of Syria,” its deputy ambassador, Dmitry Polyanskiy, told the UN Security Council, which held a debate on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on Wednesday. Polyanskiy spoke just hours after Israel broke its neutrality on the conflict, as it gave a nod in support of Ukraine...

He also indirectly took issue in his comments with Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem, including west Jerusalem.

In 2017, Moscow said it recognized west Jerusalem as Israel's capital. But Polyanskiy appeared on Wednesday to ignore that recognition of Israel's government, using Tel Aviv as a synonym for Israel's government.

It is a phrase used only by those countries who mean to convey that they do not recognize Israeli sovereignty over any part of its capital city (*The Jerusalem Post*, February 24, 2022).

Let us remember that Israel mistakenly assumes that Russia is their friend.

This issue has caused much concern in Israel. Note this headline and the comments.

Will Israel Find Itself on the Wrong Side of the 'Changing' World Order?

With fighting raging in Ukraine, Israel finds itself torn between supporting independent Ukrainian sovereignty and not wishing to anger a newly belligerent world power in Russia.

Should the Jewish state support a diminishing world order led by the United States and Western European powers, or an emerging order in which a China- and Russia-led axis now seeks to dominate international affairs? Must Israel choose? (*the algemeiner*, February 27, 2022).

Recall that the Biden Administration, when they came into office, was asked if they agreed with Trump's decisions about the Golan Heights rightly belonging to Israel.

They did NOT say "yes," that they do agree with his decision. Instead they merely said that we should leave the status quo in place for now. In other words, it is possible that they would agree with Russia that the Golan is not legally in the hands of Israel.

This does not bode well for either Israel or the United States.

Point 9: Iran Is Now In A Position To Attack Israel Without Repercussions

This invasion by Russia has emboldened Iran to move forward with its worldwide terroristic campaigns. Note the following headline and story:

How war in Ukraine increases Iran's threat to Israel - analysis

There is a chance that the war in and US focus on Ukraine could lead Iran to believe it can exploit this chaotic time to encourage its proxies to attack Israel.

Reports on Thursday morning showed Russian attacks across Ukraine including against key airports and military sites. Air raid sirens were heard in western Ukraine and in Lviv, where some countries, including Israel, have relocated their embassies.

The message that Russia's unprovoked attack has for the world is clear: other countries can do the same. In the Middle East, Iran understands that the Russian operation gives it a blank check to continue attacking countries throughout the region. This has potential repercussions for Israel. Jerusalem has always behaved as if it will have to face Iran alone, but the conflict in Ukraine is yet another message for the Middle East (*Jerusalem Post*, February 24, 2022)

Israel will certainly be more vulnerable.

Consider this headline and article about the supportive nature of Iran to Russia with respect to their invasion:

Iran supports Russian invasion of Ukraine, orders Iranians not to protest against Putin, but they defy the order

This is yet another sign of the deep unpopularity of the Islamic regime in Iran. It might have fallen if Biden's handlers hadn't thrown it a life rope in the form of billions in sanctions relief (*Jihad Watch*, February 27, 2022 by Robert Spencer).

There is also this:

Beijing, Moscow, and Tehran Coordinate the Destruction of Democracy

As deadly missiles rain upon [Ukraine](#) from a fateful and ill-conceived decision by Vladimir Putin to invade, one prominent country stands with the Russian dictator: [China](#). Having just signed a wide-ranging strategic agreement with Putin on Feb. 4, Xi Jinping is effectively joining a Moscow pact against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization ([NATO](#)). China's junior ally [Iran](#) also signaled support for the dictators by condemning NATO as at fault for Russia's crime (*The Epoch Times*, February 25, 2022).

Sadly, one of the differences in attacking Israel as opposed to attacking Ukraine is the hatred for Israel among almost all of the countries of the world.

Summing Up:

As we have seen, these events fit well into the biblical scenario of the world as it will exist in the last days. Therefore, the words of Jesus should ring true in our hearts as we look at them from a biblical perspective.

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” (John 16:33 NKJV).

Indeed, He has...lest we forget!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Don Stewart is a graduate of Biola University and Talbot Theological Seminary (with the highest honors).

Don is a best-selling and award-winning author having authored, or co-authored, over eighty books. This includes the best-selling *Answers to Tough Questions*, with Josh McDowell, as well as the award-winning book *Family Handbook of Christian Knowledge: The Bible*. His various writings have been translated into over thirty different languages and have sold over a million copies.

Don is now a full-time missionary with GoinChrist Ministries. His website educatingourworld.com provides many free resources for those wanting to know what Christians believe, as well as why we believe.

Currently there are 64 books on the site in PDF form, totaling about 13,000 pages of material while answering over 1,900 questions. All of his books can be downloaded for free on his website www.educatingourworld.com.