

THE TIME OF GOG'S INVASION
IN EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

by
Stephen L. Johnson

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Author: Stephen L. Johnson
Degree: Master of Theology
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Advisers: Charles R. Smith
Donald L. Fowler

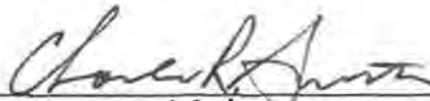
Ezekiel 38 and 39 have been an interpretive challenge for expositors down through the centuries. This author will focus on one of the most perplexing difficulties of this prophecy, namely, attempting to establish when Gog's invasion will occur. It is the contention of this author that the time of Gog's invasion portrayed in these two chapters is during the transition period between the Second Advent and the beginning of the millennium.

Several clues in the text support this viewpoint. For example, this invasion occurs when Israel is fully restored, possesses great wealth and is dwelling securely. Each of these concepts, when analyzed in Scripture, points to a time subsequent to Messiah's Second Coming. Furthermore, other data and conditions of the text (in particular the results of this invasion) indicate that Gog's invasion occurs in close proximity to the Second Coming. Thus, the transition period between the Second Advent and the formal starting of the millennium is chosen.

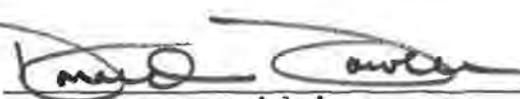
The major opposing viewpoints to this position are surveyed and found to be unsatisfactory when matched against the data of the text. The various historical positions do not fulfill the fact that Ezekiel says this invasion will occur in the latter days. Placing this invasion pretribulationally ignores the text's indication of a close association between Gog's invasion and Israel's restoration and the Second Advent. The midtribulational and Armageddon viewpoints fail to satisfy the condition of the text requiring Israel to be dwelling securely when Gog invades. The author's conviction is that the security Israel will be experiencing as discussed in these two chapters specifically refers to a Messianic peace that the Messiah establishes, beginning immediately when He returns. Finally, the postmillennial (Rev 20:7-9) position is eliminated on the basis of its inability to satisfactorily incorporate what happens as a result of Gog's invasion into its scheme.

So, after observing and analyzing all the data that is presented in Ezekiel 38 and 39 and surveying all the viewpoints, the author concludes that the most feasible position is this "transitional" viewpoint.

Accepted by the Faculty of Grace Theological Seminary
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Adviser



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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Adam Clarke has called Ezekiel 38 and 39 "the most difficult prophecy in the Old Testament."¹ Indeed, a number of difficulties for expositors beset this portion of Scripture. For example, how do these two chapters relate to the rest of the book of Ezekiel? What is the identity of these forces that invade Palestine (i.e., "Gog," "Gomer," and "Beth-togarmah")? What is the nature of Israel's restoration described here? How should the details of this invasion be interpreted? This thesis will consider each of these questions. However, the major problem that will be tackled is attempting to determine the time when the invasion of Israel described in these two chapters will take place.

The Position of This Study

Many solutions to this knotty problem have been advanced by Bible teachers throughout the history of the church. With such a plethora of opinions on this controversial passage, as Clarence Mason states, "one thing is certain: no teacher should speak dogmatically on a prophecy

¹Adam Clarke, The Holy Bible with a Commentary and Notes, (New York: Lord & Scott, 1850), p. 528.

like that of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38-39."¹ Because of this, caution will be exhibited concerning dogmatism in this thesis.

At the same time, one's convictions must be expressed. This thesis will affirm that the correct solution to this problem is that Gog's invasion will take place after the Second Coming of Jesus Christ but before the millennium. This conviction has been shared historically by several rabbinical writers.² In more recent times, it has been popularized among conservative Christians by A. C. Gaebelein.³

When is this time period being proposed? One should not think of the millennium beginning immediately after the Second Advent. For, there is a transition period between the two (Scripture suggests at least a month and a half--Daniel 12:11, 12). It is during this transition period that this writer places Gog's invasion. Thus, he is not maintaining that this invasion will take place in the tribulation--that ends with Christ's return. Also, he is not asserting that this invasion will occur during the millennium--that does not formally commence until Satan is bound. This writer sees a clearly defined "transition" period between these two significant events, the Second Advent and the binding of Satan.

¹Clarence E. Mason, "Gog and Magog, Who and When?" In Prophecy and the Seventies, ed. Charles L. Feinberg (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), p. 221.

²See: G. A. Cooke, The Book of Ezekiel, ICC, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936), p. 409.

³Arno C. Gaebelein, The Prophet Ezekiel, (New York: Fleming Revell, 1918), pp. 251-268.

Because Gog's invasion is placed in the transition period between these two great events, it will have some affinity to both periods. For example, in this transition period millennial affects will already begin to be felt (i.e., peace) although Christ's formal rule will not, as of then, have started. But, the fact that in that day Messiah will again be physically present on earth makes the transition period clearly distinct from the tribulation period. Yet, neither is it the millennium. Technically speaking, it is Messianic but not millennial. On the other hand, in the sense that Gog's armies are "late-arrivers" (hold-overs among the nations to the battle of Armageddon, as this position will maintain), in a way, it can be viewed as a continuation of Armageddon. But, this writer does not prefer to emphasize this aspect since, unlike the main invasion and battle in Israel commonly known as Armageddon, Gog's invasion takes place during the restored Messianic peace of this transition period. Later the reasons for this position will be amplified.

The Plan of This Study

To demonstrate this position, the following plan will be followed. First, Chapter two will be devoted to the analysis of Ezekiel 38 and 39. Here most of the basic interpretive matters will be dealt with. This information will then be used as the basis for evaluating the key conservative positions that are held on this issue. Chapter three will be the analysis of the five main opposing viewpoints on this

passage other than the one maintained in this thesis and Chapter four will present and defend this writer's position. Finally, a summary and conclusion will be given in Chapter five. It is hoped that by the end of the study, this position will be shown to be the most feasible one. At least, it is hoped that this study will be thought provoking and will stimulate further inquiry into Ezekiel 38 and 39.

The Limitations of This Study

Each of the difficulties of Ezekiel 38 and 39 mentioned above, would itself be worthy of a thesis. Consequently, this study will be careful to limit its discussion on parallel topics except as they are helpful in the resolution of the stated goal. Furthermore, an extensive exegesis of these two chapters will be avoided. Finally, it is the desire of this writer to avoid mere prophetic speculation. Far too much of this has taken place in premillennial circles as is always a danger when dealing with unfulfilled prophecy. Unfortunately, it seems that for the past two centuries, each generation has seen within the development of its own current events, the impending fulfillment of this prophecy.¹ Consequently, this writer desires to avoid this seeming "newspaper hermeneutic." Rather, he will strive to rely upon Scripture to interpret this passage and reach his conclusions.

¹See: Dwight Wilson, Armageddon Now (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) for a chronicle of this.

The Hermeneutical Position of This Study

The hermeneutical method utilized by each expositor will greatly influence the conclusions reached in the interpretation of any prophetic passage. Basically, one of three divergent hermeneutical approaches has been adopted to interpret Ezekiel 38 and 39.¹ One school of thought treats these two chapters as a "prophetic parable."² Thus, Ezekiel 38 and 39 does not refer to any specific historical event. Instead, using prophetic imagery, it contains some great hidden truth (like apocalyptic literature). A second school of thought treats this passage as symbolically depicting some future event.³ A third school of thought approaches Ezekiel 38 and 39 using a "literal method." This method treats the details of these two chapters precisely as they are stated, that is, as giving specific details of a future attack on Israel.

The method to be employed in this thesis will be the third one which is also commonly called the "historical-grammatical" method of interpretation. This means that a passage is interpreted by determining the precise meaning

¹Anton T. Pearson, "Ezekiel," The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, gen. eds. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), pp. 755-756.

²Charles R. Erdman, The Book of Ezekiel (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1956), pp. 121-122.

³E. W. Hengstenberg, The Prophecies of the Prophet Ezekiel Elucidated, translated by A. C. Murphy and J. G. Murphy, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1869; reprint ed., Minneapolis: James Publications, 1976), pp. 329-332.

which the writers of Scripture intended to convey and based on facts of language and history.¹

Labels can be misunderstood as Bernard Ramm has shown regarding the usage of the word "literal."² So that this thesis is not misunderstood in its usage of "literal" and "the literal method," two excerpts from Ramm's classic work need to be stated:

We use the word "literal" in its dictionary sense: ". . . the natural or usual construction and implication of a writing or expression; following the ordinary and apparent sense of words; not allegorical or metaphorical" (Webster's New International Dictionary). We also use it in its historical sense, specifically the priority that Luther and Calvin gave to literal, grammatical, or philological exegesis of Scripture in contrast to the Four Fold Theory of the Roman Catholic scholars (historical meaning, moral meaning, allegorical meaning, eschatological meaning) developed during the Middle Ages . . .³

Furthermore, he adds:

The Literalist . . . is not one who denies that figurative language, that symbols are used in prophecy, nor does he deny that great spiritual truths are set forth therein; his position is simply that the prophecies are to be normally interpreted (i.e., according to the received laws of language) as any other utterances are interpreted--that which is manifestly literal being regarded as literal, and that which is manifestly figurative being so regarded.⁴

So, this method advocates that usually it will be

¹Milton S. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), p. 173.

²Bernard Ramm, Protestant Biblical Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), pp. 114-127.

³Ibid., p. 119.

⁴Ibid., pp. 121-122. Ramm quotes Craven, Commentary on Revelation (from Lange's Commentary), p. 98.

readily apparent in each prophetic passage whether the writer was employing figurative language or not. Unfortunately, in some cases, this is not so easy to determine. Therefore, in making a decision (literal vs. figurative as discussed above), the words of the oft quoted principle are appropriate to follow: "when the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense . . ." ¹

Within this hermeneutical method there is still room for some latitude of opinion particularly as it is applied to certain portions of Scripture (i.e., poetic passages, prophetic passages). Ezekiel 38 and 39 is one such portion of Scripture. This is partially why so many godly men have differed so greatly in their interpretation of this text. Some of these tensions will be seen in the pages to follow.

¹Merrill F. Unger, Principles of Expository Preaching (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), p. 176.

CHAPTER II

AN ANALYSIS OF EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

The focus of this chapter will be to present and analyze the text of Ezekiel 38 and 39 in order to have criteria for evaluating the various views as to the time of Gog's invasion which will be discussed in the following two chapters. This analysis will primarily emphasize the details which are pertinent to the goal of this thesis. It will be conducted in the following format: (1) a study of the context, (2) a general exposition, (3) a consideration of selected words and phrases, (4) a discussion of key theological matters and (5) a summary of the findings.

A Study of the Context

The proper exposition of any portion of Scripture must take into consideration the context.¹ This is no less important in the case of Ezekiel 38 and 39. In fact, several key arguments hinge upon contextual matters. So first an investigation of the historical and scriptural context of these two chapters will be made.

The book of Ezekiel is commonly divided into two, three or four parts. If a twofold division is followed, the

¹A. Berkley Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), p. 99.

break is made after chapter 24. For a threefold division the breaks are generally after chapters 24 and 32.¹ This writer prefers a fourfold division:

- I. Chapters 1-24, Prophecies Against Judah Prior to the Fall of Jerusalem.
- II. Chapters 25-32, Prophecies Against the Gentile Nations.
- III. Chapters 33-39, Prophecies Relating to Israel's Future Restoration.
- IV. Chapters 40-48, Prophecies Relating to Millennial Worship.

Ezekiel writes while exiled in Babylon. He was deported in 597 B.C. along with King Jehoiachin and other important people of Jerusalem. The prophet lived in his own house in Tel-Abib by the river Chebar, identified by Harrison as the Kabar Canal (כַּבָּר קָנָל, 1:1, 3; 3:15).²

Like Isaiah, the theme of Ezekiel has two aspects to it. The first part is pronouncing judgment, the second is predicting future blessing.³ Until news arrives concerning the fall of Jerusalem (33:21) the prophet primarily is denouncing Israel for her rebellious and unrepentant heart. After this historical point, in character with his Hebrew

¹Charles L. Feinberg, The Prophecy of Ezekiel (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 14.

²Roland Kenneth Harrison, Introduction to the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 833. Note: Hebrew citations will be taken from Rudolf Kittel, Biblia Hebraica (Stuttgart, Germany: Wurttembergische Bibelstalt, 1961). All English quotes will be from the New American Standard Bible, Reference Edition (La Habra, CA: Foundation Press, 1973).

³A. C. Schultz, "Ezekiel," The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. II, Gen Ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 463.

name, *שׁוֹרֵת*; ("God strengthens"), Ezekiel's oracles to his people become messages of comfort and hope for a future, regathered and repentant nation. Chapters 38 and 39 are in the midst of the latter thrust.

These oracles to the exiled Jews in Babylon are presented essentially in chronological order beginning in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile (1:2). In fact, Taylor comments, "the book has a clear chronological sequence, with dates appearing at 1:1, 2; 8:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1, 17; 33:21; 40:1. No other major prophet has this logical progression of dates. . . ." ¹ Most are introduced by *וַיָּבֵי*, "and it came about in" and then a date is given according to the number of years of Jehoiachin's captivity. Ezekiel 38 and 39 are in the section introduced by this phrase in 33:21. Thus, 33:21-39:21 structurally forms one unit (the next section beginning at 40:1 where the final chronological formula is given). ²

Ezekiel 33:21 and 22 explain that as Ezekiel hears the news of the fall of Jerusalem, his "tongue is loosed." After this, six messages are then recorded which comprise the section from 33:21 to 39:29. Each of these six messages begins with the expression *וַיָּבֵי דְבַר יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר*, "then the word of the Lord came to me saying." Alexander argues that

¹John B. Taylor, Ezekiel (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1969), p. 15.

²H. L. Ellison, Ezekiel: The Man and His Message (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), p. 137.

בַּעֲרֹב לַלַּיְלָה בַּלַּיְלָה (33:22) indicates that all six of these messages were uttered the same night, from the time his tongue was loosed, until morning.¹ Keil disagrees saying that nothing from the Hebrew in verse 22 reveals precisely when Ezekiel is given the words of God in this section.² Nevertheless, 33:21-39:29 does constitute one section governed by . . . וְהָיָה בְשֵׁם יְהוָה שְׂמֵךְ . . .

All of these messages are intended to provide encouragement and hope to the hearers. They focus on Israel's future, not the current gloomy situation of captivity. In the first message, Ezekiel explains that God has not broken His covenant by driving them from the land. It is a desolation and a waste "because of all of their abominations which they have committed" (33:39). In the second message (chapter 34), the prophet speaks of a future day when false shepherds of Israel will be replaced by "one shepherd, My servant David" (34:23)--which speaks of the Messiah. He then adds that, when this true shepherd arrives, He will: "make a covenant of peace" (34:25), all dangers will be removed from the land (34:25), and the people will be living securely and experience blessing (34:25-29). In the third message (35:1-36:15), Ezekiel states that Edom and all of

¹Ralph H. Alexander, "A Fresh Look At Ezekiel 38 and 39," Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies 17 (Summer, 1974):158.

²Carl Friedrich Keil, Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Ezekiel, in Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, eds. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), pp. 70-71.

the nations will be driven out of the land. Furthermore, he adds that a day is coming when Israel will no longer have to endure the insults, not just of Edom, but of all the nations (36:5-7, 15). In the fourth message (36:16-37:14), the prophet speaks of a future day when Israel will be both restored physically (gathered back into her own land from all the lands where she had been dispersed) and restored spiritually (purified from her uncleanness and given Yahweh's Spirit to live within her people). The fifth message features the symbolic act of the joining of the two sticks. This, the prophet explains, pictures the reunion of Judah and Israel (37:21-23). Also, fulfillment of this is stated as when "My servant David will be King over them" (37:24). The sixth and final message of this section is Ezekiel 38 and 39. Here the prophet describes an outburst by Gog and his allies to oppress the land and God's people. However, this invasion is thwarted by Yahweh.

These six messages would accomplish several things. First, they would encourage Ezekiel's readers by assuring them that God has not reneged on His promises. This whole section would be a reminder that God is faithful to His covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Gen 15:7; 17:7, 8). Also, it would clearly portray to an exiled people that in the future they would again occupy their own land--this time as an everlasting possession (i.e., 37:26, 27). Finally, these messages--which form a unit with the unifying theme:

future restoration and blessing for God's people, Israel¹-- would instill hope for the future. In connection with this, Ezekiel seems to indicate that in that future day when all these events are realized, Messiah will again be physically in the land. This factor is especially helpful in determining the time of Gog's invasion as Alexander notes:

The import of this context is extremely significant in the delineation of the time element of Ezekiel 38 and 39, for it is at this place in the argument that this last night message of Ezekiel occurs. The context is abundantly clear. These events occur in the end times when Israel has been restored to the land, when Messiah is present, and when Israel's covenants are fulfilled. It is not permissible to view Ezekiel 38 and 39 as an interpolation, for the normal introductory formula to a message initiates this sixth message in the series, and the major section to which these chapters belong does not conclude until a new chronological notice appears in chapter 40, verse 1.²

In contrast to the above, Pentecost teaches that Gog's invasion, according to the context, must occur between the time of the beginning of the restoration of Israel (which would start before the tribulation as portrayed in chapter 37) and the millennial age (as portrayed in chapters 40-48).³ He then argues that chapter 33 to the end of the book presents a chronological progression of events.

¹Feinberg, Ezekiel, p. 188.

²Alexander, "A Fresh Look," p. 159. He sees the transition period as when this invasion occurs. However, he is unique in his views in that he also sees a second fulfillment of this passage in Rev 20.

³J. Dwight Pentecost, "Where do the Events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 Fit into the Prophetic Picture," Bibliotheca Sacra 14 (October, 1957):334-346:336.

However, as has just been indicated, this assertion does not fit the basic structure of Ezekiel. For, as Alexander correctly remarks, "One should not look to chapters 40 through 48 for the contextual setting, rather he should see these events within their natural division within the book."¹ Furthermore, the assertion that chapters 33 through 37 are tribulational (or, just before the tribulation)² is questionable. While some elements of chapter 37 perhaps do represent a time preceeding the tribulation (i.e., verses 7-9), clearly most of these prophetic motifs view Israel fully restored to the land enjoying (both spiritually and physically) Messianic blessings (i.e., 34:20-31; 36:8-15, 22-38; 37:21-28 are clearly not tribulational).³ Thus, the prophetic time as revealed by the context of Ezekiel 38 and 39, seems to be the future day when Israel is back in her land and her Messiah has returned.

A General Exposition

Having noticed the context, an exposition of Ezekiel 38 and 39 will be given. The main details of these two chapters will be considered and interpreted according to the following outline: (1) the participants of the invasion,

¹Alexander, "A Fresh Look," p. 159.

²Pentecost, "Events of Ezekiel," p. 335.

³This writer acknowledges that these are events (as is often the case in eschatological portions of Scripture) which are not necessarily being presented in chronological sequence. However, his viewpoint is in less danger of imposing a linear chronology in the text than Pentecost's position.

(2) the description of the invasion, (3) the purpose of the invasion and (4) the results of the invasion.

The Participants of the Invasion

Those who accompany Gog in this invasion of Israel are listed in Ezekiel 38:2-6. This section will survey each of these proper nouns in the order that they appear in the text in an attempt to determine their identity. After completing this survey, a conclusion will be presented evaluating how this data contributes to the primary purpose of this thesis: pinpointing when Gog's invasion will take place.

Gog

Some hold that Gog (גֹּג) should be taken "typically" to represent Israel's enemies in general.¹ However, this is unlikely since none of the other nouns in Ezekiel 38:2-6 is used in a symbolic sense. Rather, each of these is a definite geographical term.

Eliminating the symbolic sense still leaves a number of proposals: (1) a specific historical person, (2) a specific place and (3) an official title. Each of these will be discussed below.

(1) Many historical candidates have been proposed by the church in an attempt to identify Gog.² Hermeneutically,

¹George N. H. Peters, The Theocratic Kingdom (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884), vol. 2, p. 710.

²A. T. Pearson, p. 755, lists: the Babylonians, the Scythians, Cambyses King of Persia, Alexander the Great, Antiochus the Great, Antiochus Epiphanes, Antiochus Eupator,

the more feasible ones are those persons that would have been known by Ezekiel and his readers such as Gyges of Lydia (Assyrian--Gugu)¹ who ruled the Lydian Empire around 660 B. C.

There are some serious objections to this identification. First, Gyges' military accomplishments and death do not fit the details of the text.² Furthermore, linguistically there is no clear evidence that the Assyrian, Gugu, was derived from ḡiḡ.³ For instance, Albright rejects any etymological connection between these two words because "it [the former] is never found used in Sumerian as an appellation of the monster of chaos (Magog)."⁴

Sayce instead proposes that Gog was an historical leader of a Scythian tribe (Gagu of the land of Sakhi) in an area north of Assyria.⁵ This view is interesting, but it

the Parthians, Mithridates King of Pontus, Suleimans Turks, the Turks and the Christians, the Armenian descendants of the Scythians, various European powers including Russia.

¹H. L. Ellison, The Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, n.d.), s.v. "Gog." For a defense of this position see: John Skinner, The Book of Ezekiel, The Expositors Bible, gen. ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (New York: Hodder and Stoughton, n.d.), p. 369.

²See the discussion on pp. 62-64.

³Francis D. Nichol, gen. ed., The Seventh Day Adventist Bible Commentary, vol. 4: Isaiah-Malachi (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1955), p. 704.

⁴W. F. Albright, "Gog and Magog," The Journal of Biblical Literature, 43 (1924):381. Albright's position is that Gog is symbolic. It is derived from the Sumerian word gug meaning "darkness."

⁵James Hastings, ed., Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), s.v. "Gog," by A. H. Sayce.

lacks evidence to be conclusive.

(2) One geographical identification has been suggested: Gaga--a mountainous area north of Melitene, in the region of Armenia and Cappadocia.¹ This suggestion is untenable, however, since the text indicates Gog is a proper name not a "place" name. This is particularly substantiated in 38:3 where Gog is called a "prince."

(3) Scholars have not been able to determine the precise etymology of גִּיג .² The Hebrew word elsewhere only appears in First Chronicles 5:4 where it refers to a Reubenite prince. This verse has no bearing on Ezekiel 38. Keil feels that his word is derived from גִּיגָה .³ Ellison concurs with this seeing a parallel in the Assyrian, Ma(t)gugu, "land of Gugu."⁴ But evidence is not conclusive enough to pinpoint any particular leader through etymology.

On the other hand, there is some support for the position that this word could have been an official title. The Septuagint rendering, Γῶγ , is employed twice in the Old Testament (Numbers 24:7 and Amos 7:1) in connection with גִּיגָה . In Numbers 24:7, the Greek ἡ Γῶγ βασιλεία is substituted for

¹Cited by Albright, "Gog and Magog," p. 387.

²Wilhelm Julius Schröder, The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel in A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures, gen. ed. John Peter Lange (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), p. 661.

³Keil, Biblical Commentary, p. 159.

⁴Ellison, Bible Dictionary, s.v. "Gog."

"King Agag."¹ This substitution of terms shows that their hermeneutical bias for מלך was viewed as the official title for a king. In lieu of this, Fausset remarks: "The title was probably a common one of the kings of the area as 'Pharoah' of Egypt."² Additionally, some postulate that "Gog" by the time of these versions, had come to be understood as a general title for an enemy of God's people.³ Little consideration should be given to this data. But, it shows "Gog" to be referring to a person rather than a place.

Magog

This noun as well as "Rosh," "Meshech" and "Tubal" (38:2, 3--to be discussed next) are not separate invaders, but are additional terms used in connection with "Gog." This noun first appears in Genesis 10:2 which lists Magog as a son of Japheth. In Ezekiel 38:2 the form is מגוג. The use of the article, according to Keil, is to cause the readers to think back to Genesis 10:2 as a reminder that Gog is a descendant of Japheth.⁴

The relationship between מגוג and מלך, as mentioned

¹The apparatus shows the Samaritan Pentateuch, Old Latin and Aquila translations to have מלך instead of מלך.

²Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset and David Brown, A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, n.d.), p. 349.

³John B. Taylor, Ezekiel, p. 244 cites J. L. Myres, "Gog and the Danger from the North in Ezekiel," Palestine Exploration Fund Quarterly Statement 64 (1932):213-219.

⁴Keil, Biblical Commentary, p. 159.

already, seems to be one of ruler (Gog) and domain (Magog). What is the relationship between Magog and Rosh, Meshech and Tubal? This question naturally arises from the statement in 38:2 which says that Gog is (of the land) of Magog and 38:3 which says that he is the prince of Rosh,¹ Meshech and Tubal. The identification of Magog determines this relationship. Some suggest that Magog is the whole region while Rosh (if it is a proper name), Meshech and Tubal would be smaller districts making up that larger region. Others see Magog as a more localized region. In this case, Gog would be ruler over the separate provinces of Magog, Rosh, Meshech and Tubal. McCurdy expresses the two opinions:

A stricter geographical location would place Magog's dwelling between Armenia and Media perhaps on the shores of the Araxes. But, the people seem to have extended farther north across the Caucasus, filling there the extreme northern horizon of the Hebrews (Ezek 38:15; 39:2).²

The position that Magog represents the whole general area is preferred. This would coincide with a statement made by Josephus who said that Magog referred to the "Magogites (also known as the Scythians by the Greeks).³ That Magog refers to the land of the Scythians would also harmonize with

¹The issue of whether "prince of Rosh . . ." is the correct rendering of the Hebrew will be discussed below.

²Samuel Macaulay Jackson, gen. ed., The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1909), s.v. "Gog and Magog," by J. F. McCurdy. Also see Edwin Yamauchi, "Meshech, Tubal and Company: A Review Article," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society 19 (1976):239-48.

³Flavius Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews (Cincinnati: H. S. and J. Applegate, 1850), 1:6:1.

the above finding on Gog. Furthermore, the phrase, "Scythians," was often used as a comprehensive term for northern barbarian hordes in general.¹ Nevertheless, this conclusion is somewhat speculative for the question--Is this what Ezekiel's readers would have known?--still remains unknown.

Rosh

This noun perhaps has caused the greatest discussion in the list. There are two primary issues involved:

(1) syntactically, does רֹשׁ function here as a noun or as an adjective, and (2) if רֹשׁ is a proper noun, what is its identity? רֹשׁ almost exclusively functions as a common noun meaning "chief," "head," or "ruler," but it is translated as a proper name clearly on at least one occasion, Genesis 46:21. There it is a reference to the seventh son of Benjamin.

Considering the syntactical question first, if רֹשׁ is functioning as a noun, then רֹשׁ אֶלְיָשׁׁ would be rendered something like "prince of Rosh." One support for this viewpoint is the Septuagint. This version reads--ἀρχοντα Ρως . A second argument is based on the Massoretic pointing: רֹשׁ אֶלְיָשׁׁ . According to this, "prince" is considered to be in the construct state which would again suggest that "Rosh" is functioning as a noun.² Finally, most add an historical

¹Merrill F. Unger, Archeology and the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1954), p. 79.

²G. A. Cooke, "Ezekiel," p. 410.

argument.¹ The point of this is to argue: if "Rosh" represents an historically identifiable people, then, in this context of names and places, it would be functioning as a proper noun here as well.

If רֹשׁ is functioning like an adjective, then רֹשׁ מֶשֶׁךְ וְטֻבַל would be rendered "chief prince." This would make the construct series one less: "chief prince of Meshech and Tubal."²

The main arguments for this position include the fact that most of the other versions beside the Septuagint understand רֹשׁ as an appellative.³ Secondly, Cooke notes that elsewhere Meshech and Tubal are coupled together in five of the six occurrences of מֶשֶׁךְ וְטֻבַל in the Massoretic text outside Ezekiel 38 and 39.⁴ So, if such a proper name, רֹשׁ, really existed, it would seem likely that in some of these other references that couple Meshech and Tubal together, Rosh would be included too. Thirdly, regarding the Massoretic pointing, a disjunctive accent is placed over מֶשֶׁךְ which Cooke affirms was done to indicate that it was being used in an adjectival

¹H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell, gen. eds., The Pulpit Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), vol. 12: Ezekiel by E. H. Plumptre and T. Whitelaw, p. 284.

²A few make a big deal of this. But, Gesenius' Grammar says that having a large series of co-ordinate genitives is not impossible. William Gesenius, Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar, revised and enlarged by Edward C. Mitchell and Ira M. Price (Boston: Bradley & Woodruff, 1895), par. 128.

³William Kelley, Notes on Ezekiel (London: George Morrish, 1876), p. 192.

⁴Cooke, "Ezekiel," pp. 414-415. These texts are: Gen 10:2; 1 Chr 1:5, 17; Ezek 27:13 and 32:26. In Ps 120:5 Meshech is mentioned but not Tubal.

sense.¹ He then cites a parallel expression in Second Kings 25:18: **כֹּהֵן קַרְאֵשׁ** --"chief priest." A. F. Johnson accurately notes: "while some lay little weight to the accents because they are not part of the inspired text, yet nothing can be unimportant that reflects the ancient viewpoint."² So, based on all of this, the best solution is the second position-- that **אֲשֶׁר** is functioning as an adjective.

This conclusion eliminates the need to seek a specific identity for **אֲשֶׁר**. However, in a survey such as this, it should be mentioned that a number of commentators argue that **אֲשֶׁר** is a prophetic reference to modern day Russia.³ Apparently the primary authority for this identification is Gesenius' Lexicon.⁴ Unfortunately there is little etymological connection between "Rosh" and "Russia."⁵ And, according to Nichol, historical evidence does not support the position that the Byzantine **οἱ Ρῶς** is the origin of the name "Russia."

¹Cooke, "Ezekiel," p. 415.

²A. F. Johnson, "The Eschatological Setting of Ezekiel 38 and 39 Rethought," (ThM Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1961), p. 22.

³For example: Wilbur M. Smith, World Crises and the Prophetic Scriptures (Chicago: Moody Press, 1950), pp. 249-251; Arno C. Gaebelin, "The Problem of Gog and Magog," Our Hope 47 (January, 1941):454-59; Harry Rimmer, The Coming War and the Rise of Russia (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1940), p. 56; Louis S. Bauman, Russian Events in the Light of Biblical Prophecy, (Philadelphia: Revell, 1942), pp. 24-26.

⁴William Gesenius and Edward Robinson, Gesenius' Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Company, 1982), p. 995.

⁵Keil, Biblical Commentary, pp. 159-160.

Rather, history supports the Varangians from eastern Sweden and Finland as the group which migrated in and originated the name "Russ."¹

Meshech and Tubal

These two nouns are listed together in Ezekiel 38:2 and 3. Unger argues:

Tubal and Meshech . . . are the Tabali and Mushki of the Assyrian records. The Tabali are first mentioned in the frontier campaigns of Tiglath Pileser I (c. 1100 B.C.) and Mushki by Shalmaneser III (860-825 B.C.), and both names occur prominently later. The notices of them in the Assyrians period place their home northeast of Cilicia (Hilakku) and east of Cappadocia (Gimirrai), but by Herodotus' time they had removed farther north to the mountainous region southeast of the Black Sea.²

So these two war-like peoples had their domain in the area southeast of the Black Sea in Asia Minor (today a part of modern Turkey). Some extend their domain to the Caucasus Mountains between the Black and Caspian seas by identifying them as the "Moschi" who migrated there.³

While this identification is fairly certain, several attempt to show that Meshech is the same as modern Moscow and Tubal is the same as Tobolsk (two major cities of the Soviet Union today).⁴ Again, this association can be linked back

¹Nichol, Isaiah-Malachi, p. 706.

²Unger, Archeology, p. 80.

³Jamieson, Fausset & Brown, A Commentary, p. 109.

⁴Bauman, Russian Events, p. 24. Bauman and other proponents say that the modern names have been derived from the ancient tribal names. However, the burden here, as with Rosh, Gomer, etc., is on them to show empirically that such phenomena has occurred.

to Gesenius' work.¹ However, historical or etymological links are lacking. The only connection appears to be the similarities in sounds (merely phonetic accidents).

Persia, Ethiopia and Put

Ezekiel 38:5 lists these three names together. Persia is not difficult to identify. It was in the area occupied today by modern Iran. Ethiopia (𐤎𐤓𐤐) of Ezekiel's day not only included the area south of Egypt, but probably also included the coastal areas of Arabia. These people migrated in the direction of Arabia and Africa from their earlier location, as recorded in Genesis 10, in the area of the Tigris and Euphrates. Put (𐤐𐤓𐤑) has been identified as the region around Cyrene in North Africa west of Egypt. This would be a part of what is today known as Libya.²

Gomer and Togarmah

These two are the last in Ezekiel's list of participants who accompany Gog in the end time invasion of Israel (38:6). Gomer in Ezekiel's day was Gimirra of the Assyrian inscription (also known as the Cimmerians by the Greeks).³ This was in Cappadocia (Asia Minor). Bauman and others have identified Gomer as East Germany based on the evidence that

¹Keil, Biblical Commentary, p. 159.

²Unger, Archeology, pp. 83-84.

³James Hastings, gen. ed., Dictionary of the Bible s.v. "Gomer," by A. H. Sayce.

later these people migrated to that area of Europe.¹ However, this assertion has yet to be proven conclusively.

On the other hand, there is little question as to the identity of Beth-togarmah. It was the Armenia of northwest Asia Minor (again, part of modern Turkey). Schröder points out, in fact, that the Armenians still consider themselves as "the house of Torgom."²

Sheba, Dedan and Tarshish

These names are mentioned in Ezekiel 38:13. These peoples do not participate in Gog's invasion. Apparently, they stand in amazement and ironically question Gog's actions (implications: "you do not really think you can pull this one off, Gog?")³

Bauman says that prophetically Sheba is the United States, Dedan is Canada, Tarshish is Great Britain and "the Young Lions" are the rest of the colonies of Britain.⁴ Unfortunately, Bauman's arguments are weak. They are based on a comparison between the descriptions in the text of Tarshish and Great Britain: (1) a merchant nation having many ships, (2) benevolent (!) toward the Jews, (3) having a lion as the

¹Louis S. Bauman, Light From Bible Prophecy (New York: Revell, 1942), pp. 32-33. Also, Lange, A Commentary, vol. 1: Genesis-Leviticus, pp. 349-350.

²Schröder, Ezekiel, p. 362.

³Julius A. Bewer, The Book of Ezekiel, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1954), p. 51.

⁴Bauman, Russian Events, pp. 34-36.

nation's symbol and (4) being the mother of many colonies. But, this description fits many nations of history, including the historical Tarshish that was in existence during Ezekiel's day (Tarsessus on the coast of southern Spain).¹

To complete the list, Sheba refers to the kingdom of Saba in southern Arabia while Dedan was a leading tribe of Sheba located in northern Arabia.²

Conclusion

Scholars can pinpoint historically many of the participants of this invasion mentioned in Ezekiel 38:2-6. Expositors could stop with these findings as their interpretations (and some do) except for the fact that the prophet indicates that this invasion occurs in the end times. So, it then becomes an hermeneutical issue to determine with whom in the end times these nations are analogous. God could raise up nations in the end times with these specific names. But, it seems more likely that the names will be different, though the geographical locations, roughly speaking, will be the same. Consequently, this makes this one aspect of Ezekiel's prophecy which is difficult to insist will be "literally" fulfilled.

Hermeneutically, the prophet used people of his own day to be in correspondence with the participants of Gog's

¹Smith, World Crises, p. 247.

²A. H. Sayce, The Higher Criticism and the Verdict of the Monuments, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1895), p. 133.

future invasion.¹ However, no principle of hermeneutics settles all of the issues. Many centuries have transpired between Ezekiel's day and the twentieth century. With migrations, intermarriage, and constantly changing political boundaries, it has become nearly impossible (at least in some cases) to establish modern day "corresponding equivalents." For example, in the case of Gomer (who has apparently migrated): how should expositors establish an end time identity? Should it be based on ethnical considerations (eastern Europe) or solely on geographical considerations (Turkey)?

From this perspective, Russia, East Germany, etc. might fulfill this prophecy. But, all of this could change overnight with the change of a political boundary or with the fall of any of these nations. So, to remain uncertain in these matters is, perhaps, wise. At any rate, even if the precise identity of each of these participants could be known, the matter of when Gog's invasion takes place is still unresolved.

The Description of the Invasion

The following are observations of the few details that the text does reveal: (1) the army will include horses and horsemen and charioteers² (38:4; 39:20), (2) they come

¹Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible, p. 296.

²Some reprint 𐤀𐤓𐤓 to read 𐤀𐤓𐤓 "riders" as in Isa 21:7; 22:6--George Arthur Buttrick, gen. ed., The Interpreters Bible, vol. 6, Lamentations-Malachi (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 281.

splendidly attired (some versions read: "clothed in full armor"¹) with buckler, shield, warclubs and spears (38:4; 39:9), (3) a great company comes (a coalition of many peoples), (4) they come "like a storm," "like a cloud covering the land" (38:9, 16) and (5) they come with bows and arrows (39:3, 9).

Two important details are noticeably missing. The first is that no battle or warfare is described in this invasion. Israel is left unharmed.² And, secondly, though Gog's armies do arrive in the land (for their destruction occurs in Israel--38:19; 39:4, 11), the direction of their invasion is not given. Gog's armies originate from the north. However, those accompanying Gog originate from the south and east as well. Probably one should assume Gog's forces primarily will invade from the north, as so often historically has been the case.

Essentially hermeneutical convictions again will decide just how literally to treat this description. The word "like" warrants assigning a figurative meaning to the fourth observation. "Like a storm . . . like a cloud" would be figuratively describing how Gog will invade; namely, swiftly and in a powerful and terrifying way.³ But, as was the case

¹Maxwell Coder in his article: "That Bow and Arrow War," Moody Monthly 74 (April, 1974):8:36-37 argues for the rendering "armor."

²The invaders are armed to do battle and intend to destroy Israel if she resists. But, God will supernaturally intervene (38:19-22) before they can carry out their purpose.

³S. Fisch, Ezekiel (London: Soncino Press, 1950), p. 255.

in the third observation, the rest are a challenge to interpret. Mickelsen argues that Ezekiel was using the language of his day to represent modern warfare (just as was the case with the nations).¹ Others believe, however, that instead of horses and chariots representing tanks; buckler, shield, sword, bows and arrows referring to guns; and clouds covering the land depicting Ezekiel's way of describing a twentieth century paratrooper invasion (or whatever is in vogue when Gog invades), in each case these details should be interpreted precisely as they are stated--that is, Gog will invade on horses and use bows and arrows.

This writer prefers the latter position. But, not knowing what the future circumstances when Gog invades will be like, he realizes that it is impossible to know for certain. Ezekiel was using terms of warfare readily understandable to his culture. Yet, at the same time, he is portraying an invasion that is to occur in the last days. So, it is also possible to understand this invasion taking place precisely as the prophet states it.

The primary reasons for this preference are twofold. First, the literal sense makes good sense and certainly would be what Ezekiel's readers would have thought. Secondly, Ezekiel appears to be laboring in this passage to indicate that these details should be taken as stated (i.e., the explicit discussion of the bird feast and the burning of the weapons).

¹Mickelsen, Interpreting the Bible, p. 296.

The Purpose of the Invasion

The purpose of this invasion is stated in a number of places in these two chapters. Actually, two sets of purposes are given: Gog's intention is to take some spoil and to plunder the land (38:10-13). God's purpose can be summarized by 38:23: "And I shall magnify Myself, sanctify Myself and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the Lord" (39:7, 13 and 21-28 elaborated on this).

This invasion is a good example of God's sovereignty and of God using "the wrath of men to praise Him (Ps 76:10). It is quite apparent from the wording of several verses that God is "behind the scenes" bringing this invasion about: 38:4--(God speaking) "I will bring you out and put hooks into your jaws and I will bring you out, and all your army . . . ;" 38:8--"you will be summoned;" and 39:2--"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." Yet, God uses Gog's greed and ambition to accomplish His goal.

God's purposes can be further delineated: lessons intended for Israel and lessons intended for the Gentiles. God will use this invasion to help His people to understand finally the reason for all their adversities over the centuries at the hand of the Gentiles (39:23-26). And, He will use this invasion to display to the nations His holiness and to teach them that He is indeed who He has claimed all along.

Also, God will use this invasion to bring about their judgment (39:21).

What clues does this discussion provide regarding the time of Gog's invasion? (1) Some connect the judgment of Gog with the judgment of the nations which is mentioned in Joel 3:12-14.¹ (2) An important detail is that Gog will invade at a time when Israel possesses great wealth. The first point is hard to prove, but the second is significant.

When in Israel's future will she possess great wealth? Some expositors say that the wealth she possesses currently would be enough to cause others to want to attack--particularly her mineral deposits in the Dead Sea and her strategic location (note the end of verse 12).² The key interpretive issue, though, is: when in the future does the Bible portray Israel possessing such wealth?

Eschatologically, the Bible pictures great wealth in Israel from the return of Christ on. It does not elsewhere intimate Israel possessing great wealth during the tribulation. However, many passages teach material blessing for Israel after Christ's return.³ In fact, Zechariah 14:14

¹Rene Pache, The Return of Jesus Christ (Chicago: Moody Press, 1955), pp. 281-284.

²Charles C. Ryrie, The Best is Yet to Come (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), pp. 56-59; Edgar C. James, "The USSR: Is it Prophecy's Northern Confederacy?" Moody Monthly 81 (October, 1980):2:24-26.

³John F. Walvoord, The Millennial Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), p. 318. He lists several passages that are "millennial." Yet some of these (especially Zech 14:14) show this material blessing will commence right after Christ returns thus including the time proposed in this thesis.

teaches that Israelites will possess great wealth right after the Second Advent when Judah will collect the wealth of the surrounding nations that are left as a result of their defeat at Armageddon. Thus, this passage in Ezekiel 38 and 39 probably portrays this same time period.¹ Historically, nations have more often coveted Israel's land because of her strategic location. But, in that day, the text particularly singles out her great wealth as the purpose of Gog's invasion and, Biblically speaking, after Christ's return is when she will possess great wealth.

The Results of the Invasion

These two chapters state specifically that three things will result from Gog's invasion: (1) certain cataclysmic events (38:19-22), (2) a bird supper (39:4-5, 17-20) and (3) a mass burial and purification of the land (39:9-16).

Cataclysmic events

Ezekiel 38:19-22 teaches that as Gog invades the land certain phenomena will occur. Like the plagues that supernaturally hit Egypt, God uses five means to judge Gog: (1) a great destructive earthquake (vv. 19-21), (2) a civil war (the invaders fight among themselves, v. 21), (3) pestilence and blood (v. 22), (4) torrential rains (v. 22), and (5) fire and brimstone (v. 22).

Each of these elements is part of oft repeated

¹A. C. Gaebelain, Studies in Zechariah (New York: Publication Office, "Our Hope," n.d.), p. 155.

eschatological language. When Yahweh appears, nature is in turmoil.¹ All of this is preceded in verse 18 by a vivid anthropomorphism (perhaps taken from Psalm 18:8). Because of this, some take all of these details as merely figurative expressions to show the intensity of God's anger.² In other words, these cataclysmic events will not actually occur when Yahweh defeats Gog and his hordes.

However, though this language is often stylistic, it does not mean that these supernatural manifestations will not actually occur when Messiah returns. Supernatural intervention (especially earthquakes) often accompany major events in Scripture involving the judgment of God. Verse 20 suggests that the whole of nature is affected by these events. Thus, Feinberg relates this to the coming day of the Lord (Zeph 1; Isa 2; Jer 4:23-26) and says that since these judgments are so widespread, "they must relate to the end of Israel's age."³ He coordinates these details with the end of the tribulation.⁴

¹This section is in the first person, God is speaking. The three reflexive verbs in verse 23 emphasize that God will personally attend to the disposing of Gog's forces.

²John W. Wevers, Ezekiel, in The New Century Bible (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1969), p. 290. Cites: Isa 24:17-20, 20:18; 1 Kgs 19:11-12; Ps 18:7-15--"language of theophanies."

³Feinberg, Ezekiel, p. 226.

⁴This writer, of course, disagrees with his time placement of Gog's invasion. Nevertheless, Feinberg is correct in asserting that these literal cataclysmic events will occur.

The Bird Supper

Another result of Gog's invasion is that the dead bodies of the invaders become food for the predatory birds and beasts of the field (39:4, 5, 17-20).¹ What is the significance of this detail?

A few have interpreted this scene allegorically making the birds and beasts symbolize all the nations.² The devouring of these armies, then, represents the devastation of these final great armies that come against Israel. Others downplay the literalness of this occasion and emphasize this as merely figurative language. For instance, Ellicott says: "the figure is not to be pushed beyond the single point for which it is used--'to fill out and heighten the description of an immense slaughter.'"³ He calls this apocalyptic literature because this same figure is employed in the apocalyptic book of Revelation.

However, more than mere imagery is involved. Just as Gog's armies literally invade, and then literally die and then Israel literally buries them, so also must the birds and beasts literally feast on Gog. All of these details are

¹While no הַבְּרָדָה inhabit the hill country today, these verses indicate that in that future day they will be there to feast on Gog's armies.

²Charles John Ellicott, gen. ed., Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, vol. 5, Jeremiah-Malachi (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), Ezekiel by F. Gardiner, p. 313.

³Ibid.

interrelated. Of course, it is natural for various kinds of birds (i.e., vultures) and beasts (i.e., hyenas), which instinctively prey upon dead carcasses, to be present in a death scene such as this. But, it is totally unnecessary to conclude as Blackwood does: "Ezekiel's meaning is almost concealed from us by his nauseating symbolism. He speaks of Gog and his princes not as individual men, but as symbols of evil."¹ Very ironically, Gog and his allies set out to prey upon Israel. In the end, they become prey for the birds and beasts.

In verse 17 God admonishes the prophet to summon these particular two groups of animals to feast upon the fallen armies. Specifically, their diet will be the flesh of mighty men (39:18), the blood of princes (39:18), horses (39:20) and charioteers (39:20). This meal is called: "My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you" (39:19). The "fatlings of Bashan" indicates that these corpses will be slaughtered as though they were the choicest sacrificial victims. Clearly some imagery is involved as this whole sacrificial motif is intended as sarcasm since these warriors will substitute for the normal animals such as rams, lambs, goats and bulls (39:19). Yet, at the same time a literal bird feast will take place.

This language of a great sacrificial feast has its precedent. Critical commentaries cite its origin as

¹Andrew W. Blackwood, Ezekiel--Prophecy of Hope (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1965), p. 232.

Isaiah 34:6f; Jeremiah 46:10; and Zephaniah 1:7-9.¹ The first passage, Isaiah 34, depicts the future judgment of God (and of Edom in particular). The oracle against Edom is likened to the Lord's future indignation against all the nations. It is similar to Ezekiel 39 in that this passage too likens the death of an army (Edom's armies) to a sacrifice. However, the detail of birds and animals preying upon Edom's dead is left out. Of particular interest in this discussion is noting that the time when all this occurs is "the Lord's indignation" (34:2), and "a year of recompense for the cause of Zion" (34:8). This is too general, however, to help in pinpointing when Gog's invasion will occur.²

Jeremiah 46:10 predicts the defeat of Pharaoh and the carnage at Carchemish. Horses, mighty men and chariots fall. This defeat is called the "slaughter for the Lord God of hosts" (46:10) but it is not a reference to the end times.

The scene in Zephaniah 1:7-9 is the future day of the Lord. The similarity in language with Ezekiel 39 is restricted merely to the last part of verse 7: "For the Lord has prepared a sacrifice. He has consecrated His guests." Again God likens the slaughtered armies to a sacrifice. One significant difference, however, is that Zephaniah does not limit the destruction merely to the armies that come upon Israel, but instead, to the complete removal of all life (1:3).

¹Cooke, "Ezekiel," p. 421.

²It should be kept in mind that this whole discussion might not be referring to the same invasion anyway.

Again, it is difficult to determine if this is a parallel passage and in particular when this death scene occurs. However, it should be noted that none of these three passages make any reference to a great bird supper.

Actually Revelation 19:17-21 is the only other place in the Bible to employ a similar "bird supper" description. In fact, expositors consistently note that John drew his imagery from Ezekiel 39.¹ This is significant because the time factor of Revelation 19 is clear: immediately after the battle of Armageddon and Christ's return.² So, unless the interpreter disassociates this passage in Revelation 19 with Ezekiel 39 (which is weak hermeneutically), this particular detail pinpoints the time of Gog's invasion to the Second Advent where Christ defeats the armies at Armageddon or shortly thereafter.

Purification of the Land

The huge number of corpses triggers a clean-up campaign (verse 11-16, another result of Gog's invasion). The fact that the burial of Gog's hordes precedes the bird supper in the text, some claim in effect robs the birds and wild beasts of their sacrificial meal.³ So, verses 11-16 are

¹Alexander, "A Fresh Look," p. 164.

²Ibid. This detail is one of Alexander's main points for placing Gog's invasion in the "transition" period. Actually, this factor also fits the Armageddon position. (See pp. 74-77). But, the two are close enough chronologically so that this detail would satisfy either viewpoint.

³Keith W. Carley, The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (Cambridge: University Press, 1974), p. 265.

claimed to be a later emendation. This alleged problem, though, fails to recognize that the details of chapter 39 are not arranged in tight chronology.¹ Thus, verses 11-16 chronologically occur after verses 17-20.

This burial scene takes place in two stages: (1) a seven month intensive burial campaign and (2) a follow-up search.

The first stage is discussed in verses 11-14. Verse 11 focuses on where the burial will take place. It gives two locations: "the valley of those who pass by" and "east of the sea" (meaning east toward the sea).² The first location indicates that because it is known as a valley for those passing through, it is fitted to be a burial place for Gog and his multitudes.³ The second (an appellation), refers to the Dead Sea (though a few would identify the sea as the Mediterranean).⁴ Unfortunately, none of these locations are specific enough to be helpful.

The primary purpose of this burial is to cleanse the land (39:13, 14). Secondly, it will become a memorial of God's mighty judgments upon Gog. It will be done not just for obvious sanitary reasons, but also in adherence to the law which prescribes the purification of the land of dead

¹Keil, Biblical Commentary, p. 176.

²Lange, A Commentary, vol. 7: Ezekiel, pp. 368-369.

³Ibid.

⁴Buttrick, Interpreters Bible, Ezekiel, p. 280.

(i.e., Deut 21:23). Those burying the slain will probably also be ceremonially cleansed (cf., Lev 5:2; Num 31:19), though the text omits this fact. Ezekiel possibly takes this for granted.¹

Next, in verses 12 and 14, the prophet explains how long this burial campaign will require--seven months. Often the number seven is used symbolically in Scripture to mean "completeness" or "perfection."² Consequently, several interpret Ezekiel 39 in this sense. For instance, Taylor says: ". . . the repeated reference to the number 'seven' is a reminder that we are here dealing with apocalyptic symbolism, and that therefore literal fulfillment of these details is not to be sought."³

However, it is preferable to believe that a literal seven months will be required to accomplish this task for the following reasons: (1) verses 12 and 14 make better sense,⁴ (2) the explicitness of several details together in this passage warrants a literal interpretation, and (3) "seven" is used literally in connection with cleansing elsewhere (i.e., Num 31:19). This detail, then, (along with the

¹Clifton J. Allen, gen. ed., The Broadman Bible Commentary, vol. 6, Jeremiah to Daniel (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1971), Ezekiel by John T. Brown, p. 348.

²John J. Davis, Biblical Numerology (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), pp. 116-119.

³Taylor, Ezekiel, pp. 247-248.

⁴Feinberg, Ezekiel, p. 230. Giving the precise time emphasizes the extent of the catastrophe.

seven years required to burn the weapons) becomes a significant fact that must be reckoned with in deciding when Gog invades.

Not many details are given as to how this burial will take place. Nevertheless, it will be a major undertaking! But this task is not logistically absurd.¹ First, the birds and beasts will eliminate many of the corpses. So, this would leave just the removal of bones.² Second, in phase two, the entire land is searched again. And, according to the wording of verse 14, men will be set apart to pass constantly (ט'קף) through the land during the seven month period and make a careful search. This scene is not describing a small operation. For, these men will carefully pass through the whole land again to make sure no bones were missed. But, if some are found, they will make sure that these too get buried. All of this speaks of the seriousness of this campaign and of the zealousness and thoroughness of the people of that day to follow God's law.

Study of Selected Phrases

Next, this analysis will focus on some selected phrases from Ezekiel 38 and 39. An understanding of some of

¹Patrick Fairbairn, An Exposition of Ezekiel (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1979), p. 473.

²Yet, it was important for the Jews to honor the bones of the dead. Probably this belief is reflected in Gog's burial and the cleansing of the land. See Jer 8:1ff and Eric Meyers, "Theological Implications of an Ancient Jewish Burial Custom," The Jewish Quarterly Review 62 (October, 1971): 2:95-119.

these is critical for determining when Gog will invade.

"Remote Parts of the North"

This phrase is used by some to support Russia as one of the invaders.¹ Obviously, the Soviet Union lies the farthest due north from Israel today. But, the idea of "the absolute farthest point north" ("uttermost") is not the meaning of בְּתוֹגַרְמַח 'תִּגְרָה' (38:6, 15; 39:2).² This is clear from verse 6 where "Beth-togarmah" is understood by Ezekiel to be situated בְּתוֹצַרְתַּיִם 'תִּצְרַתַּיִם'. Certainly Ezekiel's readers were aware of peoples farther north than the land of the Cimmerians (modern Turkey).³ So, based at least on this phrase, the Soviet Union is not likely in view.⁴

"Mountains of Israel"

Four times in Ezekiel 38 and 39 the geographical phrase הַרְבָּנוֹת 'רָבָה' occurs. In 38:8 this phrase is used to identify where the regathered Jews will return. In 39:2 it is the place where God will bring Gog's armies. Finally, in

¹Leon H. Wood, The Bible & Future Events (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), p. 122.

²Don Fowler, "Ezekiel 38-39: A Plea for Caution," Spire (Fall, 1981):7.

³See pp. 24-25 for a discussion of Gomer and Beth-togarmah. But, it should be noted that Bauman, who identifies the Soviet Union as part of this invasion, argues that the regions of Beth-togarmah today are part of Kurdistan, one of the Republics of the USSR (between the Black and Caspian Seas). Louis S. Bauman, Light from Bible Prophecy (London: Revell, 1940), p. 32.

⁴Emphasis should be placed on the word "north." The significance of this detail will be developed below.

39:4 and 17, it designates where the birds and beasts will feast upon Gog's armies. אֲרָרָה alone is figuratively employed in 38:20 to signify the terrible judgment of God upon His enemies. This is common eschatological language to describe a great moral event or to use in a judgment motif.¹

While אֲרָרָה in connection with judgment occurs in several forms, this word in construct with אֲרָרָה is unique to Ezekiel (occurring 16 times).² In five instances (6:2, 3; 36:1; and twice in 36:4), the prophet invokes the mountains of Israel to hear the words of the Lord. In chapter 6, they are to hear God's pronouncement of judgment against the sons of Israel for their wickedness. In chapter 36, they hear why God's judgment must fall. But, also, they hear the prediction of future blessing. These are purely figurative usages which refer to Israel.

However, in Ezekiel 38 and 39, this is not the case. All four occurrences are plain geographical references to the whole land in general (not just to the mountainous regions of the land).³ Hills and mountains are a common feature of Palestine. So here, emphasis is laid upon the mountains to indicate the totality of the invasion. As Fisch comments ". . . this horde leaves no hilly spot untouched."⁴ This

¹Ellicott, Ellicott's Commentary, p. 311.

²Cooke, "Ezekiel," p. 68.

³Fisch, Ezekiel, p. 259.

⁴Ibid.

coincides with the imagery of 38:9 which likens Gog's invasion to a cloud covering the land (meaning the whole land). The best support for this interpretation is 38:8. It states that the place in which the Jews will regather will be the mountains of Israel. Here אֶרֶץ is connected with הַרְיִי שְׂרָאֵל . This is also the case in 34:13, 14; 36:8 and 37:22. Similarly, in 33:28 when the "land" is desolate, the "mountains of Israel" will be desolate. Additionally, Ezekiel 35:12 incorporates the people of the land into the concept of הַרְיִי שְׂרָאֵל .

"Know that I am the Lord"

This phrase, used five times in Ezekiel 38 and 39 (38:23; 39:6, 7, 21, 28), is one of Ezekiel's favorite expressions. It is often used by the prophet as a summary statement to indicate that a lesson has been learned concerning God's sovereignty, holiness and Lordship.¹ In this context, the phrase is used in connection with God being known after Gog's judgment. However, it cannot be proven to be particularly specifying a knowledge or acceptance in a salvific sense.² Moreover, it should be noted that both Israel and the nations are the subjects of this knowledge. Regarding the determination of the time when this will take place, only in the 39:28 usage can an inference be made.

¹James Cooper Gray and George M. Adams, eds., Gray and Adams Bible Commentary, vol. 3, Ecclesiastes-Malachi (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), p. 642.

²Allen, The Broadman Bible Commentary, p. 349.

There, Israel's knowledge is associated with Messianic blessing (verse 29).

"Restored from the Sword"

The Hebrew is מְשׁוּבְּרֵי חֶרֶב . The verb (a passive participle) is from the root שׁוּב meaning: "to turn back" or "to return" and in the Pual stem: "restored."¹ This particular expression is used elsewhere in Genesis 40:13 and 41:13 to describe restoration of the butler to his office in Egypt.

The preposition has the sense of privation rather than the causal sense.² מִחֶרֶב indicates that God's people in that day will be experiencing peace, not merely in the sense of having no expectation of war but also in the sense of being completely removed from the presence of the ravages of war.³ Moreover, this phrase is not teaching that Israel's restoration was accomplished by means of the sword; rather, in harmony with 36:1-15, Israel and her land are removed completely from any further oppression from her enemies.⁴

¹Francis Brown, S. R. Driver and Charles Briggs, A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), pp. 996, 998.

²Using Davidson's terms: A. B. Davidson, Hebrew Syntax (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1973), pp. 141-142, שׁוּב can be used in the instrumental sense with inanimate objects like חֶרֶב . But the sense of privation is preferred because the emphasis in verse 8 is on separation. Also, in Ezekiel's argument, the finality of this restoration is in view (especially 39:21-29).

³Keil, Biblical Commentary, p. 164.

⁴The fact that Gog invades, does not contradict this point any more than the invasion described in Rev 20 violates the characteristic state of peace (i.e., Mic 4:3) ascribed to the millennium. In neither case does God allow his people to be "oppressed."

This fact would account in part for the fact that the Jews are "living securely on their own land with no one to make them afraid" (39:26).

"Living Securely"

It is stated four times in Ezekiel 38 and 39 that this invasion is to occur at a time when Israel is "living securely" (חַטָּל וְיִשְׁבְּטֵי -- 38:8, 11, 14; 39:26). Once, in Ezekiel 39:6, חַטָּל with the participle יִשְׁבְּטֵי, it is used to describe non-Jews. Elsewhere in Ezekiel, this phrase is found twice in 28:26, in 34:25 and in 34:28.¹ With slight variation, this Hebrew expression occurs twenty times in the Old Testament.

חַטָּל is primarily used in an adverbial sense. It is from the verb חָטַל -- "to trust."² The NASB renders this word in a wide variety of ways: "confidence," "safety," "secure," "security," "unawares" and "unsuspectingly."³ This same idea of dwelling securely is expressed in Scripture also using בטח

(with or without ל) and several other verbs: שָׁכַן, הָיָה, חָלַל and יָבֵט.⁴ Thus, this is a fairly common concept in the Bible.

¹Brown, Driver & Briggs, Lexicon, p. 105.

²Ibid.

³Robert L. Thomas, gen. ed., New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance (Nashville, TN: Holman, 1981), p. 1497.

⁴Brown, Driver & Briggs, Lexicon, p. 105.

Though this phrase has several senses,¹ the primary sense of these passages that are not eschatological in nature is--prosperity and peace if God is obeyed. For example, God said to Moses concerning Israel on Sinai that if they kept His commandments, they would prosper and "live securely" (Lev 25:18, 19). Similarly, in Leviticus 26:5, if Israel kept the Sabbath and had no idols in the land, they would prosper and live securely. Zophar said to Job that if he would trust God, he would rest securely--meaning experience the general blessing of God (Job 11:18).

This study is primarily interested, however, in noting the eschatological usages of this phrase.² Outside Ezekiel 38 and 39 eight passages speak of dwelling securely in a future sense: Jer 32:37; 34:25, 26 and Zech 14:11 (נחלף וישׁ); Jer 23:6; 33:16 (נחלף יְשׁוּ) and Ezek 34:27 (נחלף). Consistently, each of these speak of that future day of Messianic times.³ There is no evidence of the concept of dwelling securely in the sense of a false peace. In these

¹I.e., Judges 18:7; Isaiah 47:8--in reference to a false sense of security; 1 Kings 4:25 in reference to Israel's prosperity during Solomon's reign; Proverbs 3:29; Deuteronomy 12:10; 1 Samuel 12:11--in reference to a general lack of fear and war.

²This writer is suggesting a differentiation between the above usages and the eschatological usages. He notes that each of them is specially connected with the actual physical presence of Messiah in the land.

³Again keep in mind this writer's insistence that the transition period (where the Messiah is present yet the Millennium has not yet technically commenced) is where he places Gog's invasion. Consequently this term is used.

eschatological passages Israel is fulfilling the condition, "dwelling securely," when her Messiah is present.

First, the prophet Jeremiah will be considered to support this assertion. Jeremiah 23:6 is the first eschatological usage. In this chapter the prophet is denouncing the false leaders--"shepherds" (verse 1) and "prophets and priests" (verse 11). After an introductory *וְיָ* in verse 1, Jeremiah then contrasts the wicked shepherds of his own day "who are destroying and scattering the sheep of my pasture" with the future shepherds that will be raised up in the last days. Verse 4 explains that unlike the current false shepherds, these future leaders will feed the flock (instead of scattering them). The result: none will be missing. When does this specifically occur? Verse 5 clearly explains, "when I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch." This refers to a time subsequent to the Second Coming of Messiah.¹ And in conjunction with Messiah's return, (verse 6), Israel will be "dwelling securely."

Jeremiah 32:37 and 33:16 are similar. Many of the same concepts are included as in Ezekiel: regathered from many lands (32:37), spiritual renewal (32:38, 39), eternal duration of this renewed relationship and covenant with Yahweh (32:39, 40). In the immediate context of Jeremiah 33:16, a Messianic setting is quite apparent as the time when

¹H. A. Ironside, Notes on the Prophecy and Lamentations of Jeremiah (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1906), p. 111. This is not a reference to a "spiritual reigning" of Messiah in the hearts of His people.

Israel is dwelling securely. The time is future: when God is dealing again with both the house of Israel and of Judah (33:14), when the righteous Branch of David has been raised up to execute justice (33:15), when spiritual renewal is occurring (33:16) and when there will be an eternal duration of Messiah's rule¹ (33:17).

This phrase, as described in Zechariah 14:11, is also a reference to a time subsequent to Messiah's Second Coming (this event is pictured in verses 1-4). Verses 5-8 speak of geographical changes that take place when the Lord returns. Verse 9 teaches that the Lord will be the exclusive ruler of the earth. The verses following verse 11, (14:12-15), recount the Lord's victory over the nations at Armageddon. Clearly, in this context, the Messiah is physically present in the land when Israel is dwelling securely.

The most important consideration is an analysis of Ezekiel's usages of this phrase. The first two such occurrences are in 28:26. After giving a lamentation over the king of Tyre (28:11-19) and pronouncing judgment on Sidon (28:20-24), the prophet in the last two verses briefly transfers his thoughts to the future when no longer "a prickling brier" or "a painful thorn" (referring to Israel's Gentile enemies) will bother them. It is at this time when Israel will be dwelling securely. This condition is also fulfilled

¹The transition period would be included in the conditions described here as it would usher in the millennial rule of Christ.

when: (1) the house of Israel is regathered and (2) "they will build houses, plant vineyards" and (3) the Lord is executing judgment upon all scorers. All of this, many expositors assert, points to Messianic prosperity and blessing.¹

Ezekiel 34:25 and 28 also indicate that Israel will be dwelling securely at a time when their Messiah is physically present. For, Israel is back in the land and no longer has any need to be afraid or be oppressed by the Gentiles (verses 22 and 28). The context reveals (verses 11-22) that at this time Israel will be a regathered people. Also, in verses 25-29, "dwelling securely" is clearly associated with Messianic times.

Again, as has been Ezekiel's pattern, this phrase is connected with blessing and increased fruitfulness (verses 26 and 27). One additional detail is given in verse 25: when Messiah is "prince," He will "make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land, so that they may live securely. . . ."

Because of the above usages, it would be natural to expect that "dwelling securely" in Ezekiel 38 and 39 also refers to Messianic times. This is indeed the case except for one usage, Ezekiel 39:6, which speaks of a false sense of security.² However, this usage should be isolated since

¹J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing Company, 1958), p. 505.

²God smites the subjects in view with fire though they think they are safe.

Israel is not in view. Otherwise, the other usages in Ezekiel 38 and 39 follow similar patterns as the other eschatological usages already noted (i.e., 39:21-29--Israel's "dwelling securely" is in conjunction with a final regathering and in the midst of experiencing spiritual and physical blessings). So, it can be asserted, that in every eschatological passage in the Old Testament where "dwelling securely" occurs in reference to Israel, Messianic times are in view.

"In the Last Days"

This time expression and a similar one "latter years" each occur once in Ezekiel 38. Verse 8a says: "After many days¹ you (Gog) will be summoned in the latter years (אֲחֵרֵי יָמַי אֲבִי) you will come into the land. . . ." Also, verse 16b says ". . . it will come about in the last days (אֲחֵרֵי יָמַי אֲבִי) that I shall bring you against My land. . . ."²

Most commentators see these two Hebrew expressions as synonymous.³ Also, the consensus of opinion holds that these two non-technical expressions refer to the end times. Taylor, for example, says that these terms are "a clear eschatological indication."⁴ Wevers says that both terms

¹Some consider this an eschatological expression as well (i.e., Ellicott, Ellicott's Commentary, p. 310).

²The Authorized Version renders this "latter days" in 38:16.

³Schröder, Ezekiel, p. 362.

⁴Taylor, Ezekiel, p. 245.

are apocalyptic terms for the end times.¹

Because of this, opinions vary widely as to precisely what future time these two terms designate. One's theology seems to dictate. Buttrick says that it is "just before the new age and the restoration of the Davidic dynasty."² A. B. Davidson remarks: "(it) belongs to the far-distant future, to a time after the people have been restored and have enjoyed long peace and great felicity."³ Pentecost says: "The term 'latter days' or 'latter years' is related to the time prior to the 'last days' or the millennial age, which would be the tribulation period."⁴

Is Pentecost's assertion correct? It is based on the observation that dispensationally there are several last days in Scripture.⁵ However, the one expression, בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים, is rendered both "last days" (i.e., Isa 2:2) and "latter days" (i.e., Deut 31:29). So, it is inappropriate to make a major distinction on the basis of such English translations. There is no justification for claiming that the "latter days" usher in the "last days" and that "latter days" is a technical term designating the tribulational period.⁶

¹Wevers, Ezekiel, p. 288.

²Buttrick, Interpreters Bible, Ezekiel, p. 274.

³Davidson, Hebrew Syntax, p. 277.

⁴Pentecost, Things to Come, pp. 351-352.

⁵C. I. Scofield, The New Scofield Reference Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 68, (the note for Genesis 49:1).

⁶Peters, The Theocratic Kingdom, p. 337.

Some usages of these two phrases do refer to a time prior to the millennium (i.e., Dan 2:28). Other occurrences are clearly millennial (Isa 2:2; Mic 4:1). In fact, this phrase in Genesis 49:1 does not even speak of the end times. Based on this phenomena, BDB probably gives the best definition of the term: "בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים in the end of the days, a prophetic phrase denoting the final period of the history so far as the speaker's perspective reaches; the sense thus varies with the context, but it often = the ideal or messianic future; . . ."¹ So, by themselves, these two "time phrases" in Ezekiel 38 and 39 do not conclusively reveal when in the future Gog will invade.

Key Theological Considerations

Israel's Restoration

This study has already stated that the theme of chapters 33-39 is: prophecies related to Israel's future restoration. Also, it has asserted that the prophetic motifs of this passage view Israel in the land and fully restored.² The time of this restoration is not the tribulation. Rather, it is in conjunction with the return of the Messiah (34:20-30; 36:8-15, 22-38; 37:21-28). This first brief theological excursus will determine if this time element corresponds with the rest of Scripture and fits the details of Ezekiel 38 and 39.

¹Brown, Driver & Briggs, Lexicon, p. 31.

²"Fully restored" as opposed to merely being regathered to their own land in unbelief. Also, it is not the purpose of this thesis to refute the position, held by some that the restoration under Zerubbabel is in view.

Writing in 1955, Charles Feinberg said:

. . . the present return of the land is a fulfillment of the prophecy only to the extent that Scripture (Zeph 2:1-2; Matt 24:12; Rev 11; 16:21) reveals Israel will be back in the land in the latter days of Israel's age in unbelief. The current regathering to the land is not a regathering to the Lord.¹

No doubt, Israel's initial regathering to her land will be in a state of unbelief. For, not only must the Jews yet be deceived by the antichrist and then spend a time in hiding before final regathering; but also, not until they are delivered by their Messiah, do they recognize the "One whom they have pierced" and are saved in large numbers.² But this regathering is a logical deduction, not the final regathering that Scriptures detail.

What details, then, are coincident with Israel's final restoration in Scripture? The following are representative: (1) Israel's restoration will embrace the whole house of Israel (Jer 3:15-18), (2) Israel's restoration is associated with the Second Advent (Isa 43:5-7; Jer 12:15; Matt 24:30-31), (3) Israel will experience a national conversion and regeneration (Zech 12:9-13:9), (4) Israel's conversion will be preceded by a time of suffering (Zech 12:9-13:9) and (5) Israel's restoration will be permanent

¹Charles L. Feinberg, "The State of Israel," Biblioltheca Sacra 112 (October, 1955):319.

²James L. Boyer, Things to Come (Winona Lake, IN: Brethren Missionary Herald, 1973), p. 56.

(Jer 32:37-41).¹

Most of these elements are present in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Following the same order as above:

(1) The phrase "house of Israel" or "My People" is the usual address in these two chapters. However, the fact that all of the Jews are in view can be seen in two phrases in 39:26: "restore the fortunes of Jacob" and "the whole house of Israel."² The last phrase in 39:28 also suggests a complete regathering: ". . . gather them again to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer."³

(2) The Lord's personal presence is intimated by the words of 38:19-23. A manifestation of God's presence is associated with this type of language. Also, as seen above, since the "bird supper" occurs in close proximity to Christ's Second Advent (Rev 19), thus quite probably Messiah is present.

(3) That Israel will experience a national conversion and regeneration, can be seen in 39:29: ". . . for I shall have poured out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declared the Lord God."

¹This list with some revision is primarily from Charles L. Feinberg, ed., Focus of Prophecy, (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1964), "Israel in the Tribulation," by Charles H. Stevens, pp. 35-37. See also, Merrill F. Unger, "Ezekiel's Vision of Israel's Restoration," Bibliotheca Sacra 106 (July, 1949):312-324.

²Taylor, Ezekiel, p. 249.

³The time element of this phrase is not after Gog's invasion. See comments on pages 70-71.

(4) This element (that Israel's conversion will be preceded by a time of suffering) cannot be proved from Ezekiel 38 and 39.

(5) The permanence of Israel's regathering can be observed in 39:22¹ which says that (after their regathering) "Israel will know that I am the Lord their God from that day onward." Also 39:26 describes that from then on, no one would make them afraid anymore. And finally, in 39:29a, God promises, "and I will not hide my face any longer."

Thus, the teaching of the rest of the Bible on Israel's restoration is supportive of this writer's position on Ezekiel 38 and 39.

Eschatological Northern Invasion

Several passages in Scripture speak of an eschatological northern invasion of Israel. How do these passages relate to Ezekiel 38 and 39? This will be the consideration of this second theological excursus.

"North" in the Bible, designates several things. Sometimes it stood for Assyria (Zeph 2:13), sometimes for Babylon (Jer 46:10) and sometimes for the Medo-Persian empire (Jer 50:9).² In Daniel 11 it represented the Seleucid empire. These kingdoms all invaded Israel from a somewhat north-easterly direction. In view of this, קִיּוֹן and קִיּוֹן became associated eschatologically with the last great enemy

¹Fisch, Ezekiel, p. 255.

²R. B. Girdlestone, The Grammar of Prophecy (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1955), p. 52.

of Israel.¹ It is probably in this general sense that Ezekiel 38:17 speaks of this invasion.² Some suggest several passages in particular that correlate with Gog's invasion, such as: Isaiah 10:10-27; 14:25; 30:31; Joel 2:20; Micah 5:5 and Daniel 11:36-45.³ Three of these passages will be briefly considered in order to glean further data which might be helpful in determining precisely when Gog's invasion will occur.

Isaiah 10:12-27

The basis for relating this passage to Ezekiel 38 and 39 is the phrase: "the Assyrian" (cf., Isa 14:25; Mic 5:5). What eschatological setting does this passage portray? Only verses 24-27 are clearly eschatological. These verses speak of the Assyrian invading Israel (v. 24). Then, they describe Israel enduring persecution at his hand (in the tribulation-- 'עַל אֲפַיִם, v. 25). Next, they picture God judging the Assyrian (v. 26). Finally, they show that Israel's burden of suffering will be removed (v. 27).

This passage describes Israel in the tribulation. The Assyrian (in parallel with the king of Assyria, verse 12) is an individual, not an invading army in verses 24-27. So, to this writer, if the tribulation is in view, it seems more

¹J. Bloore, Numerical Bible: Ezekiel (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, Bible Truth Depot, n.d.), p. 225.

²Possibly instead of the above suggestion, this is alluding to Joel 2:20.

³John C. Whitcomb, "Dispensational Eschatology" (Syllabus, Grace Theological Seminary), pp. 83-84.

likely that the identity of the Assyrian would be the anti-christ¹ not Gog.

Joel 2:20

This verse speaks of God's end time ("the day of the Lord") removal of a northern army from Israel. This context has many phrases and concepts in common with Ezekiel 38 and 39. For example, this invasion precipitates Israel's restoration (2:18, 19, 23-26). At that time, they will never again be a reproach among the Gentiles (2:19) and from then on they will never be put to shame (2:26). Israel will know her God (2:27) and God will put His Spirit within His people (2:28). Joel 3:1-2, then, goes on to correlate this restoration scene with the defeat of the nations at Armageddon. Since this pattern broadly fits that which is found in Ezekiel 38 and 39, quite possibly they refer to the same event. However, no new information is introduced. The time setting of Joel 2:20 is around the time of Christ's Second Advent. This verse is perhaps the most difficult for this writer's position. However, there is no conclusive proof, either that the Northerner equals Gog.

¹F. C. Jennings, Studies in Isaiah (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, n.d.), pp. 140-143. See also: William Richard Foster, "The Eschatological Significance of the Assyrian," (ThD Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1956), pp. 44-46; 93-94. His position is that neither the "Assyrian" nor "northerner" are the antichrist.

Daniel 11:36-45

This passage has been used by several as a cross reference to Ezekiel 38 and 39. It describes a "willful king" entering Israel ("the Beautiful Land," verse 41) during the tribulation and just before the time of the resurrection (Dan 12:1-4). Some attempt to make all of Daniel 11 historically apply to Antiochus Epiphanes,¹ but most conservatives (at least from verse 36 on) prefer to see Antichrist as the king in view.²

Usually those who correlate Ezekiel 38 and 39 with this passage argue for three kings in view in verse 40: "the king of the South," "the king of the North" and "him" (a reference to the willful king, verses 36-39). Thus, the "king of the North" attacks the willful king "with chariots, with horsemen, and many ships" in the "Beautiful Land" (Palestine) which is similar to Ezekiel 38 and 39.

However, a "two-king" explanation of verse 40 is preferable. For, this view understands the first "him" of verse 40 to be referring back to the "he" of verse 39 and the second "him" referring back to the king of the South making the attack that is occurring in verse 40: the king of the

¹James A. Montgomery, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Daniel, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1927), pp. 460-461.

²Charles F. Pfeiffer and Everett F. Harrison, gen. eds., The Wycliffe Bible Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1971), Daniel by Robert D. Culver, p. 797.

North striking back at the king of the South.¹

Exegetically, this second view can be supported by noting that "north," throughout the preceding context, is Syria (11:6-8, 11, 13, 15) and "south" is Egypt (11:5-6, 9, 11, 14, 25); no third party is in view. Secondly, a two-king view better parallels the historical movements of Antiochus Epiphanes. Thirdly, Kiel argues that the reason for the particular wording here is to avoid ambiguity: the verse speaks of the king of the South pushing and then immediately mentions the willful king as the king of the north to avoid confusion. If, after introducing the king of the South pushing at "him" and then, in the next clause, simply saying that he shall come against him, the first "he" would be misconstrued as still referring to the king of the South. To avoid confusion, the next clause reads "and the king of the North." It is being used synonymously with "the willful king." This similar pattern is repeated in verses 8, 9, 11 and 15.² So, with this preferred interpretation of Daniel 11:40, there is no reason for importing into the context of Ezekiel 38 and 39 the meaning of "the king of the North."

¹This view was first called to the writer's attention by Professor James E. Rosscup in his "Daniel Syllabus" (Talbot Theological Seminary, 1973).

²For a full discussion of this see: Edward J. Young, The Prophecy of Daniel (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), p. 251; Keil, Biblical Commentary, Daniel, p. 469 and Philip R. Newell, Daniel (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962), p. 181.

Summary

This chapter has attempted to analyze the details of Ezekiel 38 and 39. This information is foundational for the discussion of the next two chapters which will investigate the various solutions that have been advanced as to when Gog's invasion will occur. According to the findings of this chapter, the following are a listing of the conditions which must be met and data that must be recognized for a suggested solution to be a feasible interpretation:

(1) In the context of Ezekiel 33-39 it must be recognized that little weight can be given to any chronological progression of events.

(2) Though the participants of this invasion can be historically identified, it is not possible to determine precisely with what nations today this end time invasion corresponds.

(3) It should be noted that no battle necessarily occurs (nor is enough detail given to dogmatize on the exact nature of this invasion).

(4) Any viewpoint must operate within the stated purposes for this invasion--in particular, Gog's intention to take some spoil. This presupposes Israel possessing great wealth at the time of this invasion.

(5) A good solution must fit within the stated results of this invasion: Gog's defeat will be accompanied by certain cataclysmic events, he becomes food for the birds and beasts, a seven month clean-up campaign commences after his

defeat and for seven years Israel uses his weapons as heating fuel.

(6) The invasion and destruction of Gog occur on the "mountains of Israel," a phrase which encompasses the whole land.

(7) The invasion occurs at a time when Israel is "restored from the sword" which views Israel in final restoration, removed from the effects of the sword and no longer fearful.

(8) Connected with this, Gog's invasion occurs when Israel is dwelling securely which views her condition in the end time as being back in her own land with her Messiah physically present.

(9) No other passage is helpful to clearly specify the time of Gog's invasion.¹ Other passages may generally allude to or overlap with this event, however, none gives enough data to pinpoint precisely when Gog's invasion will occur.

¹Revelation 20:8-9 will be explained below.

CHAPTER III

OPPOSING VIEWPOINTS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the other positions not agreeing with the conclusion taken in this thesis as to when the invasion portrayed in Ezekiel 38 and 39 will occur. To accomplish this, each opposing viewpoint will be evaluated one at a time, showing first the strong points (where each argument aligns with the data discussed in the last chapter) and then pointing out the weaknesses. The goal in doing this will be to demonstrate that each of these positions is less feasible and does not line up as closely to a "literal interpretation" of the text as the position taken by this thesis.

Historical Fulfillment

This position asserts that Gog's invasion has been fulfilled in history. The crux of this position has been to identify Gog with an historical person. Primarily, three candidates have been advanced by commentators: Gyges of Lydia,¹ Cambyses, King of Persia,² and Antiochus

¹Sayce, Higher Criticism, pp. 125-126; (cf., Cooke, "Ezekiel," p. 410).

²Mentioned as a possibility by Adam Clarke, Clarke's Commentary (New York: Lane and Scott, 1850), p. 421.

Epiphanes.¹ Arguments supporting this position are inadequate. They rest on only coincidental matters, namely, where an occasional detail of history happens to harmonize with some of the data of Ezekiel 38 and 39.² No conclusive evidence exists to support historically an invasion of Palestine by any of these rulers that even remotely resembles the details presented in Ezekiel. Baker is right when he comments that the birth of this position is perhaps found in the liberal's aversion to predictive prophecy.³

In addition to a general lack of evidence, none of this viewpoint's suggestions are without historical problems. For example, Gyges was weak militarily. He made no great military conquests. His death did not occur in Israel (cf., 39:4). Rather, he was killed by invading Cimmerians.⁴ Cambyses committed suicide near Mount Carmel on his way back to Babylon having learned that Gaumata had usurped the throne and been accepted in the eastern Persian provinces.⁵

¹E. Henderson, The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co., 1855), pp. 186-187.

²Such as in the case with Antiochus Epiphanes. His invasion of Israel in 169 B.C. squares with some of the details of the text.

³J. Wayne Baker, "The Eschatological Problems Involved in an Exegesis of Ezekiel 38 and 39," (M.Div. Thesis, Talbot Theological Seminary, 1961), p. 48.

⁴George Arthur Buttrick, gen. ed., The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), s.v. "Lydia," by M. J. Mellink.

⁵Merrill C. Tenney, gen. ed., The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), s.v. "Cambyses," by John C. Whitcomb.

Antiochus did not die on the mountains of Israel in battle. Instead, he died on a bed in Persia of an illness.¹

Many other weaknesses to this viewpoint are easy to demonstrate. Little more space will be taken to refute this position except generally to say the following: (1) it fails to take seriously the time phrases such as "in the latter years" which point to an end time fulfillment,² (2) it is inadequate in any of its versions to satisfy the requirement that the Jews be "dwelling securely," (3) none of the results of the invasion described in the text can be matched historically. Since this position falls far short of satisfying the details of Ezekiel 38 and 39, few conservatives hold this viewpoint today.

Pretribulational Fulfillment

Arguments

David L. Cooper popularized this position which contends that Gog's invasion will take place prior to the tribulation period. He states his position as follows:

It occurs at a time when Israel is dwelling in unwalled villages and is at rest in the land. From this position there can be no recourse. Since it must come to pass before the tribulation and since Israel will be dwelling securely and at rest in the land when it occurs, we cannot avoid the conclusion that there will be a time before the tribulation when Israel will thus be enjoying security and prosperity in the land of their fathers.

¹William Greenhill, An Exposition of the Prophet Ezekiel (Edinburgh: Jones Nichol, 1863), p. 762.

²Keil, Biblical Commentary, p. 163.

During such a period as this the foretold invasion takes place. . . . It must, therefore, be located before the tribulation because there is no other place for it to occur.¹

Cooper opts for this conclusion based on the belief that "living securely" cannot possibly describe any point in the tribulation period because of its turbulent nature. This writer concurs, but wonders why this means that Gog's invasion must take place before the tribulation. Cooper does not seem aware of all the alternatives. He views his position as the least problematic, yet he is aware of tensions within his viewpoint. In fact, in another work he acknowledges that 39:17-29 is a reference to Armageddon (because of the allusion to the bird supper and the picture of the redemption of Israel).² However, he attempts to reconcile this tension by envisioning two invasions--one in chapter 38 and one in chapter 39. This suggestion, however, is unacceptable, for it would break up the natural unity between these two chapters.

Weaknesses

Theologically, if Gog's invasion occurs before the tribulation, it would naturally then happen during the church age. Based on this, Pentecost notes that this

¹David L. Cooper, When Gog's Armies Meet the Almighty (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1940), pp. 80-81.

²David L. Cooper, "The Invading Forces of Russia and of the Antichrist Overthrown in Palestine," (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, n.d.), pp. 8-9.

viewpoint would disrupt the doctrine of the imminent return of Christ and violate the usage of "latter years" (a phrase he believes the Scriptures use in connection with Israel and not the church).¹ Furthermore, as was the case with the preceding viewpoint, this position, too, fails to satisfy the condition of the text which requires that Israel must be "living securely" when Gog's armies invade. This viewpoint incorrectly sees no Messianic Kingdom security in this phrase. Furthermore, there is no scriptural support for the view that Israel will experience peace in any way even remotely resembling that which is described in chapters 38 and 39. On the contrary, true lasting peace for Israel will not commence "until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24) when her Messiah returns."²

Midtribulational Fulfillment

Arguments

This viewpoint places Gog's invasion shortly before or right at the midpoint of the tribulation when the anti-christ breaks the covenant that he has made with Israel (Dan 9:27). Accordingly, this position relies heavily on connecting Israel's dwelling securely with the "false peace"

¹Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 347, and "Events of Ezekiel," p. 342.

²Though the modern state of Israel has experienced phenomenal success, she has not rid herself from the threat of Gentile invasion. True security will not be hers until her Messiah has returned. During the tribulation she will undergo perhaps her severest persecution yet at the hand of the antichrist.

established in the first half of the tribulation by Anti-christ (Rev 6:2-4--the first seal is thought to symbolize this).¹ "Living securely" can only be fulfilled in the first half of Daniel's 70th week since the second half of the tribulation is characterized more by war. Also, at that time, according to Revelation 12:13-17, many of the Jews are driven out of the land or experiencing persecution.

Christie gives three lines of argument in support of this position: (1) an argument from the context, (2) an argument from specific details and (3) an argument from supportive Scripture.² Each of these will be highlighted below and then evaluated in the next section.

(1) In the argument from the context, Christie sees that the surrounding chapters of Ezekiel 38 and 39 provide a clue as to when this invasion occurs. Chapter 37 portrays the restoration of Israel to the land in the last days in unbelief. The time setting of chapters 40-48 is the millennium. Therefore Ezekiel 38 and 39 would then have to occur just prior to this in the tribulation.³ According to Christie, the last two verses of chapter 39 are transitional. They picture the final restoration of Israel which occurs around the time of the second advent just before the beginning of the millennium. Again, this signifies that the

¹John F. Walvoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ (Chicago: Moody Press, 1966), pp. 126-128.

²George R. Christie, "Who is Gog in Ezekiel 38:14" (M.Div. Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1962), pp. 38-48.

³Ibid., p. 39.

rest of Ezekiel 38 and 39 are before this event in the tribulation period.¹

(2) Next, Christie strives to use the specific details of the text to demonstrate that his viewpoint is the correct one. In reality, for the most part, he uses the data instead to show that the viewpoints which disagree with his position are "impossible." Then by process of elimination, he concludes that his position is best. Naturally, this is a necessary activity (what this chapter is seeking to do). However, it is unfortunate that his work does not positively demonstrate as well how the specific details of Ezekiel 38 and 39 themselves fit within his scheme (except for the phrase "dwelling securely"). This omission is typical of most presentations of this viewpoint.

(3) Finally, using Daniel 9:27; 11:36-45; Revelation 13:3-5; Isaiah 30-35 and Joel 2-3, Christie argues that Gog's battle occurs in the first half of the tribulation. The key to this argument is the equating of the "king of the North" with Gog. After establishing that Daniel 11:36-45 and Ezekiel 38 and 39 coorespond, he then cites several clues within Daniel 11 that indicate that the time being described in this passage is the tribulation. Of course, then, by association, Gog's invasion would occur in the tribulation.

¹Christie, "Who is Gog?" p. 40.

²Ibid., pp. 43-48.

From Isaiah 30-35 and Joel 2-3 he observes the following pattern: (a) a northern army invades, (b) the nations are destroyed--which, according to Christie, takes place at Christ's return, (c) then, the millennium is described. He also envisions this same pattern in Ezekiel 38 and 39.¹ All of this is based on the assumptions that each of these patterns are chronological and again, that the Gog of Ezekiel is the same as the northern invader spoken of in these parallel passages and others.

Pentecost goes beyond this to submit that probably Gog's invasion will take place at the midpoint of the tribulation, not just somewhere in the first half.² He reaches this conclusion using the following reasoning. First, Israel will not be occupying her own land (a condition stated in Ezek 38:8) until the covenant is made with the antichrist. Then he notes that this false peace of antichrist is what would be associated with the Jews dwelling securely at the time of Gog's invasion. Naturally then, when Gog invades, this peace will end. According to Daniel 9:27, the point when this peace ceases is precisely at the midpoint of the tribulation when antichrist breaks his covenant. Finally, he uses Daniel 11 to tie these two events together by noting that Palestine is occupied by the beast at the time the king of the North (Gog) enters the land.³ In other

¹Christie, "Who is Gog?" pp. 43-48.

²Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 350.

³Ibid., pp. 350-352.

words, he reasons that it is the Gog invasion (Dan 11:40) which causes the antichrist to break his peace treaty. Thus, the invasion will take place in the middle of the tribulation.

Weaknesses

Though there are some variations within this viewpoint, most have two elements in common: (1) the condition, "living securely," is identified with the false peace established by the antichrist in the first half of the tribulation and (2) the end-time northern invasion, spoken of in several portions of the Old Testament, is the same as Gog's invasion in Ezekiel 38 and 39. As has been seen, this thesis contests both of these assumptions.

Christie's other arguments will be considered. First, regarding his argument based on the context, it was maintained above that no progression of events is being presented in chapters 33-48.¹ Even within chapter 39 this can be seen: verse 4--introduces the bird supper; verses 5-6--Gog's destruction described; verse 7--an explanation of the purpose; verses 9-16--the cleansing of the land; verses 17-20--the bird supper restated (only more in detail); verses 21-29--purpose restated (only more in detail). This clear pattern, precludes Christie's argument for a sequential presentation of these chapters. In addition, some cite evidence of "chronological progression" based on the word

¹See pages 13-14; note--Bewer, The Book of Ezekiel, p. 51 argues for a totally different time (a millennial setting) based on a "chronological progression."

אָפּ in 39:25. However, the prophet does not employ this word to denote a time sequence. Rather, in summary fashion he reverts back to his own day to make his next point.¹ So, it is invalid on the basis of a "chronological progression" to determine the time of Gog's invasion.

Regarding Christie's second argument, based on the specific details of Ezekiel 38 and 39 (many of which he seems to avoid), the data, if treated literally, renders his position quite unlikely. The following are problems:

1. The phrase מְשׁוּבַת מִחֶרֶב -- "restored from the sword." This term teaches that when Israel is invaded by Gog, she is in a state where she "will no longer be slain by enemy sword."² Someone might argue that Gog's invasion invalidates this interpretation. In response, it should be pointed out again, that Gog only threatens. No battle is described. And, saying this is not merely an argument from silence, because the same pattern recurs in Revelation 20:9. So, if Gog invades when Israel is in a state "with no one to make them afraid" (39:26), these conditions could not possibly be fulfilled if Gog's invasion takes place at the midpoint of the tribulation. For, at that point in time, the Jews must still undergo much destruction by a sword and be very much afraid (Matt 24:15-22--even flee for their lives):

¹Keil, Biblical Commentary, p. 178. Also, יָדָעוּ should be rendered "and they will know" (39:28).

²W. W. Feraday, "Armageddon," Our Hope 47 (December, 1940):400. The pual participle carries the sense of permanence (Keil, Biblical Commentary, p. 164). It has already been shown that this phrase means Israel is in a state removed from the sword.

2. This position ignores the detail of the burning of the weapons. Ezekiel 39:9-10 explicitly indicates that Israel uses Gog's weapons as firewood for seven years. A. F. Johnson correctly remarks "it is inconceivable that Israel would go on burning weapons for seven years under the severe persecution of the Beast (Rev 12:13; 13:7) especially since Israel will be driven into the wilderness (Matt 24:16-18; Rev 12:6,14)."¹

3. Similarly, the fact that for seven months after Gog's destruction the house of Israel is actively involved in cleansing the land (by burying dead bodies), renders the mid-tribulation viewpoint unlikely. Will Israel have time during "Jacob's trouble" to carry on such an activity?

4. Ezekiel 39:7, 22 and 26 teach that Israel will not again be defiled as a result of Gog's invasion. Furthermore, the point that the nations will finally learn their lesson is very emphatic in this passage (38:16; 38:23; 39:6, 7, 21-28). The mid-tribulation position overlooks the tenor of these particular verses as well.² No answers are adequately given to the question: how can the second half of the tribulation occur after Gog has been defeated and the words of Ezekiel 39:7 still come to pass ("and I shall not let My holy name be profaned any more"). Again, the finality of Gog's judgment and Israel's subsequent blessing as

¹Johnson, "Eschatological Setting," p. 44.

²Alexander, "A Fresh Look," p. 162.

described in Ezekiel 38 and 39¹ are violated if three and one half more years of death and persecution must still be endured.

5. The conversion of the Jews and their full restoration does not harmonize with a mid-tribulational fulfillment (especially since Scripture sees this full restoration in conjunction with the Second Advent).²

6. The imagery of the bird supper is often overlooked. As was seen, the only other reference to this scene is Revelation 19:17-19. John's usage becomes a formidable signpost for placing Gog's invasion in close proximity to Christ's Second Advent.³ Since the middle of the tribulation is not "reasonably close" to this event, this detail is rarely dealt with.

7. One detail is discussed often by proponents of this viewpoint, the phrase--"living securely." It is identified as the false peace negotiated under antichrist. However, the word study in chapter two argued that in all other eschatological passages in reference to Israel, a Messianic peace is in view.⁴

Christie's third line of argument was based on arguments from supporting Scripture. Less weight should be

¹See pp. 44-50; 53-55.

²See discussion on pp. 54-55.

³Alexander, "A Fresh Look," pp. 164-165.

⁴See pp. 45-50.

given to this argument than the last argument. Nevertheless, as has already been observed, his assertions cannot be conclusively proven.

Armageddon Fulfillment

Arguments

This viewpoint places Gog's invasion toward the end of the tribulation in connection with the final conflagration (commonly called the battle of Armageddon, based on Rev 16:14). Gog's invasion is viewed as merely one aspect of the total end time war which brings all nations upon Israel at the end of the tribulation (Zech 14:1-4).¹

It is not a problem to this view to note that Zechariah 14 teaches that this final battle occurs at Jerusalem while Ezekiel 39 states that Gog is defeated upon the mountains of Israel. For, it was shown, "mountains of Israel" refers to the whole land of Palestine² of which Jerusalem would be a crucial part. Neither is the discrepancy in participants (Ezekiel 38 vs Zechariah 14) a problem since Ezekiel is only presenting one aspect (Gog's invasion) of the entire war (Armageddon).

As was the case with the mid-tribulation view, this view puts emphasis in its support on similarities between Ezekiel 38 and 39 and parallel passages. The

¹Peters, The Theocratic Kingdom, p. 709; William Kelly, Notes on Ezekiel (London: G. Morish, n.d.), p. 200; H. A. Ironside, Expository Notes on Ezekiel the Prophet (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1949), p. 265.

²See pp. 41-43.

parallel passages that are used which portray Armageddon vary. Ironside primarily uses Zechariah 12 and 14.¹ L. S. Bauman uses Daniel 11:44-45.² Baker supports his position based on five parallel passages: Isaiah 29, Joel 3, Zechariah 12:1-14, 14:1-5 and Revelation 16:12-32.³ He sees common themes in each of these similar to Gog's invasion. Since the time of the battles described in each of these passages can be determined to be that of the end of the tribulation because of these similarities, Gog's invasion of Israel must take place at the same time.

The common themes that Baker observes will be listed, for they are representative of the support presented by others who hold this position. There are four: (1) the wars of each of these passages have the common purpose of judgment of the nations (cf., Ezek 38:4, 16-39:6), (2) most include mention of a chastisement of Israel (cf., Ezek 38:4, 10, 23), (3) all of these passages end with divine intervention and with victory for Israel (cf., Ezek 39:22, 39:22, 25-29), (4) Israel's conversion results (cf., Ezek 39:22, 25-29).⁴

Weaknesses

Many of the same objections presented against the last viewpoint also apply to this position as well. The

¹Ironside, Ezekiel, p. 265.

²Bauman, Russian Events, pp. 174-176.

³Baker, "Eschatological Problems," p. 59.

⁴Ibid., p. 60.

position is based on general motifs rather than on the specific details given within the text. The most problematic detail, is for the Armageddon position to be fulfilling the condition of Israel "dwelling securely" when she is invaded. Baker's response to this problem is weak and unacceptable:

Ezekiel indicates that Israel will be dwelling in peace and safety during the last half of the tribulation period. . . . This is the only valid argument against Armageddon. However, it is not known that Israel will not have a short period of relative calm before Armageddon.¹

An only slightly better answer to this objection is that "dwelling securely" is a false security based on Israel's wealth (Ezek 38:11-12).²

Baker's four observations have problems, too. The first point is somewhat superficial. The observation is correct that each of these passages teach that one of the purposes of the wars being presented in the verses cited is to judge the nations. But, this is true to some extent for all wars. The second point is erroneous. The passages cited in Ezekiel do not teach that Israel is being judged or chastised by Gog in this invasion. In fact, there is no verse in Ezekiel 38 or 39 which says that any harm at all is incurred by Israel or that any battle is fought at all. The third point is true but again many battles in the Bible fit into this category. Finally, the fourth point is inaccurate because the

¹Baker, "Eschatological Problems," p. 63.

²Alexander, "A Fresh Look," p. 163.

Bible pictures the conversion of Israel occurring in close proximity to the return of Christ. Another point that he affirms is that Ezekiel 39:25-29 does speak of millennial conditions, but this thesis has disagreed that chronologically they follow the rest of chapter 39. These arguments are not convincing. They do not prove that these cross references are referring to precisely the same event.

Revelation 20:7-9 Fulfillment

Arguments

The strength of this position is that it places the time of Gog's invasion in accordance with the only other mention of Gog and Magog in the Bible, at the end of the millennium as recorded in Revelation 20:7-9. Ellison emphasizes this very point in his book on Ezekiel:

There are but two mentions of Gog in Scripture, here and in Revelation, and unless we can produce very cogent arguments to the contrary, we must let the latter interpret the former.¹

Alexander similarly says:

Normal hermeneutics would require the identification of these two texts . . . unless strong reasons can be mustered to deny such an equation.²

Furthermore, the millennial setting of Revelation 20:7-9 would certainly qualify as a time when Israel is fully restored and dwelling securely. Davidson argues strongly for this when he says:

¹H. L. Ellison, Ezekiel: The Man and His Message (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), p. 133.

²Alexander, "A Fresh Look," p. 166.

From the position of the prophet the invasion of Gog seems to belong to the far distant future, to a time after the people have been restored and have enjoyed long peace and great felicity.¹

In addition to this, many point out that in both Gog passages the invaders are supernaturally destroyed without a fight.² Many also insist that the reason that many of the details that are described in Ezekiel are omitted in Revelation is because this is John's consistent usage of the Old Testament in Revelation.³ The placement of Gog's invasion in Ezekiel before chapters 40-48 are also, frequently discussed by proponents of this viewpoint. A common explanation for the fact that Ezekiel places the post-millennial Gog invasion before the millennial chapters 40-48 is for emphasis: "to show the certainty of the final achievement of the Lord's consistent purpose that all the nations shall recognize his power and deity (38:23; 39:9, 21)."⁴

¹A. B. Davidson, The Book of the Prophet Ezekiel (Cambridge: University Press, 1924), p. 301.

²As stated above it is not uncommon in Scripture for God to intervene supernaturally in an invasion. The method of destruction, "fire," is a timeless motif.

³Merrill C. Tenney, Interpreting Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), pp. 101-105.

⁴Bewer, Ezekiel, p. 6. This chapter has already noted that chapters 33-48 are not a strictly chronological presentation anyway. Amillennialists who hold this position do not have a problem with this because they do not believe Ezekiel 40-48 is a millennial setting. (See: Taylor, Ezekiel, pp. 241-242 for another suggestion.)

Weaknesses

While there is some relationship between these two passages, significant differences do exist which suggest that the Gog invasion is not fulfilled at the time described in Revelation 20:7-9. One difference has to do with the participants involved. The specific participants are listed in Ezekiel (38:2-6). The suggestion is that in this invasion by this list, though a great company is involved (39:11), the invasion is not a world-wide campaign. But, in the Revelation account, it is quite apparent that all the unbelievers of the world are involved in this "Gog" invasion. They come from the four points of the compass and are as many as the sand of the sea (Rev 20:8). Robert Thomas writes: "In Revelation twenty the words 'Gog and Magog' apparently denote the nations as a whole while in Ezekiel they combine the nations to the north and east of Palestine."¹

Also, this viewpoint fails to satisfy completely the details connected with the results of the invasion. Ezekiel's invasion occurs in connection with the Restoration of Israel (cf., Ezek 39:25-29). As has been seen, this occurs around the time of Christ's Second Advent.² This is a clear discrepancy with the time element in Revelation 20:7 which occurs at the end of the thousand year reign of Christ.

¹Robert Thomas, "Argument of the Book of Revelation," (ThD dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1959), p. 293.

²See pp. 52-55.

Furthermore, in regard to the end of the millennium, the next event described that comes (perhaps there is an unstated time interval in between) is the Great White Throne judgment. This fact is incongruous with the results of the text in Ezekiel 38 and 39. As Alan F. Johnson observes:

The point is that in Revelation the next event after the battle of Gog and Magog is the judgment of the great white throne (Rev 20:11-15). It is here that the unsaved will stand in resurrected bodies (John 5:29; Rev 20:5) to face their sentence. It is illogical to think of Israel burying the bodies for seven months only to have them immediately after this, raised out of the graves and brought to the white throne judgment.

The weapons are burned for seven years (Ezek 39:9) after the destruction of the host. Again it would seem illogical for Israel to be burning wood fuel during the eternal state.¹

Moreover, having a seven year gap (to fulfill this detail) would be an unreasonably long gap to have between Gog's invasion and the start of the eternal state.

Summary

The various opposing viewpoints regarding the time of Gog's invasion of Ezekiel 38 and 39 have been surveyed. Each has been found to be unsatisfactory when matched against the data of the text. The various historical arguments do not fulfill the fact that Gog's invasion is an end time invasion. Next, the pretribulational viewpoint is quite arbitrary and does not take into account the results of Gog's invasion or the fact that a close association exists between this invasion and Israel's restoration and the Second Advent.

¹Johnson, "Eschatological Setting," p. 50.

Among other things, the midtribulational and Armageddon viewpoints fail to satisfy the condition of the text requiring that Israel be "dwelling securely" when she is invaded. Finally, the Revelation 20:7-9 position cannot satisfactorily incorporate what happens as a result of Gog's invasion into its scheme. These deficiencies, when compared with the observations of the next chapter will hopefully demonstrate that the position advocated by this thesis is the most feasible.

CHAPTER IV

THE FULFILLMENT OF GOG'S INVASION

This chapter will present and defend this thesis' position regarding the time of Gog's invasion which is during the transition period between the Second Advent and the millennium. This viewpoint will be presented in three sections: (1) the position stated, (2) the position supported and (3) the objections answered.

The Position Stated

To avoid being misconstrued, this position's two parameters must again be stated. First, it has been asserted that the invasion of Ezekiel 38 and 39 will not technically take place during the millennium but rather, just prior to this period. The reason for insisting upon this is to circumvent the problem of Satan being bound when this invasion occurs.¹ Also, it has been maintained that this invasion occurs after Christ's Second Advent. Though this invasion will take place soon after Christ's return, it must occur after it to avoid placing the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38 and 39 during the turbulent days of the great tribulation. Otherwise, it would be the same as the Armageddon fulfillment

¹This is discussed again on pp. 88-89.

position, and unable to explain how Israel could be dwelling securely when Gog invades. So again, to fit this condition of the text, a time subsequent to (but in close connection with) the Second Advent is insisted upon.

The Position Supported

Some of the details that were considered in Chapter two were shown to be aligned closely with the Second Advent. Other details applied to the millennium (when the Messiah is physically present and ruling). Placing Gog's invasion in the transition period between these two events has the advantage of satisfying both sets of details. Support for this position has already been alluded to in the preceding discussions. This section will merely highlight this support with seven lines of argument:

(1) This viewpoint harmonizes beautifully with the context. The theme of Ezekiel 33-39 focuses primarily on the restoration of Israel. As has been shown, glimpses of Israel's final restoration are sprinkled throughout these two chapters.¹ Gog's invasion occurs when Israel has been finally fully restored which does not take place until after the return of Christ.²

(2) The data describing the results of this invasion also supports this position. Placing Gog's invasion just after the Second Advent is congruous particularly with the

¹S. R. Driver, An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1913), p. 279.

²See pp. 52-55.

"bird supper" scene. Revelation 19 places this event right after Christ's return which is in the vicinity of what this position asserts. Furthermore, the mention of the cataclysmic events (38:18-22, does not conflict with this viewpoint. It was noted that they occur at various points throughout the tribulation and especially in relationship with the Second Advent. Consequently, no particular time can be determined for these events. No doubt additional earthquakes, etc. will occur simultaneously with Gog's destruction. Finally, more than with any other position, this viewpoint blends well with the other two results of Gog's invasion: the seven month clean-up campaign and the seven year usage of Gog's weapons as heating fuel. It is not unreasonable as the millennium begins, for these two activities to be going on. Nearly all of the other viewpoints are quite incompatible with this data. So, the description of the results of Gog's invasion are especially strong in favor of this position.

(3) This position fits the need for Israel to be possessing great wealth when Gog invades. In addition to the clear teaching of Zechariah 14:14 which states that Israel will gather in great abundance the gold and silver and other spoil left by the attacking armies of Armageddon, Alexander adds Isaiah 61:6 as support for this which declares:

". . . you will eat the wealth of nations, and in their

riches you will boast."¹

(4) Neither the time expressions nor the geographical data violate this position. Regarding the identity of the participants, neither the presentations that claim to know who Gog and his allies are, nor those that do not make this claim, are prevented from maintaining this viewpoint.²

(5) After the tribulation when Christ returns, the Jews will come out of hiding and be regathered to their land (Matt 24:31; Rev 12:14). At this time, spiritual refreshing will come upon Israel and many will call upon Yahweh (Zech 13:1, 9; Rom 11:25-26; Joel 2:28-3:2; Isa 59:18-21). Also, there will no longer be the threat of war. For, when Israel's Messiah returns, He will establish peace (Isa 9:6-7). All of these are expressed in Ezekiel 38 and 39 as the conditions in Israel when Gog invades: Israel will be restored from the sword (38:8), regathered to her own land for good (39:28), experience spiritual refreshing (39:29), and enjoy the state of having "no one to make them afraid" (39:26). Gog will try to undermine all of this, but Yahweh will annihilate the invaders without a battle (39:4-6).

(6) This position fits the condition that Israel be "dwelling securely" when Gog invades. The Old Testament

¹Ralph Alexander, Ezekiel (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), p. 126.

²For example, Gaebelien, Ezekiel, pp. 256-259 claims that Rosh is Russia; Alexander, "A Fresh Look," pp. 161-162 denies this. Yet, both basically hold to the position of this thesis.

uses this phrase eschatologically solely in reference to security in connection with Messiah's reign when Israel is in view.¹ Thus, only this position or the Revelation 20:7-9 position would qualify. However, because of the other five arguments, this "transitional period" viewpoint better suits the text of Ezekiel 38 and 39.

(7) No cross-references give definitive information that would disallow this position. Some Scripture is used to challenge this position (especially Daniel 11:40).² But, all of these merely portray a general future time which would only disqualify the historical viewpoint.

The Objections Answered

Though this position closely aligns with the details of the text, many are critical of this viewpoint. All of the positions discussed have weaknesses. The position of this thesis is no exception. Consequently, answers must be given to the objections that others have expressed. Some have already been answered. These will not be repeated. However, some other significant ones must still be discussed.

Cooper expresses a couple of theological objections to this position based on Jeremiah 25:31-33, Matthew 25:31-46, Isaiah 2:1-4 and 9:4-5.³ The first two passages present one

¹See pp. 45-50.

²The objections pertaining to this verse have been discussed, pp. 58-59.

³Cooper, When Gog's Armies Meet the Almighty, pp. 74-75.

problem and the latter two from Isaiah pose a second objection.

Both Jeremiah 25:31-33 and Matthew 25:31-46 suggest that when the Messiah returns, He will judge all the nations. Based on this, Cooper asks how Gog and his allies could escape this judgment and invade after Christ returns. Isaiah 11:4 and Revelation 19:15-18 are also sometimes included to demonstrate that all the wicked will be slain when the Lord returns. For, it appears that all the nations of the earth are gathered against Christ at Armageddon and then destroyed.

In response to this, none of the above references state specifically that all of the nations are judged simultaneously. This position envisions Gog's invasion occurring separately but not long after the Revelation 19 Armageddon scene (during the transition period after Messiah has begun to judge the nations). It is unlikely that every single enemy of Christ will be gathered at Armageddon or judged all at once. This judgment process will take some time. Gog's judgment would be part of the last stage. So, these verses are not really a problem.

Isaiah 2:1-4 and 9:4-5 (cf., Mic 4:3) are used to show the impossibility of a war after the return of Christ. This objection is weak for several reasons: (1) none of these passages infer that the "learning of war no more" happens instantaneously. In fact, in Micah, the reference to

¹Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 349.

the hammering of swords and spears happens subsequent to the Lord's judgment of the nations.¹ (2) No battle seems to take place when Gog invades anyway. (3) This same objection could be made regarding Revelation 20:7-10. But, since Gog invades the land then, though Messianic peace has been in force for a thousand years, the description of these passages are not inviolable.

In addition to this, some object that because Ezekiel teaches that for seven months the land will be defiled (39:12--referring to the invader's dead bodies), it would be impossible for the return of Messiah to have occurred since He effects its cleansing.² However, this objection is invalid because: (1) Messiah is present on the earth in Revelation 19:17-21 when dead bodies are still present and (2) the presence of Messiah would precipitate such a cleansing of the land and would readily explain Israel's fervent zeal to do so.

Pentecost also questions that anyone would be available to lead this invasion since it would occur after the beast and false prophet had been cast into the lake of fire and Satan has been bound.³ In response, this objection is inappropriate since it misrepresents this viewpoint which

¹In Micah 4:3 the Hebrew "וְכָתוּב" follows "בְּשֵׁנִי." The setting for this description is when "the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of mountains."

²Pentecost, Things to Come, p. 349.

³Ibid.

insists that these invaders come in the transition period between the Second Advent and the millennium. Though some millennial conditions will invariably begin to take effect right after Christ returns, officially the thousand year reign of Christ does not begin until the binding of Satan (Rev 20:2-3). He will still be loose at the point in time this viewpoint proposes that Gog will invade.

Emert thinks it inconceivable that such a great army as described in these two chapters could be formed as this thesis purports for the following two additional reasons: (1) how could an insurrection take place while the nations are being judged? and (2) what would be the value of a second demonstration to the nations and Israel (38:16, 23) so close on the heels of Armageddon?¹

(1) How could an insurrection take place while the nations are being judged? It is incorrect to assume that these final invaders delay because they are unaware that Christ has returned. Rather, they hold back as was observed in Chapter two, because God is sovereignly bringing this invasion about. It will occur according to God's timetable. The wording of 38:4 suggests even that God is almost coercing them to invade. Also, their greed is blindly driving them to do this even though with Christ present, an invasion is foolish. Sin is often irrational.

¹Charles F. Emert, "The Chronology of Events as Related to Ezekiel 38 and 39" (ThM Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1968), pp. 45-48.

(2) What would be the value of a second demonstration? This is not out of character with God. Frequently, He has to reiterate lessons to sinful man. Even believers have to be reminded over and over again of His lordship. Amazingly, this even takes place in close proximity to a mighty demonstration of His power. For example, it was not many days after the crossing of the Red Sea that Yahweh had to display His power to Israel (cf., Exod 14:21-15:25). On the very next day after Jesus miraculously fed a multitude of people, He had to again provide another mighty reminder to His forgetful disciples that He was Lord (Mark 6:30-52).

Summary

How does this position coorelate with the broad sweep of future prophetic history? These findings will be summarized in the form of a brief prophetic scenario.

At the end of the tribulation the land of Israel is under attack (the antichrist and the kings of the east in particular are converging upon Jerusalem). Christ routs these armies as He returns and all fighting is stopped. As Messianic peace is inaugurated, Israelites flock to the land (i.e., those scattered still throughout the nations, Ezek 20:33-38; and those in hiding, Matt 24:16-20). At this time they truly begin to dwell securely. With Messiah in charge after Armageddon, a clean-up campaign is launched (including the confiscation of much wealth left by the nations). While this transitional work goes on in preparation for the institution of Christ's millennial reign, the invasion described

in Ezekiel 38 and 39 takes place. However, as these greedy invaders enter the land, their attack is supernaturally squelched. This is followed by a seven month purification of the land by the burial of Gog's bones. Other events that transpire during this transitional period include: the "sheep and goats" judgment, the resurrection of the Old Testament saints and, finally, the binding of Satan. With Satan's confinement, Christ's millennial reign officially commences. But, after this thousand year period, he is again released for a brief time. True to character, he resumes his opposition to Christ by inciting many people to an insurrection against Him at Jerusalem. This uprising is a repeat performance of Gog's invasion just prior to the millennium.¹ However, this final uprising too is supernaturally halted. Then, soon after Satan's final defeat, the second resurrection occurs. All the unjust are raised to be sentenced before the Great White Throne Judgment. And finally, when all of this is completed, God creates the new heavens and the new earth.

¹Just as Antiochus Epiphanes foreshadows the anti-christ (Dan 11), so also Ezekiel 38 and 39 prefigure the events of Revelation 20:7-9.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This thesis has attempted to deal with a difficult portion of prophetic Scripture. In particular it has maintained that Gog's invasion, as described in Ezekiel 38 and 39, occurs in the transition period between Christ's Second Advent and the start of His millennial reign.

Chapter two sought to examine the text in order to establish data for the evaluation of the major positions on this issue. Chapter three treated the opposing viewpoints and Chapter four defended the position of this thesis. Though all of the viewpoints have weaknesses, it was felt that the position taken in this thesis best satisfies the data of the text interpreted literally.

Many of the interpretive difficulties pertaining to this portion of Scripture are hermeneutical. Is there a special eschatological hermeneutic? How rigidly literal should prophetic expressions be understood? A literal ("normal") interpretation of Scripture includes the recognition of various figures of speech. Being a literalist can allow for modern equivalency such as a bow and arrow being equivalents to a modern rifle. This thesis, employing the literal method, has assigned figurative meanings where

it was felt that a figurative meaning was necessary. However, it has strived to be as literal as possible, perhaps too much for some. Nevertheless, it is this writer's conviction, as expressed by another, that "the language of prophecy is relatively free from symbolic language and is not smothered into incomprehensibility by so much symbolic drapery."¹ Hopefully, hermeneutical principles regarding prophecy have been applied consistently. This was the greatest challenge of this work. One thing is sure, however--though it may be difficult to speak with finality regarding the time when Gog and his allies invade, their doom, as well as that of all of the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ, is inevitable.

¹Feinberg, Premillennialism or Amillennialism, p. 17.

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