

EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

Part XI

by Thomas Ice

Be prepared, and prepare yourself, you and all your companies that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them. After many days you will be summoned; in the latter years you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them.

—Ezekiel 38:7–8

The first six verses of Ezekiel’s prophecy in chapter 38 outlined “who” would be involved in an invasion of Israel, while verses 7–9 tell us “where” and “when” these events will take place. This new section (verses 7–9) begins with a taunt from God for Gog and his coalition to make sure that they are really ready for their invasion of Israel.

GOD TAUNTS GOG

Verse 7 begins with the same verb used two times, back-to-back. The reason why the verb “prepare” is arranged this way is to intensify their meaning. In other words, God is telling Gog and his allies that they better make sure that they are prepared to the utmost for their attack on Israel, because in essence it is an attack on God, which is something that humans can never really prepare for. “With consummate and telling irony,” notes Charles Feinberg, “Ezekiel urged Gog to be fully prepared for the encounter, and to see to it that all was in readiness as far as his confederates were concerned.”¹

The final phrase of verse 7 says, “be a guard for them.” The Hebrew noun for “guard” means “watch” or “lookout” and in this context has the connotation of “to maintain vigilance, post a strong watch” and “to stand at the ready.”² The Lord is further taunting Gog as He challenges him, as the leader of the coalition, to make sure that he guards or watches over this assembled company so that he may protect them against any evil that could befall them. This is a sarcastic warning to Gog and his group that even though their gathering is for the purpose of wiping out Israel, it is their company that will be destroyed.

AFTER MANY DAYS

The sovereignty of God continues to be a major theme of this prophecy as Ezekiel begins verse 8 by saying, “After many days you will be summoned.” This entire operation is ultimately God’s idea and He will “put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out,” (verse 4) against Israel. Now Ezekiel says that God is summoning Gog and his coalition to attack Israel to accomplish the Lord’s purpose. “The mind of man plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps” (Prov. 16:9).

The exact Hebrew phrase “after many days” is found only one other place in the Old Testament. “Now it came about after many days, when the LORD had given rest to Israel from all their enemies on every side, and Joshua was old, advanced in years,” (Josh. 23:1). Since context governs the length of time intended for a temporal phrase, it is clear in Joshua that many days referred to a few years because “many days” all took

place within the lifetime of Joshua. A similar Hebrew phrase is used four times in the Old Testament (1 Kings 18:1; Eccl. 11:1; Isa. 24:22; Jer. 13:6). Three of these four occurrences are similar to the Joshua 23:1 uses, however, Isaiah 24:22 is used in an eschatological context. "So it will happen in that day, that the LORD will punish the host of heaven, on high, and the kings of the earth, on earth. And they will be gathered together like prisoners in the dungeon, and will be confined in prison; and after many days they will be punished. Then the moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed, for the LORD of hosts will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and His glory will be before His elders" (Isa. 24:21–23). C. F. Keil, writing in the nineteenth century says, "The first clause reminds so strongly of Isa. xxiv. 22, that the play upon this passage cannot possibly be mistaken; so that Ezekiel uses the words in the same sense as Isaiah."³ This context is clearly referencing something that is future and has not yet occurred. "After many days" in verse 22 is likely a reference to the thousand-year time period revealed in Revelation 20:2–7.

The length of time indicated by the phrase "after many days" is determined by factors in the context, which are clearly longer than the lifespan of a human. We will soon see as I examine the other time statements in this context that "the text is emphatic that the invasion and its consequences have been foreseen long before."⁴ Keil says, "after many days, i.e., after a long time . . . signifies merely the lapse of a lengthened period; . . . is the end of day, the last time, not the future generally, but the final future, the Messianic time of the completing of the kingdom of God."⁵ Feinberg declares, "the notion of time indicated that the attack of the enemy would not take place for a long time. The events here predicted were not to be expected in the lifetime of Ezekiel or his contemporaries."⁶

IN THE LATTER YEARS

"After many days" is not the only time indicator of when this invasion will take place. "After many days" is immediately followed in the Hebrew text by the phrase "in the latter years." These two phrases must refer to the same time period. Like the previous phrase, since it is not qualified by something like the latter years of a person's life, etc., it is an absolute phrase referring to the span of history. An almost identical phrase is used in verse 16 and says, "It will come about in the last day that I shall bring you against My land." The term "latter years" is only used in this passage in the entire Old Testament, however, since "last days" is used in verse 16 describing the same event, it is safe to conclude that the more frequently used phrase "last days" is synonymous with "latter years." Such a conclusion is supported by the fact that "after many days" and "in the latter years" are used in tandem in verse 8. Feinberg says, "the time element was distinctly stated as 'in the latter years,' which is equivalent to 'the latter days' of verse 16."⁷

When we search the Old Testament for the use of terminology similar to "the latter years" of Ezekiel 38:8 we find three other phrases that are parallel.⁸ I have selected only the uses of these three phrases that have a future, prophetic meaning. The first term is "latter days" (Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Jer. 30:24; 48:47; Dan. 2:28; 10:14), the second is "last days" (Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 49:39; Eze. 38:16; Hosea 3:5; Mic. 4:1), while the final phrase is "the time of the end" (Dan. 8:17, 19; 11:27, 35, 40; 12:4, 9, 13). The fact that Ezekiel uses three phrases ("after many days," "in the latter years," and "in the last days) provides strong support that this battle will take place during a yet future time. Randall Price tells us, "while the expression "latter days" may refer to the Tribulation period, it is not a technical term for such, since its contextual settings and varieties of usages allow it to

be employed in different ways.”⁹ Thus, references to the latter days phrases include the 70th week of Daniel or the tribulation period, the millennial kingdom and could also include some events that might take place shortly before the tribulation, like the Gog and Magog invasion. Mark Hitchcock notes, “These phrases are used a total of fifteen times in the Old Testament. They are always used to refer to either the Tribulation period (Deut. 4:30; 31:29) or the Millennium (Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1). While these phrases do not specifically identify the time of the invasion, they do clearly indicate that the general time period is future even from our day.”¹⁰

RESTORED FROM THE SWORD

The next phrase tells us, “you will come into the land that is restored from the sword.” The land into which Gog will lead his coalition of invaders is without a doubt the land of Israel. Interestingly the land of Israel is described as a land that has been restored from the sword. The Hebrew word for “restored” is the common word meaning “to turn around” or “repent.”¹¹ Therefore, the sense in which “repent” is used here is of a people who once were in the land of Israel, then they were removed from the land, and now they have been brought back to the land from which they originated. Thus, they were turned or returned to the land of Israel. The Jews are said to be the only group of people in the known history of the world who were removed from their homeland, dispersed among most all of the nations, and have returned to their original homeland. This explains why my English translation (NASB) renders this Hebrew word with a meaning of restore. In other words, the Jews are returning to their land when this event happened. Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 221.

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

³ C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 162.

⁴ Jon Mark Ruthven, *The Prophecy That Is Shaping History: New Research on Ezekiel's Vision of the End* (Fairfax, VA: Xulon Press, 2003), p. 123.

⁵ Keil, *Ezekiel*, p. 163.

⁶ Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 221.

⁷ Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 221.

⁸ Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.3.

⁹ Randall Price, *Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel*, (2007), p. 40.

¹⁰ Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 126.

¹¹ Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.