

EZEKIEL 38 AND 39
 Part XII
 by Thomas Ice

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 38:8

Verse 8 is one of the longest verses in Ezekiel 38—39 and describes when this invasion of the land of Israel will take place. There are a total of seven descriptive phrases used in verse 8 to tell us when this event will occur. We have already examined the first three and have seen that the invasion will take place “after many days,” “in the latter years,” and when the land of Israel “is restored from the sword.” We must keep in mind that this event will unfold when all seven indicators are in place at the same time.

FULFILLED IN THE DAYS OF ESTHER?

Preterist Gary DeMar proposes a bizarre interpretation of when the invasion of Gog would be take place. He contends that the battle described in Ezekiel 38—39 has already been fulfilled through the events of Esther 9 in about 473 B.C. in the days of Queen Esther of Persia.¹ DeMar states that the parallels between the battles in Ezekiel 38—39 and Esther are “unmistakable.”² There are a multitude of problems with such a view, the least of which is not the seven phrases provided in Ezekiel 38:8. It is not the couple of similarities that are determinative when comparing the prophecy with Esther but the multitude of differences that render DeMar’s view as impossible. The only possible motive for advocating such a view appears to be DeMar’s obsessive desire to avoid any future prophecy relating to the nation of Israel. Such an obsession blinds him to the clear meaning of the text.

Here are a few of the more apparent and problematic inconsistencies.

EZEKIEL 38—39	ESTHER 9
The land of Israel is invaded (38:16) by multiple armies. The enemies fall on the mountains of Israel (39:4). Gog, the leader of the invasion, is buried in Israel (39:11).	Jews are attacked in cities throughout the Persian empire (127 provinces, 9:30) by apparent gangs of people, not armies, and defend themselves (9:2). The enemies die throughout the Persian empire.
The Jews bury the dead bodies over a period of seven months to cleanse the land of Israel (39:12).	No need to cleanse the land because the dead bodies aren’t in Israel.
The invaders are destroyed by a massive earthquake in the land of Israel, infighting, plagues, and fire from heaven (38:19–22). God destroys the enemies supernaturally.	Attackers are killed by the Jewish people themselves, assisted by local government leaders (9:3-5).

<p>Invaders are from as far west as ancient Put (modern Libya) (Ezek. 38:5) and as far north as Magog, the land of the Scythians.</p>	<p>The Persian empire did not include these areas. It only extended as far west as Cush (modern Sudan) (Esther 8:9) and a far north as the bottom part of the Black and Caspian Seas.</p>
<p>God even sends fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands (39:6).</p>	<p>There is nothing even close to this in Esther 9.</p>

One important question we might ask at this point is the following: If Ezekiel 38—39 was literally fulfilled in the events of Esther 9, why did this escape the notice of everyone in Esther’s day? Why isn’t there any mention in Esther of this great fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy? The answer is quite clear. Esther 9 did not fulfill Ezekiel 38—39. In fact, an important Jewish holiday developed out of the Esther event called Purim (9:20-32). This is a joyous annual holiday to celebrate God’s deliverance from the hand of Israel’s enemies. Purim’s celebration includes the public reading of the book of Esther, but no tradition has developed or even been heard of in which the Jews read Ezekiel 38—39 in connection with this observance. If Ezekiel 38—39 had been a fulfillment of Esther, then no doubt a tradition of reading that passage would have arisen in conjunction with the celebration.

Further, why aren’t there any Jewish scholars down through history that have recognized this fulfillment? The consensus of Jewish commentators has always seen the Gog prophecy as an end of days event. In fact, this battle is the focus of their view of end-times prophecy that will be fulfilled right before the coming of Messiah. Contemporary Rabbi Rafael Eisenberg summarizes Jewish tradition on the battle of Ezekiel’s Gog as follows:

Our prophets and sages have foretold that prior to the arrival of the Messiah, the Wicked Empire, Rome (which as we have already shown, is modern Russia), will regain its former greatness. In those pre-Messianic days, Russia will expand over and conquer the entire globe, and her ruler, “who will be as wicked as Haman,” will arise and lead the nations of the world to Jerusalem in order to exterminate Yisrael. . . . At that time, the overt miracles which will bring about the great retribution against Yisrael’s enemies and the final destruction of the Wicked Empire, will convince the world that God, alone, is the Judge and Ruler of the Universe.³

Another simple reason we can know that this invasion is still future is because nothing even remotely similar to the events in Ezekiel 38—39 have ever occurred in the past. Just think about it! When has Israel ever been invaded by all these nations listed in Ezekiel 38:1–6? Or when did God ever destroy an invading army like this with fire and brimstone from heaven, plagues, earthquakes, and infighting among the invaders (Ezek. 38:19–22)?

The answer? Never. That’s because Ezekiel is describing an invasion that is still future even in our day. Now we will investigate the final four indicators of verse 8.

GATHERED FROM MANY NATIONS

The fourth phrase says, “whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel.” The phrase “whose inhabitants have been gathered” is a rendering of the single Hebrew verb for “gather.” This verb is the common word for collecting something like agricultural products at harvest time. “Gather” is used in this passage as a pual⁴ participle, which implies by ellipsis in this context that the ones gathered are the “inhabitants” of the mountains of Israel. The implication of the pual participle in this context is that God is the One who has gathered the inhabitants back to the land of Israel. From where has He gathered them?

God has gathered them from many nations. The word translated “nations” is simply the common Hebrew word *am* that is used almost 3,000 times⁵ in the Old Testament and simply means “people, peoples, nation, or nations.”⁶ This gathering is not from just a few nations, but said to be from “many” nations. “This cannot refer to the Babylonian captivity but to worldwide dispersion,”⁷ notes Charles Feinberg. C. F. Keil agrees and says, “gathered out of many peoples, points also beyond the Babylonian captivity to the dispersion of Israel in all the world, which did not take place till the second destruction of Jerusalem.”⁸ These returnees will come “to the mountains of Israel.” Jerusalem is a city set within the mountains of Israel. Thus, since 1967 the modern state of Israel has been in control of the old city known as Jerusalem.

A CONTINUAL WASTE

The fifth phrase says, “which had been a continual waste.” What had been a continual waste? This phrase speaks of the land of Israel which had been a continual waste.” The Hebrew noun for “waste” is used 50 times in the Old Testament,⁹ primarily in the prophets to speak of the ruins of Jerusalem, Israel and sometimes Egypt as a result of God’s judgment. The adverbial participle “continual” modifies the noun “waste,” and speaks “of going on without interruption, continuously.”¹⁰ Rabbi Fisch says that “continual” “here signifies ‘for a long time,’ meaning the period of the exile.”¹¹ But which exile? Does it refer to the 70 year Babylonian exile or the almost 2,000 year global exile that much of modern Jewry is still experiencing? Feinberg says, “This had in view a period of time longer than that of the seventy year in Babylon.”¹² Keil also notes that “continual” in this text “denotes a much long devastation of the land than the Chaldean devastation was.”¹³

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of The Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), pp. 12-15.

² DeMar, *End Times Fiction*, p. 13.

³ Rafael Eisenberg, *A Matter of Return: A Penetrating Analysis of Yisrael’s Afflictions and Their Alternatives* (Jerusalem: Feldheim Publishers, 1980), p. 155, as cited in Randall Price, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy: A Definitive Look at Its Past, Present, and Future* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2005), p. 459. For an overview of Jewish beliefs about the Gog’s invasion of Israel in Ezekiel 38—39 see Price, *The Temple and Bible Prophecy*, pp. 458–61.

⁴ The pual verb stem in Hebrew denotes an intensive passive form of a verb.

⁵ Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

⁶ Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

⁷ Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 222.

⁸ C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 164.

⁹ Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

¹⁰ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

¹¹ Rabbi Dr. S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text & English Translation With An Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), p. 254.

¹² Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 222.

¹³ Keil, *Ezekiel*, p. 164.