

EZEKIEL 38 AND 39
Part XIII
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. And you will go up, you will come like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you.

—Ezekiel 38:8–9

The final two of seven descriptive phrases in verse 8 will now be examined. These phrases provide a framework for determining when this invasion will take place.

GATHERED FROM THE NATIONS

The sixth descriptive phrase of verse 8 says, “but its people were brought out from the nations.” The disjunctive *waw* at the beginning of this construction indicates that this phrase stands in contrast and is related to the previous phrase: “whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste.” The subject “it” “is feminine in the Hebrew, can only refer to *the land*.”¹ The sense is as follows: the land of Israel’s people (i.e., the Jews). Such a sense provides a strong polemic that the people God believes belong in the land of Israel are the Jews.

The Hebrew verb *yasah* is used over a thousand times in the Old Testament and means to “come out” or “go forth.”² However, in this instance it is in the hophal stem, which gives it a causative passive sense and means that the Jewish people “were brought out” from the nations by someone other than themselves. Who would that “someone” reference? The implication can only refer to God as the One who will cause the Jews to be brought back to the land of Israel. The verb “brought out” in this instance serves to support the overall notion of God’s sovereign control over all nations—Israel and the Gentiles. The Gentiles were noted at the beginning of verse 8 as they are “summoned” to invade Israel. Israel is emphasized in this phrase since it is God who is in reality bringing them back to their Promised Land.

There are only three Hebrew words in this phrase and it literally says, “but it is brought forth out of the peoples.”³ Reading this in context, as should always be done with any passage, the “it” refers to the last half of the preceding phrase “the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste.” Thus, how can the land of Israel be brought back from the peoples or nations? This can only occur if the people are brought back to the land, which explains why most translators add “people” in an effort to clarify the sense of the Hebrew.

LIVING SECURELY

The final construct says, “and they are living securely, all of them.” This phrase is also composed of three Hebrew words and completes this long sentence. The verb *jasab* is used over a thousand times in the Old Testament and has the general meaning of “sit,

remain, or dwell."⁴ Therefore, it is translated "living" in many English translations since that is the nuance of what one does when they stay for a period of time on a certain piece of land, as opposed to one who is just visiting.

The next Hebrew word is the noun *betah* that is translated "securely." There has been a lot of discussion about just what this word means in this context. The Hebrew lexicons tell us that the general meaning is "security" or "confidence" and is similar to our English word "trust" in range of meaning.⁵ It is often used in construct form with the verb "to dwell," as is the case here and occurs 160 times in the Hebrew Bible.⁶ It is used in Leviticus and Deuteronomy as a promise from the Lord that He will cause the nation to dwell securely in the Land if they obey his law (Lev. 25:18, 19; 26:5; Deut. 12:10). This term is used throughout the historical and prophetic Old Testament books as a comment whether or not Israel is dwelling securely in the land. In fact, this phrase is used in Jeremiah 49:31 in a similar invasion context as we see in Ezekiel 38. It says: "'Arise, go up against a nation which is at ease, which lives securely,' declares the LORD. 'It has no gates or bars; they dwell alone.'" This is how it is used in Ezekiel 38:8. "However, quite often this general meaning has a negative ring . . . to indicate a false security."⁷ The context supports the false security connotation in this instance, because of the impending invasion. On the other hand, since God miraculously delivers the nation, maybe it is not misplaced after all.

Some have tried to equate the notion of "living securely" with the "living peacefully." It is said that what is described in this passage is a situation where Israel is at peace with all their neighbors and no one is a treat to them. This is not supported by the word *betah* or the context. "Nowhere in the entire text does it speak of Israel as living in peace. Rather, Israel is merely living in security, which means 'confidence,' regardless of whether it is during a state of war or peace," notes Arnold Fruchtenbaum. "There is nothing in the various descriptions of Israel given in this passage that is not true of Israel today."⁸

The final Hebrew word is translated by the English phrase "all of them." To whom does this refer? It can only refer to all of those living securely in the land of Israel. All of those who have returned to the mountains of Israel are dwelling in security. Charles Feinberg concludes, "Finally, they were viewed as living securely, all of them, without fear of invasion or deportation."⁹ This sets the stage for the comments in the next verse where God again addresses God and his invading force.

GOG GOES UP

We see that the action of verse 9 will take place when the conditions of verse 8 are all in place. "Just when least expected and without the slightest warning, the enemy will swoop down on the returned exiles, as an unheralded storm."¹⁰ The Hebrew verb "go up" is very common and becomes idiomatic when used in a military context where one goes up to battle or in reference to the land of Israel, one goes up, regardless of the direction of one's movement.

A CLOUDY STORM

A couple of similes are used to describe how Gog's invasion will take place. The first one "will come like a storm." One Hebrew lexicon said that the use of "storm" in this passage "really means 'a storm that breaks out violently and suddenly.'"¹¹ Thus, the Gog invasion of Israel will be suddenly and unexpected like a thunderstorm that gathers quickly and then unleashes its fury with an outburst that catches many unprepared.

The second simile describes the extent and vastness of the size of the invading army. The Hebrew verb *kassot* is only used eleven times in the Hebrew Bible and has the connotation of not just “to cover,” but to cover some thing for the purpose of concealing it.¹² So we see that the Gog invading forces will be so massive in number that their troops will cover the land so completely that one will not be able to see the land upon which they move.

The final phrase of the verse says, “you and all your troops, and many peoples with you.” “You” is a reference to Gog himself. Gog will be coming with all of his troops as described earlier in the chapter. Gog will not be alone, he will with him the many different people groups as mentioned above as their alliance invades God’s land of Israel. Rabbi Fisch notes that the same description is used in Jeremiah 4:13, which says, “Behold, he goes up like clouds, and his chariots like the whirlwind; His horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us, for we are ruined!” Fisch concludes that the Ezekiel passage is “a figure for the strength and terrifying appearance of Gog’s approaching armies.”¹³ “The land will be covered and smothered by the vast multitude of Gog’s followers, just as a cloud blankets a land below it,” says Feinberg. “Gog will see to it that he has plenty of allies and enough mercenaries to carry through his satanic scheme.”¹⁴ Israel may be caught off guard but not the Lord God of Israel Who never sleeps nor slumbers. He is standing guard and will fight for Israel when this great northern invasion suddenly breaks forth in history. After all, the Lord God of Israel is the one who initiates these yet future events. Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ (italics original) Rabbi Dr. S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text & English Translation With An Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), pp. 254–55.

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

³ Fisch, *Ezekiel*, p. 254.

⁴ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

⁵ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition; and Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

⁶ From a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

⁷ G. Johannes Botterweck, & Helmer Ringgren, editors, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), p. 89.

⁸ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (Tustin, CA: Ariel Press, [1982] 2003), p. 117.

⁹ Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 222.

¹⁰ Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 222.

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

¹² Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition; and Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

¹³ Fisch, *Ezekiel*, p. 255.

¹⁴ Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 222.