

EZEKIEL 38 AND 39
Part XXII
by Thomas Ice

“And it will come about on that day that I shall give Gog a burial ground there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea, and it will block off the passers-by. So they will bury Gog there with all his multitude, and they will call it the valley of Hamon-gog. For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land. Even all the people of the land will bury them; and it will be to their renown on the day that I glorify Myself,” declares the Lord GOD.

—Ezekiel 39:11–13

The slaughter by the Lord as He defends Israel against Gog and his hoards will be so great and significant that the biblical text spends ten verses talking about the clean up and burial process following the battle (Ezek. 39:11–20). What was meant to result in the physical death of the nation of Israel by Gog is turned around by God in such a way that it will provide an opportunity for spiritual life for Israel (Ezek. 39:25–39).

GOG’S GRAVE

Our family lived for five years in Fredericksburg, Virginia in the mid-90s. One of the first things one notices as one becomes familiar with the town is the hill that has almost 10,000 Union soldiers buried there as a memorial to their efforts in the Battle of Fredericksburg during the Civil War. At first I wondered why those Northern soldiers were buried in the South. I eventually learned that the reason for their burial down South is because the carnage was so great in that battle there was no way to reasonably transfer them to their various homes up North. A similar fate awaits those invaders of Israel during the future Gog invasion.

Just as those invading Northern soldiers were buried where they had fallen in the Battle of Fredericksburg, so will Gog and his hordes. “And it will come about on that day that I shall give Gog a burial ground there in Israel” (Ezek. 39:11a). Remember the context of the overall Gog and Magog event: It is the Lord who puts hooks into the jaw of Gog and his allies that brings them down to the land of Israel in the first place (38:4). At the human level, Gog’s motive was to take plunder from Israel (38:12), but the Divine purpose is to glorify God and sanctify the Lord’s name (38:23). Therefore, God’s purpose is fulfilled while Gog’s intent is foiled and they end up being spoiled to the glory of God. Just as the burial site in Fredericksburg is a memorial to the fallen Union soldiers, so also will Gog’s grave be a testimony to what God will have done.

The location of this memorial is said to be “the valley of those who pass by east of the sea.” “So vast were to be the masses that nothing but a deep valley would suffice for their corpses.”ⁱ Where in Israel is this valley located? “The burial place will be in one of the valleys east of the Mediterranean Sea,” according to Arnold Fruchtenbaum, “which would put it in the Jordan Valley above the Dead Sea, and will be renamed accordingly.”ⁱⁱ Charles Dyer adds the following:

The valley where Gog’s army will be buried is “on the east side of” the Dead Sea in what is today Jordan. The phrase “those who travel east” could be taken as a proper name. It might refer to the “mountains of Abarim” east of

the Dead Sea that Israel traversed on her way to the Promised Land (cf. Num. 33:48). If so, Gog's burial will be in the Valley of Abarim just across the Dead Sea from Israel proper in the land of Moab. Yet the burial will be **in Israel** because Israel controlled that area during some periods of her history (cf. 2 Sam. 8:2; Ps. 60:8).ⁱⁱⁱ

After this battle and burial the passage says, "and it will block off the passers-by." This means that the passage way will be blocked off with so many bodies of the dead soldiers clogging the way that it will be difficult for travelers to make it past the scene.^{iv} Randall Price says, "The slaughter will have been so great that the dead bodies of Gog's army will fill an entire valley blocking passage for travelers through this area."^v The location of this burial site indicates that the invaders route will likely come down from the north, continue south down the Jordan valley with intent to move west to Jerusalem when they reach the northern edge of the Dead Sea. The Lord will strike down the invaders as they begin to move west toward His city, Jerusalem.

"So they will bury Gog there with all his multitude, and they will call it the valley of Hamon-gog." Since the multitude of invaders will meet their end in a valley that will likely enable the burying teams to simply cover them over with dirt in a mass burial graveyard. The word "Hamon" in Hebrew means "multitude" or "crowd."^{vi} Thus, "overlooking the cemetery a new city will be built"^{vii} by the name of "Multitude of Gog" to commemorate this event in history.

SEVEN-MONTH BURIAL

"For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land." The "house of Israel" refers to the Jewish people who have returned to their homeland (38:8) and now live in the Promised Land. The Jewish people will need to bury the corpses "in order to cleanse the land." What is the Jewish requirement that necessitates such a cleansing? Price points out contemporary practices in Israel relating to this passage as follows:

On the basis of this verse the rabbis inferred the legal ruling (*halakha*) that *all* graves must be marked. In the modern State of Israel a group of non-governmental Orthodox Jews known as ZAKA (Hebrew acronym for "Identification of Disaster Victims") is appointed to carefully remove all human remains after suicide bombings in order to restore order and prevent ritual impurity in the Land. The reason, according to Jewish law (*halakha*) is that the dead must be buried immediately because exposed corpses (or even single bones) are a source of ritual contamination to the Land (cf. Num. 19:11-22; Deut. 21:1-9). Ezekiel 36:17-21 has already connected ritual purity and divine holiness, and the text here mentions the need to "cleanse the Land" three times (verses 12, 14, 16).^{viii}

The text says that this burial process will take seven months. Why will it take so long to accomplish this task? First, the vast number of invaders who are killed will simply make for a daunting burial task in itself. Second, Fruchtenbaum is no doubt correct when he says, "Since the armies are destroyed in the mountains of Israel, many of the bodies will fall in crevices where they will not be easily found, and so special details will be employed by the government for the seven months to search out these bodies for burial in the special valley."^{ix}

BURIAL PARTY

“Even all the people of the land will bury them.” This statement supports the fact that the slaughter of the invading force is so large that it takes all the people of the land to bury the dead. Apparently the general population of Israel will have to leave their normal jobs in order to accomplish this task (see 39:14–16). Perhaps the general population will be involved in the initial cleanup before specialists take over to complete the task.^x Since the cleanup is such a huge task, it could account for why a town will be developed overlooking the valley. Just as when an oil boom or a gold rush occurs in the United States and boomtowns spring up nearby, so it could be that the initial motivation for Hamon-gog is the need for a base camp for the burial workers.

The burial project for all the people of Israel is said to be “to their renown on the day that I glorify Myself,” declares the Lord GOD.” The Hebrew phrase “to their renown” is in construct form linking “to them” to “renown.” The word for “renown” is a common one^{xi} that is usually translated in English by “name.” But in this context, the meaning clearly carries the notion of “making a name” or “becoming famous.”^{xii} This is why “renown” is an excellent translation of the word “name” in this context. Thus, the burial party conducted by the people of Israel will become famous in that day as a result of this burial process. Even further than that, the passage says that it is because of His people’s fame or renown that the Lord GOD will be glorified through these events. Why will this be seen from God’s viewpoint as a glorious event honoring Him? It will be seen as glorious because through this event God will demonstrate to Israel and all the nations of the world that He, the Lord GOD of Israel is able to keep His promises to His covenant people Israel. Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, A. R. Fausset et al., *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory, on the Old and New Testaments* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Eze 39:11.

ⁱⁱ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), p. 116.

ⁱⁱⁱ (emphasis original) Charles H. Dyer, “Ezekiel” in John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures, Old Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), p. 1302.

^{iv} Dyer, “Ezekiel,” p. 1302.

^v Randall Price, “Ezekiel” in Tim LaHaye & Ed Hindson, editors, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), p. 194.

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

^{vii} Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 117.

^{viii} Randall Price, *Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel*, (2007), p. 44.

^{ix} Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 116.

^x Dyer, “Ezekiel,” p. 1302.

^{xi} 864 times according to a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

^{xii} Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.