

EZEKIEL 38 AND 39
Part XXIV
 by Thomas Ice

Having completed an examination and overview of Ezekiel 38—39:20, I now turn to the issue of when this event will or has taken place in history. What are the various views relating to the timing of when this campaign takes place? There are at least seven different views concerning the time of the fulfillment of the battle of Gog and Magog.

VARIOUS VIEWS

The seven views do not even take into account additional possibilities that arise within the historicist and idealist interpretative approach. I will not consider these perspectives since the historicist system is largely dead, except for advocacy by some cults, while the idealist method is by definition opposed to examining the timing of prophetic events. This leaves the student of the Bible with two broad options—a past or future fulfillment.

Those who believe that this prophecy has been fulfilled in the past are the preterists and they advocate two views. First, Gary DeMar and only a couple of other preterists believe that this battle was fulfilled in events of Esther 9.ⁱ Thus, he believes it was fulfilled in the fifth century B.C. during the reign of the Persian King Xerxes I (486–465). While there are other sub-views within preterism, the second view is that “most preterists have understood this vision as a prophecy which was fulfilled in the 2nd century B.C. at the defeat of the Assyrian invaders of Palestine by Judas Maccabeus.”ⁱⁱ

The other major group are those who believe these prophecies will be fulfilled in the future. The first view believes that the Gog prophecy will take place before the tribulation (could occur before the rapture, but not likely).ⁱⁱⁱ A second view sees it taking place in the first half, towards the middle of the tribulation.^{iv} The third view equates Armageddon and the Gog invasion as the same event in conjunction with the second coming.^v Fourth, is the view that these things will occur at the beginning of the millennium.^{vi} The final view believes that the invasion takes place at the end of the millennium.^{vii}

PAST FULFILLMENT?

As I examine the two past fulfillment views, I must confess that the least likely of all seven views is DeMar’s contention that the Gog invasion was fulfilled in the days of Esther 9. DeMar says that Ezekiel 38—39 was “literally” fulfilled by the events described in Esther 9 that occurred in about 473 B.C. in the days of Queen Esther of Persia. DeMar declares that the parallels between the battles in Ezekiel 38—39 and Esther are “unmistakable.”^{viii} However, in his “literal” interpretation DeMar fails to account for a number of clear differences between Ezekiel 38—39 and Esther 9. A simple reading of the two passages reveals that they cannot be describing the same event.

Here are a few of the more apparent and problematic inconsistencies in the following comparisons that render DeMar’s view as an impossibility.

EZEKIEL 38—39	ESTHER 9
The land of Israel is invaded (38:16). The enemies fall on the mountains of Israel (39:4). Gog, the leader of the invasion, is	Jews are attacked in cities throughout the Persian empire (127 provinces, 9:30) and defend themselves (9:2) The enemies die

<p>buried in Israel (39:11).</p> <p>The Jews bury the dead bodies over a period of seven months to cleanse the land of Israel (39:12).</p> <p>The invaders are destroyed by an earthquake in the land of Israel, infighting, plagues, and fire from heaven (38:19-22). God destroys the enemies supernaturally.</p> <p>Invaders are from as far west as ancient Put (modern Libya) (Ezekiel 38:5) and as far north as Magog, the land of the Scythians.</p> <p>God even sends fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands (39:6).</p>	<p>throughout the Persian empire.</p> <p>No need to cleanse the land because the dead bodies are not in Israel.</p> <p>Attackers are killed by the Jewish people themselves assisted by local government leaders (9:3-5).</p> <p>The Persian empire did not include these areas. It only extended as far west as Cush (modern Sudan) (Esther 8:9) and as far north as the bottom part of the Black and Caspian Seas.</p> <p>There is nothing even close to this in Esther 9.</p>
--	--

Clearly Ezekiel describes a surprise invasion involving only the land of Israel, while Esther 9 speaks of the Jews scattered throughout 127 provinces of the Persian Empire (Esther 9:30) who knew the exact day (Adir 13 according to Esther 9:1) when the king's edict would be executed. No one in Ezekiel's prophecy was killed by hanging on a gallows, as were Haman and his ten sons (Esther 9:13). Why is the land of Israel not even mentioned in Esther 9 while the Persian capital of Susa and many other place names in the empire are referenced? In Ezekiel Persia is one of the invaders that is wiped out by the Lord, while in Esther 9 the Persian king and many Persians aid the Jews in defeating the anti-Semites while this all takes place in Persia. Further, the Jews living in Persia in Esther 9 could not be said to have been regathered from the nations and living at ease in the land of Israel as Ezekiel describes, instead, the Jews in Esther were embroiled in the struggle involving the bravery of Queen Esther. Clearly, these differences are like day and night.

One important question we might ask at this point is this: 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? And why aren't there any Jewish scholars in that day (or subsequently) who recognized this fulfillment?

The answer is quite clear. Esther 9 did not fulfill Ezekiel 38—39. In fact, an important Jewish holiday called Purim developed out of the Esther event (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.

Fortunately, Ezekiel actually tells us when this invasion will occur. In Ezekiel 38:8, he says specifically that this invasion will occur in the "latter years." This is the only occurrence of this exact phrase in the Old Testament.

Another similar phrase occurs later in this chapter in verse 16: “It will come about in *the last days* that I shall bring you against My land” (italics added). This phrase is used in the Old Testament in reference to Israel’s final time of distress or to Israel’s final restoration to the messianic kingdom (see Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 30:24; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1). Likewise, in Ezekiel 38:16, the phrase “in the last days” is a technical term that refers to the end of times, according to Hebrew scholar Horst Seebass. He says it refers to “how history will culminate, thus its outcome.”^{ix} Therefore, Ezekiel is telling us that this invasion will occur in the final time of history in preparation for the establishment of the messianic kingdom of Christ.

Another very simple reason we can know that this invasion is still future is that nothing even remotely similar to the events in Ezekiel 38–39 has 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 (38:19–22)?

The answer? Never. That’s because Ezekiel is describing an invasion that is still future even in our day. The only possible motive for relating Esther 9 with Ezekiel 38–39 is because DeMar and other preterists desperately want to avoid the possibility that this is a future prophecy since it would undermine their past fulfillment views.

CONCLUSION

The view of a massive invasion of Israel in the end times has not yet occurred in history in spite of claims to the contrary. No event in Israel’s past history since the time of Ezekiel’s prophecy even comes close to fitting the details of Ezekiel 38–39 (especially Esther 9). Therefore, since the prophecy must be literally fulfilled, it must still be future even in our day. Ezekiel 38–39 describes a future end-time invasion of Israel by Russia, Iran and many allies (all of whom are Islamic nations today that despise Israel). Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

ⁱ See Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), pp. 12–15; also DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), pp. 368–69. DeMar follows fellow preterist James Jordan and his view in *Esther: In the Midst of Covenant History* (Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons, 1995).

ⁱⁱ Jay Rogers, “Does the Bible predict a Russian invasion of Israel?” an article published April 1997 on the internet at www.forerunner.com/predvestnik/X0058_Russia_Israel.html, accessed March 12, 2009.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), pp. 117–125. See also, Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins as depicted in *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth’s Last Days* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1995).

^{iv} See Mark Hitchcock, *Iran The Coming Crisis: Radical Islam, Oil, and The Nuclear Threat* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2006), pp. 17789.

^v See Louis S. Bauman, *Russian Events in the Light of Bible Prophecy* (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1942), pp. 174–75.

^{vi} See Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Prophet Ezekiel* (New York: Our Hope, 1918), pp. 252–55.

^{vii} See Ralph Alexander, *Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976), pp. 127–29.

viii DeMar, *End Times Fiction*, p. 13

^x Horst Seebass, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, translator John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), vol. I, pp. 211–12.