

EZEKIEL 38 AND 39
Part XXV
by Thomas Ice

The second past fulfillment or preterist view of this passage believes that the prophecy “was fulfilled in the 2nd century B.C. at the defeat of the Assyrian invaders of Palestine by Judas Maccabeus.”ⁱ A preterist said that this is the most widely held view by preterists of the Gog prophecy, yet I searched my library and more importantly the preterist web sites and could hardly find any preterist who has written about what this prophecy means. As usual, there were many preterists who said it did not mean what we futurists say it means, however, they rarely take time to tell us in any detail what they believe the passage means. It is very hard to find a running commentary by a preterist providing a word-for-word commentary on their views. Thus, I will note the general thrust of their views.

SECOND CENTURY B.C. FULFILLMENT

Full preterist Max King said concerning the identity of Gog and Magog, “that Ezekiel’s use of the term was in reference to the power of the Seleucidae, especially as it came to a head in the days of Antiochus Epiphanes.”ⁱⁱ He then footnoted non-preterist, amillennialist William Hendriksonⁱⁱⁱ in support of his statement. Therefore, without supplying much detail, those who hold this view believe that “the oppression of God’s people by ‘Gog and Magog’, refers, in Ezekiel, to the terrible persecution under Antiochus Epiphanes, ruler of Syria.”^{iv} Unlike Gary DeMar’s view dealt with in our previous installment, at least this view has the invaders actually ascending upon the land of Israel, as noted in Ezekiel’s prophecy. “The context of Ezekiel was describing the uprising of the Maccabees in the second century before Christ,”^v declares preterist Vic Reasoner.

While it is true that Antiochus Epiphanes, the ruler of Syria did invade Israel in the second century B.C., very few similarities exist between that invasion and the one prophesied in this section of Ezekiel. To begin with, Antiochus’ initial invasion was successful as he was able to oppress the Jewish people. It was only after a period of living under the oppression that the Maccabean revolt was initiated and then eventually successful. At no point in the Gog led invasion of Israel did the invaders experience any kind of success, let alone a period of occupation of Israel’s land. The Lord wipes out the invading armies in Ezekiel as they are invading Israel. The main characteristic of the Maccabean revolt is that it clearly involved human agency in the overthrow of the Seleucid occupiers of Israel, while in the Ezekiel prophecy God does not use humans to defeat Gog and his armies, instead, He does it Himself through miraculous means (Ezek. 38:21–22).

The Maccabean revolt did not occur after an international regathering of the Jews from all parts of the world, as will occur with the Gog events. Also, while Jewish nationalism was at a highpoint during the Maccabean revolt, it falls woefully short of the spiritual revival predicted as a result of the Lord’s deliverance of Israel at the Gog event (Ezek. 38:23). When was fire sent upon “Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety” with the result that Magog and the nations learned “that I am the Lord” (Ezek. 39:6)? When did the Jews of the Maccabean era burn the implements of war for seven years or take seven months to bury the dead invaders (Ezek. 39:9–16)? These things just did not happen during the second century B.C., thus, they are still future to our time. This invasion will come from “the remote parts of the north,” (Ezek.

38:15) not from the near north, which is where Syria is located. Ezekiel says the invasion will occur “in the latter years” (Ezek. 38:8) and “in the last days” (Ezek. 38:16). If the Maccabean view were correct then that would have been about 2,200 years ago, in the middle of history not at the end or in the last days.

Interestingly, the campaign of Gog and Magog is widely held by modern Orthodox Jews to be a future event. If it had in reality been fulfilled in the second century one would think that such a view would be recognized by the Jewish rabbis from that time until our present. Instead, the details of this famous battle have not yet been fulfilled in the past but await a future fulfillment.

PRETRIBULATIONAL VIEW

As I shift the discussion away from past fulfillment views to those holding to future fulfillment of Gog’s invasion, the first view we encounter is the one that believes this event will take place before the tribulation. Most who hold this view tend to think that the invasion will take place after the rapture but before the tribulation begins, during the interval of time which could be a time of days, weeks, months or even a few years. Some who hold this view also think it is possible that this event could take place before the rapture.

This view is the one that I think makes the best sense, even though I think there are a few problems with this view that I have not yet found satisfactory answers. In fact, the timing of this prophetic event is one that I am least confident about when compared with the timing of other events within God’s prophetic plan. I am not one hundred percent satisfied with any of the possible positions regarding the time of fulfillment of this battle. However, at this point in my studies I am firmly in the pretribulational camp, even though I still have questions.

If one were to compile a survey about 25 years ago of the timing views of futurists concerning Ezekiel 38 and 39 the leading view would have clearly been the one that this event will take place around the middle of the tribulation. Leading prophecy teachers at that time clearly held this view such as Hal Lindsey, John Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, and Charles Ryrie. However, I would say that today the most widely held view among prophecy teachers today would be the pretribulational view of Gog and Magog. Some who hold this view include Chuck Smith, Chuck Missler, Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Randall Price, Tim LaHaye, and Joel Rosenberg. What are some reasons that support this view?

First, Fruchtenbaum describes the pretribulational view as follows:

that the Russian invasion will occur before the Tribulation actually begins. From the text of Ezekiel 38:1–39:16, this view arrives at certain conclusions. *First*, Israel is established before the Tribulation and is dwelling securely. *Second*, the Russian confederacy invades Israel during this time of security before the Tribulation. *Third*, the confederacy is destroyed in Israel before the Tribulation.^{vi}

This view places an emphasis upon the fact that the nation of Israel at the time of the invasion is one that has been gathered back from the nations who were scattered as a result of the sword (Ezek. 38:8, 12). This would mean that the nation, at the time of the invasion, has just returned to the land of Israel, which had been sent into exile by the sword, which would be the Roman invasions of A.D. 70 and A.D. 135. This is the current situation of the present state of Israel. Fruchtenbaum tells us:

After 1900 years, 46 invasions, and the War of Independence, the Land is Jewish again and free from foreign domination. This nation is gathered from many nations and peoples (38:8, 12). The Jews in Israel today come from 80–90 different nations. The continual waste places are now inhabited (38:8, 12). The Israelis today are rebuilding the ancient places and turning them into modern towns and cities.^{vii}

Perhaps the strongest argument for this view relates to the fact that if this event is pretribulational then there would be time for the seven months to bury the dead (Ezek. 39:12) and the seven years to burn the implements of war (Ezek. 39:9). Again Fruchtenbaum explains:

Putting this invasion in the *beginning of the Tribulation* presents no real problem with the seven months, but it does have problems with the seven years. This would put it at a time when Israel would be in flight and would not have time to finish the burning of the weapons. . . . the *before the Tribulation view* is the only one which has no problems with either the seven months or the seven years. The Jews continue to dwell in the Land after this invasion and remain there until the middle of the Tribulation. Hence, the seven months of burial is no problem. The seven years also create no problem since they would begin before the Tribulation and can extend as far as the middle of the Tribulation if at all necessary. According to this view, this invasion must take place at least 3½ years or more before the Tribulation starts.^{viii}

Pretribulational advocate Randall Price, has a little different twist on the seven year burning period when he says:

if the “seven years” during which Israel will burn the weapons of these nations is the “seven years” of the Tribulation (Daniel 9:27; Revelation 11:2), then this, along with the burial ground of Gog and the slain multitude (Ezekiel 39:11-16) will serve as a witness throughout the Tribulation to both the promise of the universal judgment of the nations and Israel’s complete restoration with the demonstration of divine intervention at the second advent.^{ix}

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

ⁱ 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.

ⁱⁱ Max R. King, *The Cross and The Parousia of Christ: The Two Dimensions Of One Age-Changing Eschaton* (Warren, OH: The Parkman Road Church of Christ, 1987), p. 235.

ⁱⁱⁱ William Hendrikson, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), pp. 193–95. Hendrikson in turn says that his interpretation is that of E. W.

Hengstenberg, *The Revelation of St. John*, II vols., 1851.

^{iv} Hendrikson, *More than Conquerors*, p. 193.

^v Vic Reasoner, *A Fundamental Wesleyan Commentary on Revelation* (Evansville, IN: Fundamental Wesleyan Publishers, 2005), p. 482.

^{vi} Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, Rev. ed. (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2003), p. 121.

^{vii} Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, p. 121.

^{viii} (emphasis original) Fruchtenbaum, *Footsteps*, pp. 122–23.

^{ix} Randall Price, “Ezekiel” in Tim LaHaye & Ed Hindson, editors, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), p. 192.