

**EZEKIEL 38 AND 39**  
Part XXVI  
by Thomas Ice

**IN THE LATTER DAYS**

Support for the Gog and Magog invasion occurring after the rapture but before the tribulation can be seen from the fact that the invasion is said to take place “after many days” and “in the latter years” (Ezek. 38:8), and “in the last days” (Ezek. 38:16). These are time indicators that place these events near the end of history because it is an absolute phrase referring to the span of history. The term “latter years” is only used in this passage in the entire Old Testament, however, since “last days” is used in verse 16 describing the same event, it is safe to conclude that the more frequently used phrase “last days” is synonymous with “latter years.” Such a conclusion is supported by the fact that “after many days” and “in the latter years” are used in tandem in verse 8. Charles Feinberg says, “the time element was distinctly stated as ‘in the latter years,’ which is equivalent to ‘the latter days’ of verse 16.”<sup>i</sup>

When we search the Old Testament for the use of terminology similar to “the latter years” of Ezekiel 38:8 we find three other phrases that are parallel.<sup>ii</sup> I have selected only the uses of these three phrases that have a future, prophetic meaning. The first term is “latter days” (Deut. 4:30; 31:29; Jer. 30:24; 48:47; Dan. 2:28; 10:14), the second is “last days” (Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 49:39; Eze. 38:16; Hosea 3:5; Mic. 4:1), while the final phrase is “the time of the end” (Dan. 8:17, 19; 11:27, 35, 40; 12:4, 9, 13). The fact that Ezekiel uses three phrases (“after many days,” “in the latter years,” and “in the last days) provides strong support that this battle will take place during a yet future time.

Randall Price tells us, “while the expression “latter days” may refer to the Tribulation period, it is not a technical term for such, since its contextual settings and varieties of usages allow it to be employed in different ways.”<sup>iii</sup> Thus, references to the latter days phrases include the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel or the tribulation period, the millennial kingdom and could also include some events that might take place shortly before the tribulation, like the Gog and Magog invasion. Mark Hitchcock notes, “These phrases are used a total of fifteen times in the Old Testament. They are always used to refer to either the Tribulation period (Deut. 4:30; 31:29) or the Millennium (Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1). While these phrases do not specifically identify the time of the invasion, they do clearly indicate that the general time period is future even from our day.”<sup>iv</sup>

Therefore, the designation that this event will take place in the latter days or years of history allows for the pretribulation view as a possibility since it holds that this invasion can take place after the rapture and right before the beginning of the seven-year tribulation period. In fact, this invasion is said to result in the Lord’s holy name being made “known in the midst of My people Israel” (Ezek. 39:7). This could be a spark that results in the conversion of thousands of Jews to Christ in the subsequent first half of the tribulation.

**SOME OBJECTIONS**

Some have objected to the timing of this view based upon some statements from Ezekiel 38:11. The land of Israel at the time of the invasion is described in this passage in the following four ways: 1) the land of unwallled villages; 2) those who are at rest; 3) that live securely; and 4) all of them living without walls, and having no bars or gates.

The first characterization of Israel as a land of unwallled villages means that they will not build walls around their villages for protection as in ancient times. Yet, some have

said that the current state of Israel is building the separation wall to keep them and the Arab population apart. Thus, that means that the current state of Israel does not meet this qualification in this passage. Price notes: "only the Old City of Jerusalem has a wall and the modern city since the late 1800's has existed outside these walls."<sup>v</sup> This probably means that the nation will lack protection from invasion since that was the purpose of building walls in ancient times. Rabbi Fisch says, "Israel will have made no preparations against attack by building walls around his cities."<sup>vi</sup> Certainly in contemporary times there is no way that ancient walls would protect against a modern invasion. Instead, this is saying that Israel will not have its defenses up and will be surprised by this attack, but it does not rule out the current situation in Israel. Most of the separation wall is being built today is really a fence that is designed to separate the Jews from the Arabs. It could not help against a modern invasion.

The second phrase tells of a people who are at rest. The Hebrew participle *saqat* describes a people who are "quiet, undisturbed, and at rest."<sup>vii</sup> This verb is used frequently in Joshua and Judges to note the quiet or rest that resulted from Israel's military victories over the Canaanites as they conquered the Land under Joshua.<sup>viii</sup> This term refers to quiet or rest from military conflict. I admit that this is the least likely of the four descriptions that appear true of the current state of Israel. Perhaps it will be the case in the near future or immediately after the rapture. It would not take much for this situation to come to fruition in the current state of Israel.

The third term is *betah* and was used in 38:8. 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.<sup>ix</sup> 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.<sup>x</sup> 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."<sup>xi</sup> 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."<sup>xii</sup>

The fourth characterization is all of them living without walls, and having no bars or gates. We have seen earlier that living without walls would literally mean that none of their cities or towns will have walls that the ancients had in order to hold off an invading army. This picture is reinforced by the note that they will not have bars or gates, presumably in walls that they do not have. Bars and gates were important points of defense in ancient city walls.

What does this mean in relation to the invasion? First, this passage is the perspective of Gog, who thinks that Israel is not properly defended and thus vulnerable to a surprise attack. Second, Price points out that, "Israel's security is based on the strength of its military, which is acknowledged as one of the best in the world and which has defended the country against overwhelming odds in numerous past invasions."<sup>xiii</sup> Third, these conditions were never true at any time in Israel's past, thus it must refer to a future time as already noted by the phrases "after many days" and "in the latter years" (38:8). Keil says, "This description of Israel's mode of life also points beyond the times succeeding the Babylonian captivity."<sup>xiv</sup>

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 221.

<sup>ii</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.3.

<sup>iii</sup> Randall Price, *Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel*, (2007), p. 40.

<sup>iv</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 126.

<sup>v</sup> Price, *Unpublished Notes*, p. 40.

<sup>vi</sup> S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text & English translation with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), p. 255.

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

<sup>viii</sup> See Joshua 11:23; 14:15; Judges 3:11, 30; 5:31; 8:28.

<sup>ix</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition; and Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>x</sup> From a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

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

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

<sup>xiii</sup> Price, *Unpublished Notes*, pp. 40–41.

<sup>xiv</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 165.