

EZEKIEL 38 AND 39
Part XXIX
by Thomas Ice

The final view concerning the time within God's end-time prophetic program when Gog's invasion of Israel will take place is at the end of the millennium. Having stated the view previously, I now will lay out a number of reasons why this view does not best explain the text in Ezekiel 38—39, especially since the end of the millennium results in the end of history and the beginning of eternity.

DIFFERENCES

It is all too common in biblical studies to notice a similarity or two in a couple of passages and conclude that they are referring to the same event. Maybe they do refer to the same event or maybe they do not. When there are thought to be similarities between biblical passages, that is when the differences become even more important. When there are too many differences, then it is usually best to conclude that the various texts speak of differing events. I believe that to be the case in the comparison of Revelation 20 and Ezekiel 38 and 39. In order for these two passages to be taken as referring to the same event, the differences must be harmonized.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum finds two major objections to this view that he considers irreconcilable.

But there are two key objections to this view. *First*, the Ezekiel invasion comes from the north; the Revelation invasion comes from all over the world. *Second*, this view also fails to answer the problem of the seven months and the seven years. This earth is done away with soon after the invasion mentioned in Revelation, not allowing any time (or place!) for seven months of burial or seven years of burning. It would require the burying and burning to continue into the Eternal Order.ⁱ

Fruchtenbaum's first objection means that the Gog invasion of Ezekiel is clearly stated to be a handful of nations (a regional invasion) from the North, while the attack on Jerusalem is said to be many individuals from all of the nations of the world, thus meaning that the Revelation invasion comes from every direction. A human being, Gog, is said to lead the Ezekiel invasion, while Satan himself (an angelic being) is the leader of the Revelation event. John Walvoord agrees and says, "nothing in the context of Ezekiel 38-39 is similar to the battle in Revelation."ⁱⁱ Walvoord asks the question: "Why then is the expression "Gog and Magog" used by John?" This is the strongest reason for this viewpoint. Walvoord answers his own question as follows:

The Scriptures do not explain the expression. In fact it can be dropped out of the sentence without changing the meaning. In Ezekiel 38 Gog was the ruler and Magog was the people, and both were in rebellion against God and were enemies of Israel. It may be that the terms have taken on a symbolic meaning much as one speaks of a person's "Waterloo," which historically refers to the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, Belgium, but has come to represent any great disaster. Certainly the armies here come in the same spirit of antagonism against God that is found in Ezekiel 38.ⁱⁱⁱ

Fruchtenbaum's second objection appears to me to be an insurmountable problem for this view. Even though advocate Paul Tanner states generally that, "time would surely be available for the burial of bodies and the burning of weapons"^{iv} he provides no specifics. Ralph Alexander makes a similar generalization when he says, "time would surely be available for the burial of bodies and the burning of weapons."^v So I guess that Alexander would have to posit a seven-year period that will last beyond the thousand years of Revelation 20. However, Ezekiel 39:12 says the purpose for the burying of the dead is to "cleanses the land." Why would the land need to be cleansed if the end of the millennium results in the great conflagration of the heavens and the earth? The flow of the text in Revelation makes it clear that instant judgment is brought down on Satan and those who are part of the global rebellion against God. Then the next scene shifts in verses 11–15 to the Great White Throne judgment, followed by the New Heavens and the New Earth in chapters 21 and 22. Revelation 21:1 includes the phrase, "for the first heaven and the first earth passed away."

THE CONFLAGRATION

There are a couple of Greek words that we should focus upon in Revelation. First, in 20:9 it says, "fire came down from heaven and *devoured* them"—that is the people who came from the nations and surrounded Jerusalem. The Greek word for "devoured" is *katephagen* and carries the general meaning of to "devour as if by eating." A Greek lexicon classifies the Revelation 20:9 use as "to destroy utterly" and "of fire: consume someone."^{vi} The clear implication of this word is that there will not be any bodies left to bury since they will be consumed and thus destroyed by the fire God sends down from heaven. Therefore, this word does not allow for a seven-year cleansing of the land as noted in Ezekiel.

The other Greek word is found in 21:1 that says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth *passed away*." "Pass away" translates the Greek word *apelelutha*, which has the basic meaning of "go away or depart." The Greek lexicon says that in this specific context it has the sense of "to discontinue as a condition or state, or pass away."^{vii} This passage, along with 20:9, supports the notion that when the thousand years come to an end then the present heavens and earth will be destroyed, which does not allow for the details of Ezekiel 39:9–16 to be fulfilled in history.

Further, 2 Peter 3:10–13 speaks of the destruction of this present heaven and earth in language that does coordinate with Revelation 20 and 21. "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens *will pass away* with a roar and the elements *will be destroyed* with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be *burned up*. Since all these things are to *be destroyed* in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens *will be destroyed by burning*, and the elements *will melt with intense heat!* But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." Much of the same vocabulary used in Revelation is also found in 2 Peter. Thus, it follows that this passage in 2 Peter 3 is an expansion of what John saw in Revelation. This means that after the thousand years this present earth is going to be burned up and totally destroyed. This perhaps explains why God sends fire down from heaven upon the rebels that surround Jerusalem, since it will be the first phase in the total destruction of planet earth. Therefore, there is no way that the details of Ezekiel's invasion are referring to the same event.

ADDITIONAL DIFFERENCES

The more I examine the details of the Ezekiel passage and compare it to Revelation 20:7–10, the more I realize that these are clearly two separate events. Another detail in Ezekiel that does not make sense in light of Revelation 20 is the fact that Gog his invaders will be buried by the Israelis in a valley that is said to be east of the Mediterranean Sea. 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).^{viii}

Such coordination between details of the two passages just do not measure up as the same event.

Why would the Lord have Israel memorialize Gog's burial place for future generations when He would also know that He is getting ready to burn up the entire planet? It does not make sense! Mark Hitchcock notes that "these chapters are set in the context of restoration (Ezek. 33—39) followed by a description of the millennial temple and sacrifices (Ezek. 40—48). The invasion in chapters 38 and 39 is a part of Israel's restoration that will occur chronologically before the millennial kingdom is officially established."^{ix}

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

ⁱ 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.

ⁱⁱ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), vol. 2, p. 981.

ⁱⁱⁱ Walvoord, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 981.

^{iv} J. Paul Tanner, "Rethinking Ezekiel's Invasion By Gog," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, March 1996, vol. 39, p. 45.

^v Ralph H. Alexander, "Ezekiel" in Frank E. Gaebelin, gen. ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 12 vol. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), vol. 6, p. 940.

^{vi} William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 532.

^{vii} Arndt, Danker and Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 103.

^{viii} (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.

^{ix} Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), p. 134.