

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

*“And I will turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords;”*  
—Ezekiel 38:4

As we look deeply at this prophecy we see that God will put hooks into the jaws of Gog, who is the prince of Rosh, which we have seen is a reference to modern day Russia. Thus, Gog appears to be a Russian individual who will lead the Russian nation and her allies in an attack on regathered Israel. This is the basic situation that we see today as we scan the geo-political landscape. The stage is already set for just such an attack.

**A ROD OF DISCIPLINE?**

Some might argue that the Gog invasion has already taken place in conjunction with God’s discipline of Israel in the sixth century B.C. Randall Price notes the following:

The role of Gog, however, is different than that of past invaders such as the Assyrians and Babylonians who had been called the “rods of God’s wrath” (cf. Isaiah 10:5). On the one hand Gog’s willful decision to invade (verse 11) is based on his own passions (verses 12-13), but on the other hand he is drawn (as with hooks in his jaw, verse 4) in order to make possible a divine demonstration of God’s power and intervention for Israel to the nations (verses 21, 23; 39:27) and Israel itself (39:28).<sup>1</sup>

Thus, it seems unlikely that this prophecy refers to a past disciplinary action by God where He uses other nations to chastise Israel, as He did with Assyrian against the Northern Kingdom (722 B.C.) and against the Southern Kingdom with the Babylonians (586 B.C.). If such were the case then God would not intervene on behalf of Israel as He does in this passage. When God uses a pagan nation to discipline Israel, He never intervenes to protect Israel during such an invasion.

**I WILL BRING YOU OUT**

As we continue to look more closely at Ezekiel 38:4 we see that the Lord, after having put hooks in Gog’s jaw will bring him out of his place. The Hebrew verb translated “I [God] will bring you [Gog] out” is in a causative stem meaning that God will use the hook in the jaw to bring Gog out of his place.<sup>2</sup> Once again, this is not something that Gog would have instigated had not God intervened to bring him out to their eventual destruction.

**GOG’S MILITARY RESOURCES**

When Gog comes down against Israel it will be with “all your army, horses and horsemen.” The Hebrew word for “army” (*chayil*) has the basic meaning of “strength or power,”<sup>3</sup> depending upon what is referenced in the context. It is the primary word for army in the Old Testament but has the abstract idea of “strength,” “wealth,” or more

concretely “military forces,”<sup>4</sup> since it takes great wealth to field a strong military. The word is used again to describe Gog and his allies in 38:15, this time with the adjective “mighty.” In other words, the *chayil* is a term that carries the idea of military might and the semantic range would not be limited to an ancient army. Since the word “all” is used with army, it means that their entire army, not just part of it, will come in this invasion of Israel.

The next textual description is that this invading army will have “horses and horsemen.” It is obvious what horses mean, while horsemen would be those soldiers riding horses for military purposes. Horsemen are often distinguished from those riding chariots in the Old Testament. Charles Feinberg concludes: “The mention of horses and horsemen is not to be taken to mean that the army would consist entirely or primarily of cavalry.”<sup>5</sup> Feinberg’s statement is supported by the fact that previously the text said “all your army,” which would include all aspects of an attacker’s resources. If this is the case, perhaps cavalry is singled out and mentioned specifically since it was the most potent offensive force for an invader in Ezekiel’s day. Also, horses denote a form of military conveyance, while horsemen the military personnel.

The last part of verse 4 describes how the military personnel are outfitted: “all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords.” This is a reference to the horsemen, all of which are splendidly attired. The Hebrew word translated “splendidly” (*miklol*) is an interesting word found only here and in Ezekiel 23:12. It is defined variously as “most gorgeously” or “all sorts of armor.” “There is little agreement over the correct translation of this word,” since it is only used twice. “In both cases it is used in contexts describing the splendid appearance of military men. A literal translation would seem to be ‘clothed fully,’” or “all fully equipped.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, these attackers will all have the best military equipment available in their day. They will not be ill equipped for the task they intend. Not only will the invaders be well equipped, there will be a great number of them who will come down to Israel.

This great company is said to have both “buckler and shield” to protect themselves. The Hebrew word for “shield” (*sinna*) refers to a “large shield covering the whole body.”<sup>7</sup> While the Hebrew word for “buckler” (*magen*) refers to the smaller “shield or buckler carried by a warrior for defense.”<sup>8</sup> This military equipment would be examples of the well-equipped condition of the invaders. “Besides the defensive arms, the greater and smaller shield,” declares Keil, “they carried swords as weapons of offense.”<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew word “sword” (*hereb*) “can designate both (1) the two-edged dagger or short sword (Jgs. 3:16, 21) and (2) the single-edged scimitar or long sword.”<sup>10</sup> Since these soldiers are riding on horses, it would make the most sense to think that the long sword is pictured here, which has historically been the weapon of choice for cavalry. The short sword would not be as practical from atop a horse. “The verse explains that Yahweh is bringing out Gog fully armed.”<sup>11</sup> The greater the opponent then the greater the possibility that Israel will find herself in an impossible situation. An impossible situation calls for Divine intervention. Thus, there will be greater glory for God when He totally destroys the invaders.

#### WHAT ABOUT THE WEAPONS?

Critics of our futurist understanding of this passage point to the fact that the text says that invaders will be horsemen riding on horses and using weapons like swords and spears, “indicators of an ancient battle in a pre-industrial age,”<sup>12</sup> insists preterist Gary DeMar. Without dealing with other textual details, DeMar argues primarily on

the basis of weapons described in the passage that it has already been fulfilled. “The weapons are ancient because the Battle is ancient.”<sup>13</sup> When in the past was it fulfilled? DeMar, apparently with a straight face, insists it was fulfilled in the days of Esther.<sup>14</sup>

“These, of course, are antiquated weapons from the standpoint of modern warfare,” acknowledges John Walvoord. “This certainly poses a problem.”<sup>15</sup> However, without abandoning the principles of literal interpretation, Walvoord believes that there is a solution to this problem. He cites three suggestions that have been made as follows:

One of them is this that Ezekiel is using language with which he was familiar—the weapons that were common in his day—to anticipate modern weapons. What he is saying is that when this army comes, it will be fully equipped with the weapons of war. Such an interpretation, too, has problems. We are told in the passage that they used the wooden shafts of the spears and the bow and arrows for kindling wood. If these are symbols, it would be difficult to burn symbols. . . .

A second solution is that the battle is preceded by a disarmament agreement between nations. If this were the case, it would be necessary to resort to primitive weapons easily and secretly made if a surprise attack were to be achieved. This would allow a literal interpretation of the passage.

A third solution has been suggested based on the premise that modern missile warfare will have been developed in that day to the point where missiles will seek out any considerable amount of metal. Under these circumstances, it would be necessary to abandon the large use of metal weapons and substitute wood such as is indicated in the primitive weapons. Whatever the explanation, the most sensible interpretation is that the passage refers to actual weapons pressed into use because of the peculiar circumstances of that day.<sup>16</sup>

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

## ENDNOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> Randall Price, *Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel*, (2007), p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

<sup>3</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck, & Helmer Ringgren, editors, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 349.

<sup>4</sup> Botterweck, & Ringgren, *TDOT*, vol. IV, p. 353.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), pp. 220–21.

<sup>6</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, editors, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), vol. I; p. 442.

<sup>7</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition.

<sup>8</sup> Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic edition.

<sup>9</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 162.

<sup>10</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck, & Helmer Ringgren, editors, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. V (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 155.

<sup>11</sup> John W. Wevers, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 202.

<sup>12</sup> Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Powder Springs, GA: American Vision, 1999), p. 367.

<sup>13</sup> Gary DeMar, "Ezekiel's Magog Invasion: Future or Fulfilled?" *Biblical Worldview Magazine*, vol. 22 (December, 2006), p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> DeMar, *Last Days Madness*, pp. 368–69; see also Gary DeMar, *End Times Fiction: A Biblical Consideration of the Left Behind Theology* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001), pp. 12–15.

<sup>15</sup> John F. Walvoord, *The Nations in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), p. 115.

<sup>16</sup> Walvoord, *Nations*, pp. 115–16.