

EZEKIEL

Hard to Heart

“Be in the Fight Place at the Right Time”

38:1-8 (part 2)

Ezekiel 38:1 Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying,

Ezekiel 38:2 "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him,

Ezekiel 38:3 and say, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.

Ezekiel 38:4 I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords.

Ezekiel 38:5 Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet;

Ezekiel 38:6 Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops--many people are with you.

Ezekiel 38:7 "Prepare yourself and be ready, you and all your companies that are gathered about you; and be a guard for them.

Ezekiel 38:8 After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely.

Prophecy expert Mark Hitchcock says, "By far, the most controversial issue in Ezekiel 38-39 is the timing of the invasion. The specific time of the invasion in Ezekiel 38 is difficult to determine."

I should explain that we believe that this prophecy is *literal* and *historical*. In other words, it describes a real military campaign against Israel that happens sometime in human history.

But when? We're going to look at a few theories but before we do there is one thing for sure that we must keep in mind. It's something we read in Ezekiel 38:8.

Ezekiel 38:8 After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely.

It's that last phrase that says, "and now all of them [Israel] dwell safely." This seems to be telling us that this invasion occurs at a time when the nation of Israel is dwelling safely in their land. It's going to be for us a kind of litmus test to tell us when this might occur.

The meaning of "safely" is important to our discussion. It is *security* or *confidence* and is similar to our English word *trust*. Some have tried to equate the notion of "living securely" with them "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 threat to them. This is not supported by the word or the context. The idea is that they are confident, trusting in something or someone for their security.

With that in mind, let's see when this invasion might occur.

Believe it or not, there are those who say ***it has already happened***. They say it was fulfilled in the time of Esther around 473BC. You remember the story. Ahasuerus was king of the Persian empire. Esther, a Jew, came to be his queen. It was providential because just at that same time Haman convinced the king to issue an edict allowing the population to rise up against the Jews.

Esther 3:13 And... letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate all the Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month of Adar, and to plunder their possessions.

Esther had concealed her heritage but now revealed herself as a Jew. Ahasuerus issued a second edict allowing the Jews to defend themselves.

Esther 9:1 Now in the twelfth month, that is, the month of Adar, on the thirteenth day, the time came for the king's command and his decree to be executed. On the day that the enemies of the Jews had hoped to overpower them, the opposite occurred, in that the Jews themselves overpowered those who hated them.

Esther 9:2 The Jews gathered together in their cities throughout all the provinces of King Ahasuerus to lay hands on those who sought their harm. And no one could withstand them, because fear of them fell upon all people.

Esther 9:3 And all the officials of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and all those doing the king's work, helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them.

Esther 9:4 For Mordecai was great in the king's palace, and his fame spread throughout all the provinces; for this man Mordecai became increasingly prominent.

Esther 9:5 Thus the Jews defeated all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, with slaughter and destruction, and did what they pleased with those who hated them.

Having read Ezekiel 38:1-9, can you see anything similar at all in Esther - except for the fact that it involved the Jews? You can't. Besides, Israel was not dwelling safely in their land in the fifth century BC. They were subject to the Persians.

No one in the Book of Esther so much as mentions Ezekiel or his prophecy, even though it was only a century removed.

An important Jewish holiday developed out of the Esther event called Purim (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. And no Jewish scholars connect Esther with Ezekiel.

There is no other time in history between the prophecy and today that we see a fulfillment. This prophecy is for the future.

Let's talk about when this invasion might take place in the future. There are those who say it could occur anytime during the current Church Age prior to the resurrection and rapture of the church. One of the verses they cite is Ezekiel 39:9, which describes what happens immediately following the defeat of Gog by God.

Ezekiel 39:9 "Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and bucklers, the bows and arrows, the javelins and spears; and they will make fires with them for seven years.

The period of time, "seven years," coincides nicely with the Tribulation on earth. So the argument is that the Church is resurrected and raptured just at the time of this invasion and the Tribulation begins.

Some of the problems with the timing of this invasion in the Church Age and prior to the Tribulation are the following:

1. Ezekiel 39:9 doesn't say that the "seven years" are the seven years of the Tribulation.
2. If this invasion were to occur today, could we say that Israel is dwelling safely? I don't think so!

The next view is that the invasion will happen after the rapture but before the Tribulation. It will be during the interval of days, weeks, months or years between the rapture and the start of the seven year Tribulation.

One argument for this view is that it sets the stage for the Tribulation. If the Tribulation is closely preceded by a failed regional invasion of Israel then this would remove much of the Russian and Muslim influence currently in the Middle East today and allow the European Union to fill the void. It would empower the EU from which many believe the antichrist will rise.

But I still fail to see how it accounts for the phrase "all of them dwell safely." If the church were raptured today, would that result in Israel being safer? I don't see how.

The most widely held historical view is that this invasion will take place around the middle of the seven-year tribulation. There are at least two major reasons for the popularity of this view:

1. The Tribulation begins when the antichrist enters into a peace treaty with Israel. He and his forces guarantee the peace of the Promised Land

and give Israel the green light to rebuild their Temple. This seems to account very well for the phrase “all of them dwell safely.”

2. This mid-trib view takes into account a parallel passage in Daniel chapter eleven. There you read about an invasion of Israel from the north. It seems that when the invasion begins, the antichrist and his forces honor their treaty with Israel and come to Israel’s aid but, before they arrive, the northern invaders are wiped-out supernaturally by God. The antichrist proceeds to Israel, to Jerusalem, and in the aftermath of the invasion goes in to the Temple and defiles it by declaring himself God.

The major argument against the mid-trib view is that the peace treaty with the antichrist doesn’t really render Israel secure. But I’d say it does allow them to “dwell safely” for a time. Ezekiel doesn’t say all their troubles are over or that there is no longer any danger.

In fact, it seems to me that the peace treaty with the antichrist is the perfect explanation of “dwell safely.” After all, in First Thessalonians five we read that it is precisely when people are saying “peace and safety” that “sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman” (5:3).

Let’s keep looking at other suggested times for this invasion. Some believe that the invasion Ezekiel thirty-eight and thirty-nine is synonymous with what the Book of Revelation calls the Battle of Armageddon (16:16). Since Armageddon is a huge invasion of Israel just prior to the Second Coming of Jesus to earth and the invasion of Israel described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 is said to be in "the latter years" (38:8) and "in the last days" (38:16), then they must be the same event.

If it is synonymous with Armageddon, *Israel is definitely not dwelling safely!* It is the worst, most awful, period of anti-semitism and persecution against Israel ever recorded.

Besides, the nations involved at Armageddon are called “the kings of the earth and of the whole world” (Revelation 16:14). It is not confined to those specifically and meticulously listed by the prophet in our passage.

The armies at Armageddon will fill the land of Israel and reach Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:2) and "the valley of Jehoshaphat" (Joel 3:2), whereas the Russian/Muslim army is destroyed on "the mountains of Israel" (Ezekiel 39:4). There is nothing to indicate they will reach Jerusalem.

The nations who invade Israel in Ezekiel are said to be destroyed by pestilence and bloodshed... flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone (38:22). At Armageddon it is the brightness of the Lord's coming that destroys those gathered for war.

A similar, but slightly different view is that the invasion occurs after the Second Coming of Christ, during the interlude between the tribulation and the start of the Millennium. The Book of Daniel does, indeed, describe an interlude, though it doesn't mention any battle. This period of time at least accounts for the safety issue. Israel will indeed be dwelling in safety at that time.

We know that after Armageddon the Lord will judge the nations. He determines who is saved and who is not in order to populate the earth for the Millennial Kingdom. There will be no possibility of any coalition to come against Israel as the Lord is judging them.

The last major view is that the battle of Ezekiel thirty-eight and thirty-nine will occur at the end of the Millennium. The basis for this view is significant since Revelation 20:7-9 speaks of a conflict at the end of the Millennium when Satan is released. The strength of this view is that Gog and Magog are specifically mentioned in the text.

The problem is that the last battle at the end of the Millennium involves nations and people from every part of the globe, not just those north of Israel and in northern Africa.

Revelation 20:8 and [the devil] will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea.

Revelation 20:9 They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them.

Remember that “Gog” is a title, like pharaoh or czar. It doesn’t mean it’s the same guy in both passages.

After everything is considered, the mid-trib invasion seems the most likely, the most biblical, timing for this invasion. I therefore don’t expect to see it happen. The church will have been resurrected and raptured by that time - at least three and one half years prior to that time.

Look again at Ezekiel 38:8.

Ezekiel 38:8 After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely.

There are a total of six descriptive phrases regarding the timing of the invasion.

1. “After many days” can mean any length of time. By itself the phrase is no real help. But in the overall context it can certainly mean the end of day, the last time, not the future generally, but the final future, the Messianic time of the completing of the kingdom of God.
2. “Those brought back from the sword” describe a people who were forcibly removed from their homeland only to be brought back. The chapters previous to chapters thirty-eight and thirty-nine have been all about God bringing the Jews back to their land. This is certainly a description of the Jews, of the nation of Israel. One author commented, “The Jews are said to be the only group of people in the known history of the world who were removed from their homeland, dispersed among most all of the nations, and have returned to their original homeland.”
3. “Gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel” points beyond the Babylonian captivity to the dispersion of Israel in all the world, which did not take place till the second destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. These returnees will come "to the mountains of Israel." Jerusalem is a city set within the mountains of Israel.
4. “Which had long been desolate” again points to something much worse than the Babylonian captivity that the Jews of Ezekiel’s time

experienced. We can look back on recorded history and see that the “long” desolation only recently ended, in this century, when Israel became a nation again.

5. “They were brought out of the nations” is written in a grammar that indicates it is God Who brought them back. This can only refer to Israel in the last days.
6. Which brings us to the sixth phrase, the one we’ve been using prominently, “all of them dwell safely.” Ezekiel foresaw Israel dispersed throughout the nations of the world, miraculously regathered to the land by God in the last days, and finally dwelling in some safety.

I’m saying all this is in place except the dwelling safely and that will occur once Israel and the antichrist enter into a treaty guaranteeing her safety.

Keep looking up!!

