

# EZEKIEL

## Hard to Heart

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### *“Captain Hooked”*

38:1-13 (part 3)

It’s going to be God versus Gog.

Ezekiel was told to “prophesy against him,” against Gog, the captain of these would be conquerers. We might call him ‘Captain Hooked,’ because God says He will “put hooks into [his] jaws, and lead [him] out.

We’ve seen the participants in this end-times invasion. We’ve discussed the various theories as to it’s timing, choosing as our current favorite around the middle of the seven year Great Tribulation. Now we get into some of the other details.

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

God is active in the affairs of human history. He raises up nations to serve His purposes. He sees that nations are destroyed to serve His purposes.

What are His purposes? One important one is to discipline His chosen nation, Israel. Keep that in mind as you see the Lord dealing with Gog and his allies.

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.

God will “turn [Gog] around. The captain of this host will be heading in a different direction when God will “put hooks into [his] jaws, and lead [him] out...” A practice common to warfare in those days was for the conqueror to literally put hooks through the jaws of captives, chain them together, and lead them wherever they were taking them.

The imagery leaves no doubt that God is in control of these events. In His sovereignty and by His divine providence, God draws these enemies of Israel away from their prior plans and down towards the Promised Land.

There are different hooks for different purposes. Fisherman utilize a variety of hooks. You might hang your bicycle in the garage on hooks.

What will be the hook God uses to draw this force down against Israel? We can only speculate.

- Years ago the prevalent speculation was that oil and gas would be found in Israel, and the northern coalition would come down to destroy Israel wanting to claim her resources. Interestingly, vast oil and gas reserves have just recently been discovered in Israel.
- Today there is speculation that Gog and his forces will act towards Israel the way the U.S. acted towards Iraq - invading to end an evil and achieve a greater purpose. In the case of Gog it will be to destroy any non-Muslim influence in the region.

The hook will undoubtedly be something we haven't considered that shows us how much smarter God is than we are!

Critics of a literal futurist understanding of this passage point to the fact that the text says that the invaders will be horsemen riding on horses and using weapons like swords and spears. These are certainly not what we would expect given the current state of the military.

One argument is that the invasion force was being described in terms Ezekiel could comprehend with the understanding that whenever this invasion took place in the future the hostiles would be equipped with all the best modern weaponry of their era.

One problem which that explanation cannot account for is that the weaponry is said to be burned for seven years after the battle. We don't normally think of modern weapons fueling a bonfire.

Another solution is the obvious one. That this really is an invasion mostly by cavalry, literally on horseback.

According to the American Museum of Natural History,

Though cavalry charges are now a thing of the past, there are still places where a horse is more useful than a truck. In 2002, for example, during the war in Afghanistan, some U.S. Special Forces rode horses in areas where the rugged terrain and lack of fuel made automobiles impractical.

A 2006 web article called *Don't Hang Up Your Spurs Yet* stated, "Russia is turning over guarding sections of its border to newly re-formed Cossack units."

Another snippet from the world-wide-web confirms that, stating,

According to the press service of Russia's FSB border guards division, in North Ossetia, in each border region of the Republic, Terek Cossack detachments of up to 20 armed fighters each have been formed. After a quick training course, the Cossacks begin to protect the state border, as part of the border detail.

Following this thread I came across these comments:

For patrol and response in many parts of the Continental United States a horse-mounted infantry/border guard force makes a lot of sense.

Another quote:

In Russia, where horsemanship is part of the every-day life of many thousands of people, the Red Army is able to maintain one of the finest horse-mounted components in the world.

Interesting that Russia is at the forefront of mounted cavalry!

A guy by the name of Randall Price has this to say:

There is no reason why these basic weapons might not be used in a future battle, if the conditions or the stage of battle prevent the use of the more advanced technology. Wars fought in certain rugged Middle Eastern terrains such as the mountainous region of Afghanistan (cf. 39:2-4) have required modern armies to use horses, and bows and arrows continue to be employed in various combat arenas. In addition, if the battle takes place in the Tribulation period, the conditions predicted for that time, such as seismic activity, meteor showers, increased solar effects, and other cosmic and terrestrial catastrophes would so disrupt the environment that present technology depending on satellite and computer-guided systems as well as meteorological stability would utterly fail. Under such conditions most of our modern weapons would be useless and more basic weapons would have to be substituted.

For now I take Ezekiel's prophecy literally. Let's move on!

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

Scholars agree this is sanctified sarcasm. Gog and his forces are coming against God. How can they "be ready"? How can Gog "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.

"After many days," that is, "in the latter years." As we've established in previous studies, this is still future to us.

We also described how only modern Israel, born in our own age, could fulfill the remaining descriptions of verse eight.

And we talked at length about the phrase, "and now all of them dwell safely." We used it as a kind of litmus test to show when this prophecy could and could not be fulfilled, concluding it must be at least some time after the antichrist enforces a peace treaty with Israel.

Ezekiel 38:9 You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you."

It's a massive invasion force that breaks like a "storm, covering the land like a cloud." Lot's of recent films, like *The Lord of the Rings*, have captured this kind of imagery.

Verses ten through thirteen reveal the thoughts of the invaders.

Ezekiel 38:10 'Thus says the Lord God: "On that day it shall come to pass that thoughts will arise in your mind, and you will make an evil plan:

I discovered this week that the Hebrew language does not have a word for "mind." It is the Hebrew *labeb* that has the basic meaning of "inner man" or "heart," used the way we use mind.

Even though God puts a hook in Gog's jaw, He simultaneously attributes his behavior to Gog's own "evil plan." God is sovereign. Man is free and responsible for his choices. Always. You cannot emphasize one over the other.

Ezekiel 38:11 You will say, 'I will go up against a land of unwalled villages; I will go to a peaceful people, who dwell safely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates' -

This has never been true of Israel, and it is not true today. This is obviously future even to us. I've been suggesting that it is only possible after the antichrist guarantees Israel's peace in the region.

Just imagine, for a moment, the elation if a genuine, albeit tentative, peace could be achieved in the Middle East. Especially if guaranteed by a military defense agreement by a powerful force in the region.

The antichrist will be the head of a revived Roman Empire. It's more than just Europe or the European Union. Much more.

Ezekiel 38:12 to take plunder and to take booty, to stretch out your hand against the waste places that are again inhabited, and against a people gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell in the midst of the land.

They come to “take plunder” and to “take booty.” Sounds like the new *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie!

Ezekiel 38:13 Sheba, Dedan, the merchants of Tarshish, and all their young lions will say to you, 'Have you come to take plunder? Have you gathered your army to take booty, to carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to take great plunder?' " "

Who are “Sheba” and “Dedan”? They are located in the modern country of Saudi Arabia. Randall Price locates Sheba as modern Yemen in the southern part of the Arabian peninsula and Dedan as Saudi Arabia.

Regardless of their precise location on the Arabian peninsula, there appears to be no doubt that it is a reference to Saudi Arabia and perhaps some of the other Arab nations currently occupying that peninsula.

"Tarshish is ancient Tartessus in the present-day nation of Spain. There does appear to be a significant historical basis to support the notion that the merchants of Tarshish are connected with the seafaring Phoenicians of 3,000 years ago.

Mark Hitchcock concludes,

Tarshish, or modern Spain, could be used by Ezekiel to represent all of the western nations which Saudi Arabia will join with in denouncing this invasion... It is highly probable that Ezekiel used the far western colony of Tarshish to represent the end-time empire of the Antichrist.

Is Tarshish the United States? The merchants of Tarshish, during the last 500 years, developed into the modern mercantile nations of Western Europe like Spain, Holland, and Britain. It's a stretch of enormous proportions to further identify Tarshish with the United States. And if we are included, we're sure not a dominant nation anymore by the time of this invasion.

Is Israel really all that wealthy? Remember, this is looking to the future. But even now we'd have to say that Israel is very well-off.

Thomas Ice<sup>1</sup> writes,

There is no doubt that Israel is by far the richest country in the region. Today she has developed a productive economy via research and development in the area of technology. Also, she is perhaps the most productive country per capita in the world agriculturally. Israel has long controlled the diamond business and is the world leader in generic pharmaceuticals.

Wikipedia says

Israel is considered one of the most advanced countries in the Southwest Asia in economic and industrial development... It has the second-largest number of startup companies in the world (after the United States) and the largest number of NASDAQ-listed companies outside North America.

While we believe this invasion will occur after we, the church, have been removed from the earth, it's fascinating to see it all setting up.

More than that, *it's energizing!* While the rapture could occur at any moment, it's clear we're closer to it with every passing moment.

To paraphrase C.S. Lewis, "*God is on the move!*"

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<sup>1</sup> I want to keep giving credit to Thomas Ice's multi-part series on Ezekiel 38 & 39 posted at the Pre-Trib Research Center website.