

A FRESH LOOK AT EZEKIEL 38 AND 39

Ralph H. Alexander
Western Conservative Baptist Seminary
Portland, Oregon

One of the perennial enigmas of biblical prophecy has been the Gog and Magog event described in Ezekiel 38 and 39. The plethora of interpretations for this passage caution the student concerning dogmatism in his conclusions. With this admonition in mind, a fresh look at this prophecy will be ventured. Hopefully this inquiry will provide new insights and create renewed investigations into this ever-challenging text of Scripture. It is always possible that the suggestions made in this article may raise more questions than they answer. But even that consequence is valuable to scholarly pursuits.

Students of biblical prophecy are familiar with the major two-fold problem within these chapters: the identity of Gog and the position of his invasion in the time continuum of biblical eschatology. The former is dependent upon the latter; thus if the temporal factor can be resolved, the identity of Gog has been greatly circumscribed.

Various solutions have been submitted for the fulfillment of the Gog and Magog event. The majority of evangelical commentators have chosen a mid-tribulational position or have related these events to some aspect of the battle of Armageddon. The most predominant view among non-evangelicals, apart from dismissing the passage as a figurative enigma, has been the post-millennial Gog of Revelation 20.

In approaching this issue, basic guidelines must be established. First, the primary data for identifying the time for the invasion of Gog must come from the principal passage of Ezekiel 38 and 39. Second, the details of any time period set forth as the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38 and 39 must be in complete harmony with the particulars found in the Ezekiel account. Third, any exposit reference or allusion to Ezekiel 38 and 39 located elsewhere in Scripture must be examined carefully in order to explain why that correlation exists. Fourth, normal grammatical, historical, cultural hermeneutics should be followed. Fifth, hypotheses should be kept to a minimum and should not provide the major bases for an explanation.

The format of this essay will be to evaluate each significant traditional view by these guidelines. The major arguments supporting each position will be examined along with the chief objections. A suggested solution will be submitted in conclusion.

The first guiding principle requires that Ezekiel 38 and 39, and its

• A paper presented at the organizational meeting of the Northwestern Section of the Evangelical Theological Society

context, be the primary basis for identifying the temporal location of the event contained therein. Thus contextual studies are crucial for the understanding of this passage. Each major section in Ezekiel is initiated by a chronological notice. Ezekiel 33:21 begins the section, which chapters 38 and 39 close, as follows: "Now it came to pass in the twelfth year of our exile, on the fifth of the tenth month. . . ." Ezekiel 33:21 through 39:29 contains a series of messages delivered by Ezekiel during the night prior to the exiles' reception of the news that Jerusalem had fallen. Ezekiel 33:22 introduces these messages by declaring that Ezekiel's mouth was opened on that evening and that he spoke all night until the messenger from Jerusalem arrived in the morning. Six messages were delivered as recorded in this prophecy. Each message commences with Ezekiel's distinctive introductory formula for a speech, "Then the word of the Lord came to me saying" (*wayehi debar-yhwh 'elay le'mor*). The six messages provide a singular proclamation of hope and encouragement to the exiles who shortly will hear of the fall of their holy city, Jerusalem. It is this destruction of Jerusalem, and the loss of the land of Israel to Babylon, that precipitates the progression of messages in that night.

The initial speech of Ezekiel 33:23-33, conveys Ezekiel's response to the question of the Jewish remnant in Israel in 586 B.C. who ask why they have lost the land of Israel if it was promised to Abraham. The land is lost, declares Ezekiel, only because Israel has disobeyed the Mosaic covenant. Israel is simply reaping her judgments.

In the second message, located in chapter 34, Ezekiel begins to develop a concept that he will continue to explain throughout the next five speeches. All is not lost! Yahweh will remove the false shepherds of Israel who have led her into exile and ultimately shepherd Israel Himself. When the Messiah becomes the shepherd in Israel, He will enter into the covenant of Peace with His people, a covenant in which He will remove all foreign oppressors from her land, restore the people of Israel to secure living in the land of blessing, and cause Israel to recognize His sovereignty as their God when He delivers them from the shame of the nations which they shall never bear again. This neglected covenant, outlined in Ezekiel 34:25-29, forms the skeletal framework for the remaining night messages.

The promise that God will clear the land of its continual invaders and possessors in preparation for the restoration of the people of Israel to that land is the subject of Ezekiel's third speech in chapters 35:1 through 36:15. Emphasis is peculiarly upon the nation of Edom, the age-long conflict between Esau (Edom) and Jacob (Israel) being set forth as the most significant example of this principle of oppression of Israel. Future dominance of Israel by Edom will result in her judgment. Yahweh will do to Edom as she has done to Israel. When the whole earth is rejoicing in the blessings of the Davidic kingdom, Edom will be a desolation. Even the land of Israel will know the sovereignty of Yahweh when He renews her productivity in readiness for her people's return to once again possess their inheritance, never again to be removed from it.

Having assured the people of Israel that Yahwah will remove her perennial oppressors from her land, Ezekiel 36:16 through 37:14 describes

Yahweh's restoration of the *people* of Israel to their land. In order to fully grasp the magnificent goodness and covenant loyal love of Yahweh in returning Israel to her land in the end times, Ezekiel initiates this message with a rehearsal of Israel's past which led to her dispersion among the nations. Just as Yahweh brought her into exile in keeping with His faithfulness to the covenant promises of cursing in Deuteronomy 29:1 through 30:10, so also Yahweh will restore Israel in the end time according as He foretold in that same passage. A vivid description of this restoration of the entire house of Israel is portrayed in the apocalyptic vision of Ezekiel 37:1-14. Israel is encouraged that Yahweh will restore the people physically to the land and cleanse them spiritually as they become participants in the New Covenant.

The fifth night message of Ezekiel centers around a symbolic act through which the joining of two sticks represents the reunion of the two formerly divided kingdoms of Judah and Israel. When asked the meaning of this act, Ezekiel elaborates on this reunion, declaring that "My servant, David," the Messiah, will be their one shepherd and king. All Israel's covenants shall be fulfilled at that time according to Ezekiel 37:21-28: the eternal land promises of the Abrahamic covenant are realized, and Israel shall walk in the stipulations of the Mosaic covenant, cleansed under the New covenant and experiencing the eternal reign of their king, the greater son of David, according to the Davidic covenant. All aspects of the covenant of Peace are fulfilled in these six night messages. The people of Israel are restored to their land and are dwelling securely. Israel's covenants are fulfilled. The Messiah is present to rule.

The import of this context is extremely significant in the delineation of the time element in Ezekiel 38 and 39, for it is at this place in the argument that this last night message of Ezekiel occurs. The context is abundantly clear. These events occur in the end times when Israel has been restored to the land, when the Messiah is present, and when Israel's covenants are fulfilled. It is not permissible to view Ezekiel 38 and 39 as an interpolation, for the normal introductory formula to a message initiates this sixth message in the series, and the major section to which these chapters belong does not conclude until a new chronological notice appears in chapter 40, verse 1. One should *not* look to chapters 40 through 48 for the contextual setting; rather he should see these events within their natural division within the book. In addition, one of the major emphases in this section of Ezekiel has been the possession of the land of Israel. The first message described the concern over its loss in Ezekiel's day. The second message encouraged Israel that some day their true shepherd, Messiah, would shepherd them in the land. The third speech reminded Israel that the Lord would remove foreign oppressors from the land and prepare it for the restoration of Israel which is so vividly described in the fourth and fifth messages. Now, in the last speech, Ezekiel discusses a *final* attempt to possess the land. This attempt will be thwarted as Yahweh will not permit His Holy Name to be defiled again through allowing Israel to be taken from her land, and her land to be possessed by others. This passage fits perfectly within Ezekiel's argument.

Not only has the immediate context of these chapters argued strongly for a general time of its events, but specific aspects within Ezekiel 38 and 39 equally argue for the same general time setting.

Several chronological phrases are employed in Ezekiel 38 and 39. The end time is certainly in view. The phrase "after many days" (*miyamim rabim*) in Ezekiel 38:8 characteristically has the indefinite sense "for a long time," though employed at times to reach as far as the eschaton (cf. Jer. 32:14; Hos. 3:4; Dan. 8:26). In this context it is found in conjunction with descriptions of Israel's accomplished restoration "in the latter years" (*be'aharit hassanim*), a chronological phrase employed only this once in the Old Testament. This latter phrase, therefore, must be understood in the light of this present context of restoration. The expression "in the last days" (*be'aharit hayyamim*), found in Ezekiel 38:16, places these events at the end time, for this phrase is most frequently employed to designate the time of Israel's final restoration to the land and the period of Messiah's rule (cf. Isa. 2:2; Jer. 23:20; 30:24; Hosea 3:5; Mic. 4:1; Dan. 10:14). Ezekiel also declares that these events occur when the land of Israel "is restored from the sword" (*mesobebet mehereb*) (Ezek. 38:8; cf. Ezek. 36:1-15) and when the people of Israel "have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel" (*mequbebet me'amminim rabim 'al hare yisra'el*) (Ezek. 38:8, 12; cf. Ezek. 36:22-37:14). Another significant factor in these chapters is the employment of the expression "living securely" (a form of *yasab* followed by *labetah*) in Ezekiel 38:8, 11, 14 and Ezekiel 39:26. This phrase is often employed in reference to millennial security, especially in Jeremiah and Ezekiel (cf. Jer. 23:6; 32:27; Ezek. 28:26; Zech. 14:11). This expression is used previously by Ezekiel in this series of messages to describe a definitely millennial picture (Ezek. 34:25-28; cf. Mic. 4:4). In addition, Ezekiel 39:26 asserts that during the time of "living securely" there will be "no one to make them afraid" (*'en maharid*). These chronological notices in Ezekiel 38 and 39, in conjunction with the temporal emphasis of the entire context of these six night messages, argues strongly that the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 transpire at the end time when Israel has already been restored to the land, the Messiah is present, and she has entered into the Peace covenant with Yahweh her Lord.

In order to evaluate traditional solutions to this problem by the second guideline established above, it is important to refresh our thinking concerning the *major* details of these two chapters. It is not in the intention of this study to develop a full-orbed commentary on Ezekiel 38 and 39. Only a brief summary of their contents will be undertaken at this juncture. In doing so, it is important to understand that Ezekiel 39:1-24 is essentially a restatement and expansion of the judgment speech of Ezekiel 38:1-23. Westermann¹ observes that such a restatement and enlargement is common to the judgment speech genre toward the end of the sixth and the beginning of the fifth centuries B.C.

Ezekiel 38:1-17 and Ezekiel 39:1-2 portray Yahweh bringing Gog

1. Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), pp. 181-194.

and his hordes from all points of the world (Persia from the east; Cush from the south; Put and the islands of the sea from the west; Gomer and Togarmah from the north) upon the land of Israel from the north after Israel has been restored to her land, dwelling in Messianic security. These armies come to plunder the land.

Ezekiel 38:19-23 and Ezekiel 39:1-6 concentrate upon God's judgment against Gog and his entourage, a judgment including the shaking of the land, a sword called for against Gog, pestilence, bloodshed, fire, brimstone, and hailstones. The consequence of this judgment will be the recognition of Yahweh's sovereignty by both the nations and Israel. Ezekiel 39:8-16 describes the cleansing of the land by Israel as they burn the weapons of Gog and his armies for seven years and bury the bones of the slain for seven months.

Ezekiel 39:17-20 portrays a sacrifice of Yahweh which He offers of Gog and his armies. The birds and beasts are invited to eat the flesh and drink the blood of Gog's slain followers, especially the leaders who have accompanied him.

Ezekiel 39:21-24 discusses the results of this judgment as stated above, while Ezekiel 39:25-29 summarizes the entire six night messages which have been primarily concerned with the description of the institution of Israel's Peace covenant with Yahweh.

A brief excursus at this juncture is necessary to treat traditional identifications of Gog and other proper names in these chapters. Etymological data for the term "Gog" is extremely uncertain. Lacking such data, several solutions have been proposed: 1) *Gugu*, one Gyges, king of Lydia who reigned a century before Ezekiel; 2) *Gaga*, a mountainous land north of Melitene; 3) *Gagu*, a ruler of the land of Sakhi, an area north of Assyria; 4) a belief that the term is derived from its associated word "Magog," and 5) an official title, a prophetic role, based upon the Septuagint rendering of several kingly names in the Old Testament (cf. Num. 24:7; Deut. 3:1, 13; 4:47; Amos 7:1) and employed, perhaps, as a general name for any enemy of God's people at the time of the composition of the Septuagint. None of these proposals contains any significant support to warrant its acceptance as *the* answer to Gog's identity. The most that can be said, perhaps, is that Gog is probably a personage, whether described by a title or by name. Further speculations are not justified on the basis of available etymological data.

Other names in these chapters attract the interest of many who seek to identify Gog. The terms "Rosh,"² "Meshek," and "Tubal," all conceived as proper names, have been identified popularly by some as Russia, Moscow, and Tobolsk. Those adhering to such a view normally appeal to etymology based on similar sounds to the hearing between the two terms, but such etymological footwork is not linguistically sound at all. The available data does argue for an identification of the most northern barbarian hordes (perhaps the Scythians) for "Magog," while Tubal and

2. The author does not consider the word *ro's* to be a proper name in light of the syntax of the Masoretic text and the usage of the term throughout the Old Testament and extra-biblical literature.

Mesheck lay in the mountainous area between, and south of, the Caspian and Black seas. Though the geographical areas involved include modern Turkey and south-central Russia, there is no warranty in Ezekiel (or elsewhere) to conjecture that these modern nations are *the* identification of these terms.

Now let us briefly evaluate each of the primary traditional views for the time of Gog and Magog event in light of the established guiding principles.

Some advocate that the invasion and demise of Gog occurred about 169 B.C. in the war between armies of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabees when Jerusalem was pillaged and the temple defiled. The greatest argument against this position is the context of Ezekiel 38 and 39, a time of the restoration of Israel in the eschaton when she lives in security. In addition, Antiochus did not die in Israel, neither were his armies defeated in the manner asserted in Ezekiel. This solution fails to satisfy the hermeneutical stipulations.

Others proclaim that this military incident is executed prior to the tribulation. "Living securely" is argued as explicable only if the perils of the tribulation have yet to begin. This impoverished diagnosis fails to recognize the eschatological context of Ezekiel 33 to 39, denying the chronological sign-posts inherent therein. Explicit minutia of these chapters are violated; for example, Yahweh's name *will be* defiled again in the tribulation in contrast to prohibition of such in Ezekiel 39:7 and 22. The recognition of Yahweh's sovereignty by the "nations" and Israel would be more harmonious with the universal knowledge of God when the Messiah is present than prefatory to the tribulation.

A popular stance on this problem is adherence to a mid-tribulation attack by Gog, equating this with the invasion by the King of the North (cf. Dan. 11:40-41) at the beginning of Armageddon. This then paves the way for the beast's severance of this covenant with Israel in the middle of this "week of years" and his subsequent persecution of Israel. Israel has enjoyed a "false security" in her land under the custody of the "antichrist" antecedent to this inconstancy of the "antichrist." The cataclysmic devastation of Gog and his hordes in the middle of the tribulation is conceived by some adherents of this view to be accomplished by the "antichrist." This defeat of Gog becomes an omen to the nations and Israel, causing them to "know" Yahweh. This, it is asserted, occurs before the end of the tribulation since so many are saved during that time of trouble. It is also argued that since Gog is the king of the north, and since he is not mentioned in Revelation 19:20 along with the demise of the beast and the false prophet, of necessity he must have already been destroyed in this significant event in the midst of the tribulation.

When this position is compared with the context of Ezekiel 38 and 39, accord is lacking. That context, in concurrence with the explicit chronological statements of Ezekiel 38:8 and 16, argues that the restoration "*from the sword*" has brought Israel into Messianic blessings and prosperity (Ezekiel 38:11-13) which is inconsistent with the time of Jacob's trouble—a time of Israel's chastisement and judgment (Jer. 30:7; Ezek. 20:33-44;

Matt. 24:9, 22a). Likewise, the particulars of these two chapters are incongruous with this interpretation of Gog. The suggestion of a hypothetical "false security" during the tribulation is both inconsistent with the purpose of that period as well as contrary to the employment in Ezekiel of the expression "living securely." The assertion in Ezekiel 39:26 that there will be "no one to make them afraid" when Israel "lives securely" in her land is incomprehensible during the tribulation. The burning of weapons seven years while being persecuted by the beast, and the burying of the bones of Gog's hordes in order to cleanse the land, while the abomination of desolation is transpiring and judgment is at its apex, is inconceivable. Rather the need for cleansing, in the immediate context of Ezekiel 38 and 39, is related to the national conversion of Israel (cf. Ezek. 35-37). The proclamation of Yahweh (Ezekiel 39:7, 26) that His name will never again be defiled through the removal of Israel from the land and/or her oppression at the hands of foreigners, finds its antithesis in Daniel's seventieth week. Ezekiel clearly delineates that it is Yahweh, not the "antichrist" of the view, who destroys Gog. Not only does this interpretation violate the context and the details of Ezekiel 38 and 39, but it also lays great weight upon the hypothesis that Gog is the "king of the North," a theory which admits of no solid biblical basis. Such a solution to this problem must be rejected.

A fourth proposal places the occurrence of these events at the end of the tribulation. Gog's invasion is viewed as part of the final rebellion of those assembled against Christ in Zechariah 12 and 14:1-4. Some adherents to this view identify Gog with the personage in Daniel 11:40 in the battle of Armageddon, while others disassociate Gog entirely from the battle of Armageddon, postulating that this is a final battle at the end of the tribulation *prior* to the second advent of Christ. Devotees to this position maintain that the "living securely" is a false security based upon Israel's wealth stated in Ezekiel 38:11-12.

Many of the same objections to the mid-tribulational interpretation of Gog and Magog may be equally leveled against this solution. This argument is similarly incongruous with the restoration and Messianic context of Ezekiel 38 and 39, with the promise in Ezekiel 39:26 that there is "no one to make them afraid," with the burning of weapons and burying of bodies for seven years and seven months, respectively, in order to cleanse the land during the battle of Armageddon, and with the prosperity of Israel set forth in Ezekiel 38:11-12. The supposition of a "false security" in Israel, founded upon their wealth, is out of character with the judgment upon Israel, being even more difficult to accept during the great tribulation's summit of Armageddon than in the middle of Daniel's sevenieth week where it was deemed inconsistent. Too many details in Ezekiel 38 and 39 conflict with this position and render it unacceptable.

Gaebelein³ proposed a time period during a transition period posterior to the second advent and antecedent to the establishment of the millennium. This view has laid somewhat dormant except for a sparsity of proponents. The strongest argument in favor of this interpretation (in-

3. Arno C. Gaebelein, *The Prophet Ezekiel* (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1918), pp. 251-253.

terestingly not argued by Gaebelin) is the formidable allusion in Revelation 19:17-18 to the "bird supper" in Ezekiel 39:17-20. Adherents declare that the phrase "living securely" is in complete harmony with the peace and restoration of Israel in the land subsequent to the second advent. After Yahweh has restored Israel, there is "no one to make them afraid." The covenants of Yahweh with Israel are fulfilled and her prosperity and wealth are congruous with the Messiah's presence (cf. Isa. 61:6). A transition period between the second advent and the official establishment of the millennium allows sufficient time for the seven month burial of the bones of the dead. The "beast and the kings of the earth and their armies" of Revelation 19:19 are equated with the nations assembled with Gog in Ezekiel. The magnitude of God's equestrian hordes in Ezekiel (38:4-7, 9, 15, 22; 39:4, 11) are paralleled with the nations, kings, commanders, mighty men, and all free, slave, small, and large that accompany "the beast" on horses in Revelation 19:15, 18, 19, 21. Yahweh's judgment in Ezekiel finds its corresponding features in God's treading of the wine-press of wrath in Revelation 19, especially in the sword which Yahweh calls for against Gog in Ezekiel and the sword proceeding out of the Lord's mouth in Revelation, both of which smite the nations that come against the land and Yahweh (cf. Ezek. 38:21 and Rev. 19:15, 20). It is argued that Revelation 19:11-16 is a heavenly description of the Lord who comes at the second advent. Revelation 19:17-21, however, describes the demise of the beast and his armies who either escape, or are not present at the battle of Armageddon, and who return (in keeping with the "turning around" of Gog by Yahweh and bringing him back to the land in Ezekiel 38:4, 16 and 39:2) later to plunder Israel and war against the Messiah. Revelation 19:17-21, then, summarizes the defeat of "the beast," or Gog, which is described in detail in Ezekiel 38 and 39. The apostle John draws this explicit parallel through the sagacious allusion to that unique facet of the Gog and Magog event—the "bird supper," the likes of which are recounted no where else in the Scriptures. This, it is maintained, is in harmony with John's normal procedure of reiterating imagery from the Old Testament, especially from the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah. The reason for not employing the term "Gog" in the Revelation 19 context, it is suggested, is because the use of that title would have confused John's recipients who clearly understood who the beast was. If the term "Gog" is suddenly employed, they would not necessarily equate "the beast" with Gog, probably perceiving only the demise of Gog (whoever he may be), for they had last read about "the beast" in Revelation 17.

Almost all commentators on Revelation 19:17-18 immediately cite the cross-reference in Ezekiel 39:17-20. Obviously, they perceive a vital relation between the passages, but they are unable to comprehend any noteworthy correlation. Accordingly, they ignore the correspondence. However, the prudent exegete cannot neglect such a salient allusion. As correctly argued by the proponents of this position, it is part of the apostle John's literary artistry to employ Old Testament imagery to communicate his message to his recipients. As D. Moody Smith declares concerning John's Revelation:

Naturally, John's reminiscences of the Old Testament are heavily weighted toward the prophetic side of the canon. . . there are numerous allusions to Ezekiel, Daniel, and Jeremiah—more in Revelation than in other New Testament books.

. . . The author's language and thought world is the Old Testament, as he understands it, particularly the prophetic writings. Without them he could not have written at all. Thus the document itself is, literally, quite inconceivable apart from the Old Testament.⁴

Therefore, it seems that the burden of proof lies upon that interpreter who would seek to disassociate these two passages, since it is John's normal style to communicate through well-known Old Testament imagery. If the allusion in Revelation 19:17-18 does not refer to Ezekiel 39:17-20, it does not relate to any other biblical text. The meaning of the figure in the Revelation context would then be rather enigmatic.

Unable to neglect such a formidable allusion, it is imperative to closely scrutinize the correlation between the context of Ezekiel's message and that of John. The restoration and Messianic nature of Ezekiel's context is consonant with that of Revelation 19. Revelation 19:11-16 presents a heavenly glimpse of the glorified Christ in His second advent. The battle of Armageddon is not described in this passage, for it has already been delineated in chapters 14 and 16. The next event, therefore, would be that of Gog—an invasion by "the beast" against the people of Israel and against Messiah, their God. Israel would have already been "restored from the sword," implying the cessation of the tribulation. They would be back in their land under the sovereign protection and blessing of Christ. "Living securely" is permitted to have its normal sense of Messianic security in this proposal. The covenants are fulfilled, and there is no one causing them to be afraid as they enjoy the prosperity and wealth of the Messianic blessing promised to them (cf. Isa. 61:6). The phrase "latter days" most frequently designates the Messianic age, which is the case here. The correlation of these two contexts is harmonious.

Many would argue that the biblical data to explain a transition period between the tribulation and the millennium is virtually nonexistent. Therefore, it is observed, much of the support for this view is grounded on hypotheses. This is admittedly a weakness of this position, but it is equally important to note that in addition to the conspicuous allusion, none of the details of Ezekiel 38 and 39 is violated by the Revelation passage or context. Objections at this point have been relatively sparse, yet it is essential to examine them. Some question how Gog (the beast) could escape from the battle of Armageddon in order to return later. Others ask what nations would be present at the invasion of Gog to observe his destruction as described in Ezekiel. Some demand that the burial of Gog in Ezekiel and the casting of "the beast" into the lake of fire are contradictory. Still others

4. D. Moody Smith, "The Use of the Old Testament in the New," *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays: Studies in Honor of William Franklin Stinespring*, ed. James M. Efird (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1972), p. 62.

inquire as to how Israel could be "living securely" in the land so quickly. Plausible solutions are available to answer these problems: 1) Nothing in the biblical text precludes the absence of the beast from Armageddon. 2) The descriptions of the battle of Armageddon do not require *all* people of the earth to be present. (cf. Matt. 25) Therefore, nations could remain to view Gog's fall, just as they will continue for the Matthew 25 judgment. 3) Though the term "Gog" in Ezekiel 38 and 39 is often employed to refer to an individual, it also is used collectively in reference to Gog's entire entourage (cf. Ezek. 38:9, 15, 16, 21 and 39:4). In addition Hebrew syntax⁵ permits an appositional relationship between two terms in the accusative with the signs of the definitive direct object attached to both (cf. Gen. 4:2). Therefore, the burial of Gog mentioned in Ezekiel 39:11 most likely relates to its appositional counterpart, "his multitude," which would be in agreement with the given name for the valley of burial, Hamon-Gog (the multitude of Gog). 4) Nothing demands that all these events occur immediately. A transition period is most probable here as has been the case elsewhere in scripture (cf. the necessity of such for Matthew 25).

The student of Revelation must always remember that John is only giving synopses of these important events. Much of the minutia is to be discovered in the Old Testament. No detail of Ezekiel 38 and 39 is hindered or prohibited by Revelation 19, which appears to be a compendium of Ezekiel 38 and 39. It is difficult to argue against this position.

Finally many expositors have submitted the passage of Revelation 20:7-10 as the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38 and 39, arguing that these events transpire subsequent to the millennium. The fundamental evidence set forth in defense of this view is the explicit reference to Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:8. The natural connection is with Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Normal hermeneutics would require the identification of these two texts (since the terms are no where else employed together in the scriptures) unless strong reasons can be mustered to deny such an equation. "Living securely" is homogeneous with the Messianic context of Ezekiel 38 and 39 and the millennial setting of Revelation 20, this being its normal significance. The restoration of Israel has certainly transpired and the Messianic blessings and prosperity are being experienced by Israel in the millennium (cf. Isa. 11, 35). Nations would be present to observe the destruction of Gog in fulfillment of Ezekiel 38:16, 21-23 and 39:21, while sufficient time is available for the burning of weapons seven years and the burying of bones for seven months in order to cleanse the land. Cleansing of the land is imperative under the righteous rule of Christ Himself. Gog, in this case, is Satan who gathers "the nations which are in the four corners of the earth." The appositional relation of "Gog and Magog" to the entire sentence (*kai exeleusetai . . . tes thalasses*) supports this thesis. Such an appositional relationship with the accusative is not un-

5. Cf. Ronald J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax: An Outline* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 17, and A. E. Cowley and E. Kautzsch, eds., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1910), p. 425.

common in Greek.⁶ The phrase "Gog and Magog" is interjected appositionally by the apostle John to refer both to Satan, the understood subject of the verb, and to the nations from the four corners of the earth. These words in the accusative in no way have to agree syntactically with any specific aspect of the sentence (not even to the infinitives which come before and after the appositional interjection). Though this construction may seem somewhat awkward, the student must remember that the grammar and syntax in the Apocalypse is characterized by seeming blunders.⁷ In apposition, therefore, Satan would refer to Gog, and Magog would indicate the nations whom he brings with him. Though some may find no comparison between "the nations which are in the four corners of the earth" and the northern invasion of Gog, Ezekiel 38:5, 6 and 13 and 39:6 certainly enumerate nations from every direction of the compass as members of Gog's entourage: Persia from the east, Cush from the south, Put and the islands of the seas from the west, and Gomer and Togarmah from the north. Even the judgment upon Gog by Yahweh finds its counterpart when Revelation 20:9 declares that "fire from heaven came down and devoured them," while Ezekiel 38:22 and 39:6 likewise portray the employment of fire by Yahweh in His destruction of Gog.

As in the previous position, the majority of scholars unhesitatingly associate these proper names of "Gog" and "Magog" with those in Ezekiel 38 and 39. Yet they proceed to ignore any direct relationship between the two passages, preferring rather to see Revelation 20:8, at the most, as metonymy for the disastrous nature of the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39. A careful student of the text must provide a more convincing explanation of the terms.

As one evaluates the context of Ezekiel 38 and 39 in the light of the description in Revelation 20, he observes a congruous setting: both passages describe environments of a Messianic nature in which Israel has been restored from the violence of pagan nations and is "living securely" in Messianic peace and prosperity. Certainly that is the condition of the millennial kingdom.

The comparison of details between the two accounts provides no incompatibility. Though every facet of the Ezekiel narrative does not find its visible counterpart in Revelation 20, there is nothing in the Revelation context which contravenes the specifics of the Ezekiel text. Again, it is necessary to remind ourselves that the apostle John is not engaged in rendering every particular of an Old Testament event, rather he is providing a conspectus of such. Frequent objections to this position are as follows: First, Gog in Ezekiel concerns a northern coalition, whereas in Revelation the armies come from the four corners of the world. Ezekiel 38:5-6 replies

6. Cf. C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), pp. 35-36; William Watson Goodwin, *Greek Grammar* (Waltham, Mass.: Blaisdell Publishing Company, 1958), p. 199; Nigel Turner, *Syntax*, Vol. III of *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, by James Hope Moulton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), p. 245; and R. W. Funk, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 245.

7. Cf. C.F.D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), p. 3.

to such an objection by declaring that the kingdom gathered by Gog come from all parts of the compass as well. Second, Ezekiel never mentions Jerusalem, whereas John asserts that Gog and Magog encompass the "beloved city." Such a title is given to Jerusalem in Psalm 78:68 and 87:2. In response, Ezekiel does declare that Gog will come upon the mountains of Israel, which most certainly may include Jerusalem (cf. Ezek. 39:4-5). Third, the hosts in Ezekiel are said to fall upon the mountains of Israel and their bodies are subsequently buried, whereas Revelation portrays the forces against God and the saints as being devoured by fire from heaven. A more detailed exegesis will answer this objection, for the judgment in Ezekiel is likewise by fire which, among other things, slays Gog's armies. The burial is of the bones of the slain (Ezek. 39:15). The "devouring" of Revelation in no way demands the total consumption of each body leaving no remains for burial. *Kateshio* is commonly employed to represent "destruction." Fourth, the disposal of the bodies and weapons in Ezekiel is said to be against the equation of the two passages, for the Great White throne judgment immediately follows the millennium. In rebuttal, there is no requirement in scripture for an immediate sequence of events which would preclude a seven year period for cleansing the land.

Undoubtedly, the reader may be perplexed at this juncture. It most certainly appears that two separate positions have been approved by the writer. This is precisely the proposal of this author. The full description of the events is recorded in Ezekiel. The apostle John only summarizes the account in both Revelation 19 and 20 since his readers would have been familiar with Ezekiel 38 and 39. Only the allusion is employed in Revelation 19 in order not to confuse the identity of "the beast's" demise by changing terminology from the familiar "beast" to a new term, "Gog." Otherwise the recipients may not have associated "the beast" with the "Gog" invasion, but rather may have perceived them as two distinct transactions, since the last previous reference to "the beast" was in Revelation 17. On the contrary, the explicit reference to "the Gog," made in Revelation 20:8, demonstrates that Satan, in addition to "the beast," is the fulfillment of Gog in Ezekiel 38 and 39.

The hermeneutical principle of "multiple fulfillment" declares that a given prophecy has one meaning applied in two or more ways.⁸ There may be a near and far fulfillment, two near fulfillments, or two far fulfillments. The latter is proposed here. Ezekiel 38 and 39 has a multiple fulfillment in 1) the demise of "the beast," the chief instrument of Satan (similar to Ezek. 28:1-10), in Revelation 19:17-21 and in 2) the final fall of Satan, *the Gog*, the supreme enemy of Israel (similar to Ezek. 28:11-19), who makes *the* final attempt to regain the land of Israel from God's chosen people. The multiple fulfillment is concentrated in two similar events with the last and greatest enemies of Israel. Both "the beast" and Satan seek to defeat Israel and acquire the land. Both attempts are thwarted by the

8. Cf. A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), p. 300; and Benard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (3rd revised edition, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1970), p. 252f.

Lord. The former, in one sense, prefigures the latter.

Gog, therefore, refers both to "the beast" in Revelation 19 and Satan in Revelation 20. The times of these accounts are between the end of the tribulation and the beginning of the millennium, and after the millennium, respectively. Both fit the context and specific details of the Ezekiel text. Both have either a specific allusion or explicit reference to that passage. Ezekiel 38 and 39 has been allowed to be the primary determining factor for the temporal aspects. Though hypotheses have been assumed, they have not been the principal support for either fulfillment.

The writer is reminded that Ezekiel 38 and 39 is one of the most difficult texts in scripture. If the concept of multiple fulfillment is rejected, the only apparent alternative is to declare the Revelation 19 text, or the Revelation 20 passage, as *the* fulfillment, and affirm the remaining text as only an allusion or analogy to Ezekiel 38 and 39. Such, of course, creates complications and arbitrariness in discerning an accurate interpretation. It fails to resolve the issue of John's purpose in employing direct allusions and explicit references in the passages under discussion. The writer's interpretation is submitted for evaluation and consideration as one which best satisfies proper hermeneutics. The reader is challenged to review these two passages in Revelation, giving attention to such a strong allusion and explicit reference to Ezekiel 38 and 39, as found in Revelation 19 and 20—attention which has been lacking among evangelical scholars.