

CONCERNING THE WAY

April 2, 2009

LESSON 54: PROPHECY SERIES — THE BOOK OF EZEKIEL



Ezekiel 38-39 – The Coming Islamic Invasion of Israel – Part Two

To review from last time, here are the seven views of when Ezekiel 38-39 happens:

1. This event already happened in the time of Esther. This is the preterist explanation (they try to put all Bible prophecy as being fulfilled in the past). This is the most ridiculous view of all of them, I could list many reasons why it's ridiculous, but can refute it with one statement. How can this event have occurred during the time of Esther when the Jews weren't even living in the land? The Jews are in the land when this event happens.
2. It takes place before the Tribulation period starts. It could be before the Rapture, but doesn't have to be. It could be shortly after the Rapture (Tim LaHaye, Mal Couch, Chuck Missler, Arnold Fructenbaum, Thomas Ice, Zola Levitt, Randall Price, David Reagan, and Charles Clough are some teachers who hold to this view).
3. It takes place at the end of the Tribulation period, and is associated with the battle of Armageddon. Hal Lindsay, Bob Thieme, and Dwight Pentecost are some that hold this view. They say that the king of the north in Daniel 11 is Gog of Ezekiel 38-39, so all three passages tie together.
4. It takes place at the beginning of the Millennium. This is not a popular view.
5. It takes place at the end of the Millennium (Revelation 20 mentions Gog and Magog again). This is also a very minority view.
6. Two-phase view – Ezekiel 38 take place at the beginning of the Tribulation, and chapter 39 takes place at the end of the Tribulation at Armageddon. I only know of one teacher who holds this view.
7. These things happen in the beginning of the Tribulation period, after the antichrist has entered into a covenant with Israel. This view is held by Dr. Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, Andy Woods, and Mark Hitchcock.

Narrowing it Down

There are really only three reasonable views here. The others have big problems and are easily dismissed. The three are the "End of the Trib" view, the "Beginning of the Trib" view, and the "Before the Trib" View. First let's look carefully at the "End of the Trib" view. This view is that the Ezekiel 38-39 is just part of the Armageddon war at the end of the Tribulation, spoken of in Daniel 11 and Revelation 16. I believe this view is not likely, for these reasons.

1. Throughout Ezekiel 38 and 39 there is not one statement that the northern confederacy ever encounters a military opponent, rather, the whole thrust is that the Russian confederacy comes in against unwallled villages, they're not even opposed by the Israeli army. God miraculously intervenes in history, destroying a massive army, wiping it out completely, it's not a war between human armies. In Ezekiel you have supernatural opposition; but in Daniel you have human opposition.
2. In Ezekiel 39:9, after all the action occurs, it takes seven years to clean up the mess, to clean up the military debris left from the invasion of the Russian confederacy. Now if Ezekiel 38 and 39 is identical to Armageddon, then where does the clean up happen? Is Israel going to clean up when they are running for their lives at the end of the tribulation? Israel won't have time to bury their own dead, let alone the dead Russians, at the end of the tribulation. And then are you going to send the seven year cleanup into the millennium? You can't do that because the Bible says the millennium begins, God supernaturally renovates the earth's surface, it will automatically be cleaned. So we have a second reason why Ezekiel 38 and 39 must be distinct from Daniel 11. By moving it away from Armageddon, you create room for the cleanup time.

3. The allies mentioned in Ezekiel are not the same as the allies mentioned in Daniel.
4. In Ezekiel the Jews are secure; they're dwelling in the land, and after it's all over they're still dwelling in the land and cleaning it up. In Daniel 11:36, before all this gets started the beast has already set up his image, he's defied the God of Gods, he apparently has already placed his abomination of desolation in the temple and desecrated it, and when that happens the Jews in Daniel 11 run for their lives. So the Jews are already in flight by the time of the events of Daniel 11, between the king of the north and the king of the south occur.
5. The Gog Magog war in Ezekiel sets up the power vacuum for the beast. When God destroys the Russian armies and slaughters them you have eliminated from the world scene one huge power block. That leaves a power vacuum and the beast rises to power. So we can see how knocking out Russia prepares the way for the rise of a European leader. There's not too much the Europeans can do with Russia on the eastern frontier.

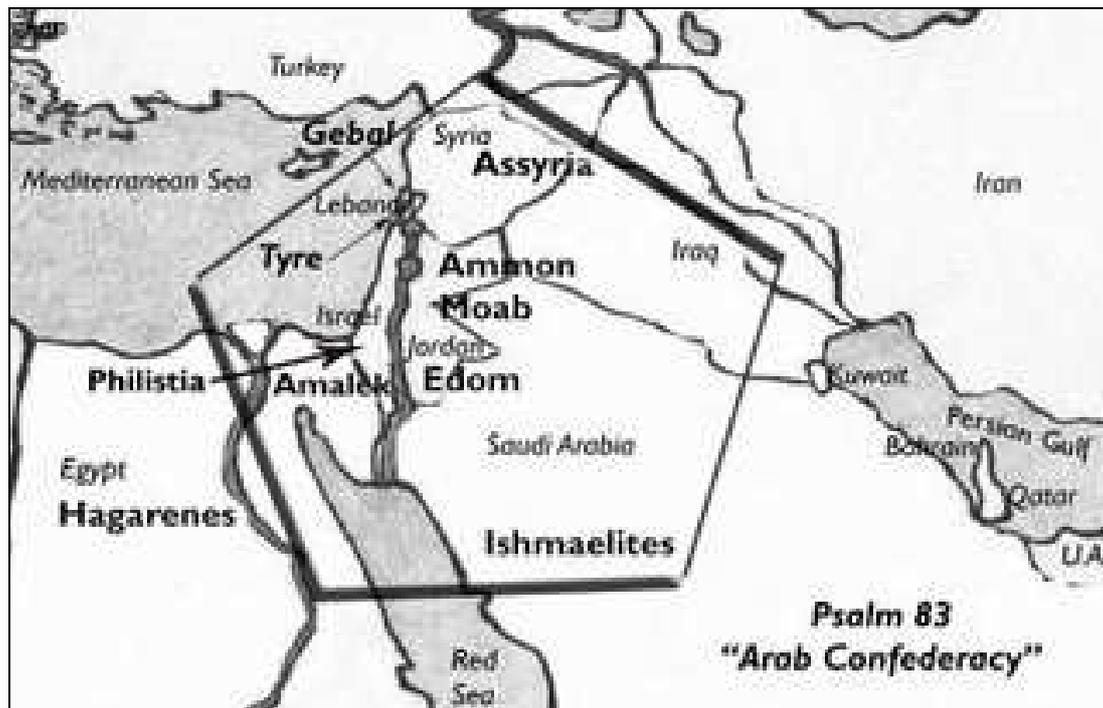
So for these reasons I can't see how Ezekiel 38 and 39 can speak of the same thing as Daniel 11; they must be speaking about two different events. So that knocks out another view, we have two left. OK, so does Ezekiel 38 and 39 occur before the Tribulation, or after? The short answer is we can't really know. There are a lot of good Bible scholars that I respect split on this, and it really doesn't matter when it comes right down to it. I can see that both of these views are very reasonable.

Now the main problem with the pre-trib view is the requirement that Israel be living securely and at rest (Ezekiel 38:11). The Hebrew word for rest is "shâqat." It can mean repose, be idle, quiet, be still. They are certainly not any of those things today. So what circumstances could occur that would bring "rest" to Israel? Well, the scholars who hold to the view that this invasion will occur after the start of the Tribulation believe that rest will come to Israel when the antichrist enters into the covenant with Israel (Daniel 9:27).

But there may be another scenario in which Israel would be at peace before the antichrist even comes to power. There is a new theory that is gaining some traction among scholars. If you're interested in the details of this theory, get the book "Israelistine" by Bill Salus. He explains it all in that book, and he's really done his homework. It involves a prophecy in Psalm 83 that most believe is yet to be fulfilled. Here it is:

Psalm 83:1-8 A Song, a Psalm of Asaph. O God, do not remain quiet; Do not be silent and, O God, do not be still. (2) For behold, Your enemies make an uproar, And those who hate You have exalted themselves. (3) They make shrewd plans against Your people, And conspire together against Your treasured ones. (4) They have said, "Come, and let us wipe them out as a nation, That the name of Israel be remembered no more." (5) For they have conspired together with one mind; Against You they make a covenant: (6) The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites, Moab and the Hagrites; (7) Gebal and Ammon and Amalek, Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; (8) Assyria also has joined with them; They have become a help to the children of Lot. Selah.

Verse 4 reads like a headline from today's news from the Middle East. The peoples who are conspiring here against Israel are today the nations that surround Israel. Salus in his book has done the research to determine who these people groups are. The Ishmaelites are Saudi Arabia, Moab is today central Jordan, Edom is Southern Jordan, and Ammon is Northern Jordan. The Hagrites are Egypt, Philistia, and Tyre are Lebanon, and Assyria is Syria. So this coalition consists of Syrians, Lebanese, Egyptians, Saudi Arabians, and Jordanians.



Psalm 83:9-18 Deal with them as with Midian, As with Sisera and Jabin at the torrent of Kishon, (10) Who were destroyed at En-dor, Who became as dung for the ground. (11) Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb And all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna, (12) Who said, "Let us possess for ourselves The pastures of God." (13) O my God, make them like the whirling dust, Like chaff before the wind. (14) Like fire that burns the forest And like a flame that sets the mountains on fire, (15) So pursue them with Your tempest And terrify them with Your storm. (16) Fill their faces with dishonor, That they may seek Your name, O LORD. (17) Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever, And let them be humiliated and perish, (18) That they may know that You alone, whose name is the LORD, Are the Most High over all the earth.

If you've paid attention to the Ezekiel 38-39 passages, none of these nations in this coalition participate in the Gog-Magog invasion. That seems pretty strange, given that none of them are friends of Israel, and all of them would, even today, love to see Israel "wiped out as a nation", and "remembered no more." Salus's theory is that the fulfillment of this prophecy takes place before the Gog-Magog war. This coalition attacks Israel, and Israel not only defends itself as she has always done since 1948, but this time is victorious over all these nations, destroying them and occupying their land, much of which has been promised to them by God. This is why Israel is secure and at rest before the Gog-Magog war, because she has conquered her surrounding enemies which constantly threaten her. Presumably this may be what God uses to put "hooks into the jaws" of Russia, to bring them down with all of her allies to destroy Israel once and for all. The rest of the Islamic nations would not hesitate to take revenge against Israel for what they had done to these nations in Psalm 83. It would make Ezekiel 38:12 make even more sense (to capture plunder and great spoil), because Israel would have become even more rich and powerful after conquering her neighbors.

This would fulfill some prophecies in the Old Testament that scholars have wondered about. Let's look at some of them.

Ezekiel 28:24-26 "And there will be no more for the house of Israel a prickling brier or a painful thorn from any round about them who scorned them; then they will know that I

am the Lord GOD." (25) "Thus says the Lord GOD, "When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and will manifest My holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant Jacob. (26) "They will live in it securely; and they will build houses, plant vineyards and live securely when I execute judgments upon all who scorn them round about them. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God.""

This could be a Millennial prophecy, but it does seem to fit with the prophecy later on in chapters 38-39. After the Jews have come back to the land, but before the Gog-Magog war, God will execute judgment on "all who scorn them round about them", and Israel will then be living securely in the land. This would seem to suggest that something will happen to the nations who are round about Israel, before the Gog-Magog invasion.

Obadiah 1:18-20 "Then the house of Jacob will be a fire And the house of Joseph a flame; But the house of Esau will be as stubble. And they will set them on fire and consume them, So that there will be no survivor of the house of Esau," For the LORD has spoken. (19) Then those of the Negev will possess the mountain of Esau, And those of the Shephelah the Philistine plain; Also, possess the territory of Ephraim and the territory of Samaria, And Benjamin will possess Gilead. (20) And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel, Who are among the Canaanites as far as Zarephath, And the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad Will possess the cities of the Negev.

Jeremiah 49:2 "Therefore behold, the days are coming," declares the LORD, "That I will cause a trumpet blast of war to be heard Against Rabbah of the sons of Ammon; And it will become a desolate heap, And her towns will be set on fire. Then Israel will take possession of his possessors," Says the LORD.

This verse prophesies the destruction of Ammon (Jordan). Notice that Obadiah says there will be no survivor of the house of Edom (Esau). This prophecy has not come true, and portends a devastating future for descendants of Esau in the Middle East. There are also many verses which speak of the final destruction of Damascus (Syria), and Egypt.

Ezekiel 25:13-14 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also stretch out My hand against Edom and cut off man and beast from it. And I will lay it waste; from Teman even to Dedan they will fall by the sword. (14) "I will lay My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel. Therefore, they will act in Edom according to My anger and according to My wrath; thus they will know My vengeance," declares the Lord GOD.

Edom is southern Jordan, and Dedan is today's Saudi Arabia. Notice God says here that Israel is who carries out God's vengeance on them.

Zephaniah 2:7-9 And the coast will be For the remnant of the house of Judah, They will pasture on it. In the houses of Ashkelon they will lie down at evening; For the LORD their God will care for them And restore their fortune. (8) "I have heard the taunting of Moab And the revilings of the sons of Ammon, With which they have taunted My people And become arrogant against their territory. (9) "Therefore, as I live," declares the LORD of hosts, The God of Israel, "Surely Moab will be like Sodom And the sons of Ammon like Gomorrah-- A place possessed by nettles and salt pits, And a perpetual desolation. The remnant of My people will plunder them And the remainder of My nation will inherit them."

There are many more passages that prophesy the complete destruction of Israel's neighbors. These passages have not yet been fulfilled. Will they be fulfilled soon as a result of this coalition in Psalm 83 attacking Israel? It is possible, but of course we won't know for sure until it happens. But this is a compelling possible reason why Israel is dwelling securely when Russia and her Muslim allies come down to invade. Israel may soon gain victory over her enemies, and much of the land promised to her, by military means. Under this scenario, the Jewish State expands territorially, acquires great plunder, and becomes regionally superior.

Then, Russia and Iran become threatened by what will then be, the new and improved, enlarged and in-charge future Israel. As a result of the Israeli Conquest over the inner circle of the core Arab nations that most closely border Israel today, the Russians and Iranians will invite an outer circle of nations to join their coalition in an attempt to destroy the Jewish State, and capture Israel's newfound fortunes. It is then that the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 come to pass.

Tying it together

Now let's tie this together and see what we've come up with. Daniel 11 is the beginning of the Armageddon campaign. With that we agree with everyone, that Daniel 11 and Revelation 16 are the same, Daniel 11 is the beginning of the wars that lead to the final great day of God Almighty. This is the trigger incident and that's why Daniel mentions it; at the latter times the battle will start, and that's how it will start. And Daniel doesn't mention Gog because that's not part of the Armageddon campaign, that's something ahead of it.

In Daniel 9:27 the beast makes a treaty with the nation Israel that begins the tribulation. So we don't know when this is going to happen, we just know that at some point after the beast has risen in world politics, this man coming out of the European alliance in some way will make a mutual defense pact with the nation Israel. And when that happens God's time clock starts again, ticking off the last seven years of Israel's history. The clock that stopped when Christ was crucified and hasn't run since 30 AD, that clock will once again start operation. And for seven years the tribulation will occur until Armageddon is concluded by the return of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That is the tribulation; it is divided in half because halfway through the tribulation it gets worse and worse until the last three and a half years is hell on earth, literally. Satan is removed from heaven, and he activates the demon powers and then Daniel 11 occurs and Revelation 16 occurs, both those occur in the last half of the tribulation. You have them somewhere in this period, it's too vague to find out where but Daniel 11 triggers it, and Armageddon finishes it. The last three and a half years are full of violence, warfare, and death.

Between now and the time the beast makes a treaty several intervening events could occur. Before I mention these, let's mention the rapture of the Church. We haven't talked much about this yet; we'll cover it in detail very soon. But the question is will Christians be around for all this? Those Christians who have died since Pentecost, every believer since Pentecost will rise from the dead. And if we are living when this happens you'll be walking down the street and your body will suddenly change into a resurrection body and off you'll go. That is Jesus Christ removing His body, because the Church is the body of Christ. Jesus removes His own body from the sphere of history before He crushes history. Judgment must come upon the world and before it can come His body must be removed out from the hand of judgment. And remember what the main purpose of the Tribulation is for, to bring Israel to repentance and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not to "purify the Church", as some might say.

And so the Church is raptured. The rapture is what theologians call imminent, in that no prophesied event has to occur to tip you off that it's going to happen. We don't know when it's going to happen, never can

tell, and never will be able to tell until it has happened. The reason for that, though the Scriptures don't say, could be to fool Satan. It's reserved in the throne room when this event is going to be pulled off so that Satan will not have time to make any countermove. The rapture of the Church can occur any time between now and the treaty of Daniel 9:27. If we see that treaty made we'll know we messed up in interpreting Scripture.

Now, there are at least four events that might be out ahead of the tribulation and so we may live to see these. First, we could see a coordinated attack on Israel by her surrounding neighbors, and Israel defeating and crushing all of them, potentially even using nuclear weapons. The prophecies of the coming destruction of Damascus could very well be the result of a nuclear attack. Second, we could see the invasion of Ezekiel 38 and 39; we may see the Russian alliance come down and be completely crushed by God Himself.

Another event we may live to see is the Jews building their temple on the very spot of Solomon's temple; the rebuilding of the third temple which must happen because the antichrist must desecrate the temple.

The other thing that we may see is a great European confederacy of nations, possibly including the United States, the Revived Roman Empire as it's sometimes called, probably divided up into ten areas and in one of those areas is going to be a very, very intelligent leader who will emerge to control all of them and that will be the beast, but it's unclear as to when he gains control. At least we can say these four events we may live to see.

Chapter 39

In chapter 39 we have the same event repeated, only with more details, a phenomena you will find in some other places in the Bible. Chapter 39 gives details about the cleanup after the battle. Only here in this chapter will you find any mention to the aftermath, the cleanup of a battle in the Bible.

Arnold Fruchtenbaum says that the interpretative principle he calls The Law of Recurrence occurs in chapter 39. He describes it as follows:

“This law describes the fact that in some passages of Scripture there exists the recording of an event followed by a second recording of the same event giving more details to the first. Hence, it often involves two blocks of Scripture. The first block presents a description of an event as it transpires in chronological sequence. This is followed by a second block of Scripture dealing with the same event and the same period of time, but giving further details as to what transpires in the course of the event.”

Maybe the reason the Lord repeats some prophecies is in order to really drive home the importance of what He is saying. This would make the Gog prophecy doubly important because of this emphasis. The second giving of the Gog invasion prophecy ends in 39:16. Ezekiel 39:1-6 is the first section in this chapter that reiterates the place of destruction.

For reference, here is the table of nations involved in this invasion that we arrived at in the last lesson:

Ancient Name	Modern Nation
Magog (Scythians)	Central Asia and possibly Afghanistan
Rosh (Rashu, Rasapu, Ros, and Rus)	Russia
Meshech (Muschki and Musku)	Turkey
Tubal (Tubalu)	Turkey
Persia (Elam)	Iran
Ethiopia (Cush)	Ethiopia, Sudan

Libya (Put or Phut)	Libya
Gomer (Cimmerians)	Turkey
Beth-togarmah (Til-garimmu or Tegarma)	Turkey

Ezekiel 39:1-3 "And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal; and I will turn you around, drive you on, take you up from the remotest parts of the north and bring you against the mountains of Israel. (3) "I will strike your bow from your left hand and dash down your arrows from your right hand.

And we discussed in the last lesson, they may actually be using bows and arrows, but it doesn't have to be. The Hebrew for "bow" means launcher; it can mean any kind of launcher. The Hebrew for "arrows" mean "piercing missile", it could mean missile. It is interesting that "Arrow" is the name of Israel's missile system. This is more accurately saying, "I will strike your launchers from your left hand, and dash down your missiles from your right hand." In other words, the Lord will disarm Gog's armies.

By the way, this happened on a smaller scale during the Yom Kippur war, when Arabs abandoned thousands of tanks, trucks, rocket launchers, etc. They just ran off and left them – up in the Golan heights, and down in the south in the desert of Sinai.

From the way these two chapters keep speaking of "the mountains of Israel", it appears that the invasion force is stopped on the mountains of the land. Arnold Fruchtenbaum describes the mountains of Israel as follows:

"They extend the length of the center of the country, beginning at the southern point of the Valley of Jezreel at the town of Jenin in Galilee (biblical Ein Ganim), and continuing south until they peter out at a point north of Beersheva in the Negev. These mountains contain the famous biblical cities of Dothan, Shechem, Samaria, Shiloh, Bethel, Ai, Ramah, Bethlehem, Hebron, Debir, and most importantly, Jerusalem, which seems to be the goal of the invading army. Here is another example where the Six Day War has set the stage for the fulfillment of prophecy. Up to the Six Day War in 1967 all of the mountains of Israel, except for a small corridor of West Jerusalem, were entirely in the hands of the Jordanian Arabs. Only since 1967 have the mountains of Israel been in Israel, thus setting the stage for the fulfillment of this prophecy."

Ezekiel 39:4-6 "You will fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and beast of the field. (5) "You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken," declares the Lord GOD. (6) "And I will send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the LORD.

Since God is the one who is bringing these invaders down, He's going to use them to feed His creatures.

"...among them that inhabit the coastlands in safety" This appears to refer to a "third party", neither the Magog forces nor Israel. Some believe this refers to western nations, and predict that if this is a nuclear war, that nukes will be fired upon Europe and the United States as well. Perhaps the U.S., siding with Israel, responds to this attack on Israel by firing nukes at Russia (Magog) and Magog fires back. Some speculate that this exchange is the instrument of judgment God uses against the United States.

The two most common prophecy questions are:

1. Where is the U.S. in the Bible?
2. Why hasn't God judged the U.S. yet?

Some believe this verse may be the answer to both questions. This is just speculation of course, but a possibility. Of course, God has always blessed the U.S. because of our support for the Jews. We don't worry about Israel, because we know God will take care of her. But we do worry about our own nation. America seems to be missing in end times prophecy. Why is that? What happens to the U.S.? By the time these prophecies come to pass, America doesn't seem to be a major player in the world. It could be for economic reasons, or because of some kind of geophysical event, or a military attack of some kind. We just don't know. It is interesting to note that just in the last few years the U.S. is starting to lose its influence around the world. I think this will continue.

However, there are problems with the "nuclear attack" view. The biggest one is that the text says clearly that God is the one doing the attacking, both upon Gog and his allies, and upon those "in the coastlands". God is going to send fire, most likely the same way that He did upon Sodom and Gomorrah. He's not going to need to use man's nuclear weapons to do this.

So who are these people who live in the coastlands? All we can do is speculate. It could be the homelands of all the invading nations. God may not only wipe out the armies, but also destroy the nations where they came from. This is the only reason I can think of why God would all of a sudden send fire on someone else. Israel appears destined for destruction in the eyes of the world as a result of a powerful coalition, but the Lord steps in and defends Israel and turns the table on the invaders by destroying their homelands, which they think to be secure.

Ezekiel 39:7 "My holy name I will make known in the midst of My people Israel; and I will not let My holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel.

E. W. Hengstenburg has noted: *"The holy name of God is His character, arising from His former historical manifestations, as God in the full sense, the absolute, the transcendently glorious, unconditionally separate from all untruth and impotence. God makes known His name among His people when He verifies His historical character anew, when He gives His people the victory over the heathen world that rages against them. He would profane His name if He were to abandon His people continually to the heathen world, as He had done in the time of the prophets on account of their apostasy."*

This could be the first step towards the nation recognizing Jesus as their Messiah. Obviously this event will also make His name known to the whole earth, as well. There will be a great revival in Israel, and around the world, because of this event.

Ezekiel 39:8-10 "Behold, it is coming and it shall be done," declares the Lord GOD. "That is the day of which I have spoken. (9) "Then those who inhabit the cities of Israel will go out and make fires with the weapons and burn them, both shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, war clubs and spears, and for seven years they will make fires of them. (10) "They will not take wood from the field or gather firewood from the forests, for they will make fires with the weapons; and they will take the spoil of those who despoiled them and seize the plunder of those who plundered them," declares the Lord GOD.

Notice that the people that live in the cities go out to burn the weapons, the cities don't seem to have been damaged by the failed attack. They go out and recover all the stuff these armies left behind.

For seven years they can use the weapons for fuel. They won't need any other type of fuel, there will be

enough from the captured or discarded weapons to supply all their energy needs for seven years. Verse 10 means that during this seven year period, Israelis will not have to use natural resources from the land for fuel. This could be wood, oil and other fuels which the huge army brought with them.

Ezekiel 39:11 "On that day I will give Gog a burial ground there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea, and it will block off those who would pass by. So they will bury Gog there with all his horde, and they will call it the valley of Hamon-gog.

Hamon-gog means "the valley of the hordes of Gog". This area would seem to be east of the Dead Sea, which puts it in current day Jordan.

Ezekiel 39:12-14 "For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land. (13) "Even all the people of the land will bury them; and it will be to their renown on the day that I glorify Myself," declares the Lord GOD. (14) "They will set apart men who will constantly pass through the land, burying those who were passing through, even those left on the surface of the ground, in order to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make a search.

There will be so many casualties that it will take seven months to bury them all! "...they will set apart men": They will employ professionals to do the work, even though all the people of Israel will be involved.

Fruchtenbaum says, "Since the armies are destroyed in the mountains of Israel, many of the bodies will fall in crevices where they will not be easily found, and so special details will be employed by the government for the seven months to search out these bodies for burial in the special valley."

Ezekiel 39:15-16 "As those who pass through the land pass through and anyone sees a man's bone, then he will set up a marker by it until the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog. (16) "And even the name of the city will be Hamonah. So they will cleanse the land."

When a passersby sees any remains, they set up a sign or marker, so the professional can come and take care of it. All the people of Israel will be involved in the search and burial of the bodies. When they find remains, they don't touch it, they just set up a marker so that the professionals can come and dispose of them. They apparently set up a city that may be either a headquarters for the burial effort, or a memorial city of some kind. All of this means this must have been a massive army. And God receives glory even in the burial process.

Randall Price points out contemporary practices in Israel relating to this passage as follows: *On the basis of this verse the rabbis inferred the legal ruling (halakha) that all graves must be marked. In the modern State of Israel a group of nongovernmental Orthodox Jews known as ZAKA (Hebrew acronym for "Identification of Disaster Victims") is appointed to carefully remove all human remains after suicide bombings in order to restore order and prevent ritual impurity in the Land. The reason, according to Jewish law (halakha) is that the dead must be buried immediately because exposed corpses (or even single bones) are a source of ritual contamination to the Land (Numbers 19:11-22; Deuteronomy 21:1-9). Ezekiel 36:17-21 has already connected ritual purity and divine holiness, and the text here mentions the need to "cleanse the Land" three times (verses 12, 14, 16)."*

Radiation or Biological Danger?

Professionals hired to clear the battlefield—they wait seven months; then clear for seven months and bury the dead east of the Dead Sea (downwind). If a traveler finds something the professionals have missed, he

doesn't touch it: he marks the location and lets the professionals deal with it. This sounds like the remains of the bodies are either irradiated or infected with some sort of virus. It is interesting that the same instructions can be found in the *Operator's Manual for Marking Set, Contamination: Nuclear, Biological, Chemical (NBC)*, US Armed Forces. Remember the means God used to destroy this army – fire and brimstone, and some sort of plague.

Ezekiel 39:17-18 "As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, 'Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, "Assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood. (18) "You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as though they were rams, lambs, goats and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan.

(Similarities with Rev 19:17,18 cause some to assume this is somehow associated with Armageddon.) Some good scholars believe this event is describing the battle of Armageddon, many do not. I do not think they are the same. Notice "My sacrifice". This huge army is given to the birds and the beasts as a sacrifice, it's a fitting end to these men who thought they were going to wipe out Israel.

Ezekiel 39:19-22 "So you will eat fat until you are gluttoned, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. (20) "You will be gluttoned at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of war," declares the Lord GOD. (21) "And I will set My glory among the nations; and all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed and My hand which I have laid on them. (22) "And the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God from that day onward.

Again we see that this is about God making Himself known. It's "My sacrifice", "My table", My glory", "My judgment". Most of Israel does not believe in God today, they are atheists or agnostics. This event will give the nation of Israel (and all the nations) an intellectual belief in God, they will not be able to deny His existence any longer. This begins the spiritual restoration of the nation.

Ezekiel 39:23-24 "The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against Me, and I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword. (24) "According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them.""

Now the world will get the picture. It wasn't that God was incapable, too weak to deliver Israel, but because of their sins and unfaithfulness God hid His face from them. God blinded Israel, they could not see Him any more.

Ezekiel 39:25-26 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name. (26) "They will forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their own land with no one to make them afraid.

Today Israel thinks that they are secure without God, they are secure in their military might, and in the protection of their ally the United States. But when this massive attack happens, they will see that they have no security. In the Millennial kingdom they will have complete security through Christ and their fortunes will be restored.

Ezekiel 39:27-29 "When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations. (28) "Then they will know that I am the LORD their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them again to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer. (29) "I will not hide My face from them any longer, for I will have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel," declares the Lord GOD.

This is a summary statement. The phrase "poured out My Spirit" means the New Covenant, ratified by Christ's death on the cross. The ultimate result of the battle with Gog will be Israel's national repentance and spiritual restoration (36:27; 37:14; Joel 2:28). This will be fulfilled when the Millennial Kingdom is established (Hosea 5:15; Zechariah 12:10).

Isaiah 32:15-18 **Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high, And the wilderness becomes a fertile field, And the fertile field is considered as a forest. (16) Then justice will dwell in the wilderness And righteousness will abide in the fertile field. (17) And the work of righteousness will be peace, And the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever. (18) Then my people will live in a peaceful habitation, And in secure dwellings and in undisturbed resting places**

The restoration of the Jews will not happen until the Holy Spirit is poured out on them. (also Jeremiah 31)

So how close are we to this event?

Here are three things that are happening in our world that are setting the stage for this event.

1. There is a present regathering of Israel in unbelief (Ezekiel 38:8).
2. There is a present gathering of a coalition of nations with the motivation to destroy Israel. All of these nations are controlled by Islam except for Russia, and Russia is today aligning itself with the Muslim nations. Russia has entered into agreements with Iran, they are now firm allies. Iran is a huge concern today, and they have made no secret of their hatred for the Jews. As long as Jerusalem is in Israeli hands, Islam will never be satisfied, they will never rest until the Jews are completely removed. The western governments will never understand this, especially the current administration of the U.S.
3. This sort of thing has happened before to Israel. Nations have come against Israel in the past and have been repelled, these are kind of a dress rehearsal for Ezekiel 38-39. It happened in the war for independence in 1948, in the 6 days war in 1967, the Yom Kippur war in 1973, in the Gulf war to some extent in 1990. It's like God is saying, you've seen the practice events, now get ready for the real thing. 100 years ago this teaching would have been viewed as ridiculous. The Jews were not in the land, Israel was a wasteland, this coalition of nations had not even begun to form. History has caught up with Ezekiel's prophecies.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of Iran firmly believes that he is destined—and committed—to cause the appearance of the 12th Imam by ushering in the "Last Days." On Oct 31, 2004, the Majlis (Iran's Parliament) chanted, "Death to America," "Death to Israel" in their stand-up vote (247 of 290) approving a bill requiring the government to resume uranium enrichment. There can be no doubt about Iran's intentions.

Attack Imminent?

Israel's existence is at risk: it has 120 aircraft at the ready; two 747 tankers; and an F-117 Stealth on loan. A general has been given the "green light" to go when "the winds are favorable." If Israel attacks Iran, this

doesn't mean these chapters are being fulfilled. I believe this event is on the horizon, but we just don't know when it will be for sure.

MARK HITCHCOCK (edited for length)

The rise of Islamic fundamentalism with its virulent anti-Semitism and a hatred of the restored Jewish state provides a powerful motivation for this invasion. While Islam is and always has been a religion of violence and terror, the modern rise of the Islamic, terrorist state began in 1979 in Iran when the Shah was ousted by the Ayatollah Khomeini. Iran has exported this terror movement to neighboring Islamic nations. Of course, Ezekiel does not mention Islam or terrorism as a driving force behind this invasion since Islam did not exist until the seventh century A.D. However, the geographical areas he identified as participant in this invasion are all identifiable Islamic nations today with the exception of Russia.

This sets the stage for the final jihad into Israel depicted in Ezekiel's prophecy. For these Islamic allies the Gog and Magog invasion will be an opening to drive Israel into the sea and lure the West into a final clash of civilizations.

Iran's Increase

Iran (Persia) is a key player on the world scene today. Clearly, Iran is public enemy #1 today for the world. As home to radical jihadists and a supporter of terror groups around the world Iran cannot be allowed to possess nuclear weapons. This is unthinkable. And all of this is greatly enhanced and complicated by the fact that Iran has about 10% of the world's proven oil reserves. Uncertainty over the situation in Iran is part of the reason that oil prices recently reached an all-time high.

To make matters even worse, in August, 2005 the Iranian people elected the hardliner, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as their new president. The 47-year-old President of Iran is the former mayor of Tehran and former Republican Guard commander. On October 26, 2005 when he said flat out that Israel should be "wiped off the map," and said that "anyone who signs a treaty with Israel means he has signed the surrender of the Muslim world." He further called for Iranians "to riot against Zionists (Israel) and unbelievers" in a nationwide demonstration on Friday, October 27, 2005 during al-Quds—or Jerusalem—Day. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad participated in the demonstration himself along with about one million others who backed his call for the destruction of the Jewish State. The marchers carried placards that read, "Death to Israel, death to America." All of this comes at a time when the United Nations is cautiously dealing with Iran about sanctions over its nuclear program. Needless to say, tensions in the region are mounting. Iran is awash in oil money and is earnestly seeking nuclear weapons.

Turkey Turns East

Also, for the battle of Gog and Magog to occur, Turkey must be willing to join the coalition of nations against Israel. In recent years Turkey has made every attempt to become part of the European Union. For this reason Turkey's participation in the Gog alliance against Israel appeared highly unlikely. However, it now appears certain that the EU will reject Turkey's bid for admission. On October 3, 2005, with great fanfare the European Union launched formal negotiations in Brussels to discuss Turkey's admittance to membership in the European club. Several months earlier European leaders had decided to open talks to consider Turkey's admission to the EU. Even the possibility of this merger was hailed as the meeting of East and West.

But it is generally agreed at this point that Turkey basically has no hope of joining the EU. Both France and the Netherlands rejected the proposed EU constitution, and one of their main objections was the notion of enlargement, especially admitting Turkey to the EU. Support for Turkish accession among the 15 EU countries that have been members the longest is only at 32%. However, the EU does not want to alienate

the Turks; so, the EU appears to be stringing Turkey along for geopolitics. There are five key reasons the EU will reject Turkey:

1. It is a Muslim country. Islam phobia is on the rise in Europe. This feeling will be heightened in light of the recent insurrection in France.
2. It is too big. With 70 million people, Turkey would be the second largest EU nation behind Germany.
3. It is agrarian. The EU supports farmers with huge subsidies.
4. It is poor. Turkey's gross domestic product per capita is only 27% of the national average.
5. It has enemies. Turkey faces two historic enemies within the EU: Greece and Cyprus.

These developments are interesting since the Bible predicts in Ezekiel 38 that Turkey will be part of a massive Russian-led invasion of Israel in the end times. The main countries that will participate in this invasion are Russia, Iran, Libya, Sudan, Central Asian nations, and Turkey. At present the government of Vladimir Putin in Russia is gaining greater control and appears to be moving back toward the days of communist dictatorship. Iran, Libya, Sudan, and the nations of Central Asia are all predominantly Islamic, and it is not too difficult to see them all joining in for one last jihad against Israel. But as Turkey moved more and more toward the west it appeared highly unlikely that she would ally herself with a Russian-Islamic coalition against Israel. But that seems to be changing. Turkey's admission to the EU is hopeless at this point. And when Turkey is rejected by the West, she will have to look elsewhere to bolster her strategic ambitions.

The AKP (Justice and Development party) of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is an avowedly Islamic party that poses a difficult challenge to Turkey's 80-year-old secularism founded by Ataturk. It seems clear that the AKP wants to move the country and its foreign policy in a more Islamic direction. In recent months, Erdogan has reached out to some very unsavory characters in Turkey's neighborhood. He visited President Bashar Assad in Syria earlier this year and traveled to Iran to meet with the Iranian mullahs.

Erdogan's chief adviser, Ahmet Davutoglu, is the driving force behind Turkey's foreign policy changes. He is now contending that Turkey has a historic opportunity to be a leader in the Muslim world. He also believes that her geographic position requires improved relations with Russia. Earlier this year, overcoming decades of enmity, Turkey signed a trade pact with Russia. At the same time Turkey is being rebuffed by Europe and is warming relations with Russia, anti-Semitism in Turkey has been growing in the last few years. According to a recent article in *The Weekly Standard* (8/29/05), "At any bookstore in Istanbul or Ankara you will find prominently displayed Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, a popular seller these days."

While there may be many twists and turns in Turkey and other nations of the world before the rapture occurs, what is occurring there right now appears to be moving Turkey back toward Russia and the Muslim world just as one would expect if the battle of Gog and Magog is near. *Mark Hitchcock*

Application – How do we apply this to our daily lives?

1. It gives us proof that the Bible is God's Word. Only an omniscient God could predict these things 2600 years ago.
2. This has a calming effect on the believer. If you don't know God and don't know His Word, you will be terrified when these things start to happen. But those of us who know God and His Word can see His hand working in these events. He is in control of history. It reminds us of God's sovereignty.
3. It reminds us of God's faithfulness. God is going to keep His covenant with Israel, and that makes me very happy, because if He is going to such great length to keep His promises to Israel, despite her disobedience, then He will keep His promises to me despite my disobedience.
4. Keep your eye on the nation of Israel (38:12). Israel is the center of the world. To the world, Israel is this tiny nation that is getting in the way of progress, of world peace. But to God this nation is the

focal point of all human history. If you want to understand history, you can't look through the world's eyes, you have to look through God's eyes.

5. Support Israel. If Satan is against Israel and God is for her, which side are you going to be on? If a person is against Israel, they are against God. Pray for Israel, support them.
6. Remember that we're living on borrowed time. When you see the Christmas lights go up, you know Thanksgiving is coming. Since we see the stage is being set for these events, we know that they are coming. Knowing that our time is short changes our whole attitude, it makes us more aggressive about serving God with the time we have left. It impacts how we live, and what we do.

Next lesson: Ezekiel 40-48. We will finish up Ezekiel by studying the Millennial temple and other aspects of the coming 1,000 years reign of Christ on earth.

