

## Lesson # 41      The World is Being Prepared for Antichrist's Arrival & Ezekiel 38 & 39 – The Failed Invasion of Israel

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I have mentioned before in our study of Revelation that the things listed herein will not occur in a vacuum. Let me preface that by saying that we cannot be dogmatic that the Tribulation will occur within months, years, or maybe even decades. We can be sure however, that when the Antichrist comes to power, it will be ( at first ) the result of a series of progressive steps towards that position of ultimate world authority and object of worship.

With that in mind, I thought it might be helpful to look at some of the clues available to us in today's world which may be pointing us towards an understanding of how such a person as Antichrist might rise to power. It is not so we can name him, but so we can see the precursors to his kingdom that the Bible says will be set up before Christ returns. I presume that no one here are without some sense of what is happening in the world around us which is haping up a new world order or globalization in which a one world dictator could thrive and a one world religion could support him.

If we examine some of the main cultural streams that shape the way people think and live ( worldviews ), it becomes almost immediately apparent that virtually every leading indicator in the world – political, social, societal, economic, religious – are heading in a direction ( like a runaway train ) that will pave the way for the acceptance of a politician who can solve major world issues and for a religion whose theme is tolerance of all religions which can sweep aside doctrinal differences and setup a figurehead that everyone will worship gladly, or if necessary, under compulsion. I have attempted in what follows to provide a brief sketch of some of the indicators which are even now shaping the future of the world, to bring it into the position that Satan wants it in, but especially to bring it into the condition that God wants it in as he brings down the history of His creation as described in the book we've been studying for over 2 years now.

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### Israel

I mention this first, because the end times truly swirl around what takes place in and to Israel. Not everyone agrees that the Israel now inhabiting that small plot of land in the middle east is the Biblical, prophetic Israel, but it is an incredibly unique occurrence in our world that a people group spread out across the world for almost 2,000 years as a result of rampant historical hatred & persecution, the target of numerous historical holocausts, has not only survived, but has been put in their land by nations of the world not because they gained it by military might ( at least, at first ), but because a world ashamed of the way the Jews had been treated, especially in WW II, decided to give them this land &

to displace the Palestinians who had occupied much of it at the time. On May 15, 1948, Israel became a reality once again in history. This seems to be a fulfillment of Ezekiel 37 as well as many other passages of the OT.

In a pre-1948 world that contained no national Israel for over 1900 years, the key element of end times Bible prophecy did not exist. There could be no temple in Jerusalem for an Antichrist to enter and defile, and no way for the Antichrist to establish a covenant with Israel ( Dan. 9:24-27 ) which begins the Tribulation. This is the key element that indicates that the end times are on the horizon, and we will see Israel coming up in many of the things that follow below, but what else speaks to us about the end times?

## Religion – The decline & fall of Christianity

See **II Tim. 3:1-7**. Although we realize that just about every civilization since Christ in some ways can be described this way, it is readily apparent that over the last 40 – 60 years, the effects of the thinking Paul describes to Timothy have been on display with increasing intensity. We could provide lengthy examples of every one of these things, and the saddest thing is we could show examples of them among the people who call themselves the church of Christ! Just a simple review of the things that entertain people on TV, in movies, music, magazines, etc. should be enough to see the wicked path the world has led us all down. The voice of believers has not been enough to stave off what appears to be a wholesale societal slide into the morass of sin from which the slide into a world-wide worship of Satanic world leaders is inevitable. ②

## The Hatred of Christian Morals & Values

Along with the general slide of western society towards sin and hedonism, and probably as a direct result of that slide, has come an accelerating plummet towards the hatred of anything to do with Christians and the Christian God. A simple review of recent legislation in the US and Canada over the past 20 years provides ample proof of this. Prayer was taken out of the schools, the posting of any Christian Scriptures or even ads for Christian events are banned from public property, parents are forbidden to spank their children, criminals have more rights than victims, gay marriage has been shoved down our throats and hate crimes legislation ensures that free speech to voice our opposition to this or to other religious views has been eliminated by law. Abortions are carried out by the millions and those who oppose it as murder are vilified as hate mongers or anti-feminists. The media regularly portrays Christians as evil, hypocritical, buffoons, fools or backwoods hicks; the US military has made an edict that Christian Chaplains may not pray in Jesus' name; kids are banned from schools for wearing shirts with Christian verses of messages while Satanic or hideously gross shirts are allowed in, etc. When a congresswoman was shot earlier this year, the media immediately pointed to Christian Talk Radio & conservative politician Sarah Palin as the contributing factor, even though facts presented the crazed man as a liberal left wing nut case, neither a Christian or a listener to

talk radio – You get the point! Tolerance is the word of the day for everyone but any offense directed at Christians is OK and receives the full support of the authorities, because we are “hate mongers”.

## The Rise of Islam

At the same time as Christianity is on the downslope of world opinion, Islam is on the rise. According to current statistics, in 1900 AD, Muslims comprised 12.4% of the world’s population, as compared to 26.9% Christians. By 1980, Islam was 16.5%, with Christianity at 30%. In 2000, 19.2 Islamic versus 29.9% Christian, and projected for 2025 – Christians 25%, and 30% Muslims<sup>i</sup>. Islam is the fastest growing religion in the world at present.

In Europe, Australia and the Americas, vast numbers of Muslims emigrate and unlike other cultures which attempt to assimilate into the country’s culture they are arriving at, Muslims tend to cluster in their own communities and battle against the culture they are in in order to promote Muslim values over western values. There is virtually no flow of western people into Muslim countries – it is very limited and tightly controlled. Those that do move into Muslim countries are forced to adapt Muslim ways or risk legal penalties, cease from evangelism under threat of death, and once allowed in are subject to special taxes as the cost of living under the grace of their Muslim hosts.

Yet, despite these admittedly sketchy facts, Islam gets a pass all over the world. ③ A combination of fear of reprisal ( terrorist bombs or mass murder ), and a fear of being seen as intolerant allow Islamic immigrants all over the world to have special privileges that even native born people do not enjoy. In some countries in Europe, some communities are set apart and allowed to practice Sha’ria Law within those communities, and the local police forces stay away. ( France, Britain )

Increasing politically correct spin presents Israel, who is defending herself against Islamic death threats on every side, as the aggressor, and the Muslims as the afflicted people simply trying to defend their Palestinian brothers. In the USA, especially under the current Obama administration, there is extreme hesitance to call any obvious terror attacks exactly what they are – to diffuse the desire for reprisal against Muslims. Later in this lesson we’ll get a glimpse of what is going on in Europe and Africa which is setting up Islam to be the controlling influence in that entire region especially due to the need for oil by all nations.

## War & Natural Disasters

**Matt. 24:3-14**: All of the things Jesus Christ mentions in these verses have been around since soon after the Fall in Eden. But since Christ is listing these as part of His answer to the disciples question in **v. 3**, then they are a sign when they intensify that the “close of the age” is not far off. He lists false Christs as the

first indicator and we have seen our fair share of these even in our brief lifetimes – Sun Yung Moon, Rabbi Menachem Schneerson, and others have all claimed to be the messiah.

Christ next lists wars and rumours of wars, and we must realize that a war does not have to be a world war to be war. Consider just recent headlines – Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Kuwait, Somalia, North Korea, Libya, Egypt, Syria, skirmishes between Lebanon & Israel, violence in Africa and Europe, etc. Many of these areas are powder kegs waiting on just the right spark to set them off. There is peace only in isolated areas of the world, and then only if those people are content to ignore the fact that all these localized wars are on the verge of escalation any time.

Because of 9-1-1, North America can no longer feel safe from the ravages of war which has always been “over there” ( at least since 1865, 1812 & 1941 ). Now we deal with – especially in a border town like Windsor – threat levels that fluctuate based on the best government intelligence at the time, always wondering if the plane we are flying on will blow up or if the next explosion we hear about is in our own city, and will it be nuclear, chemical or biological this time?

Genocide, often seen as a separate entity to war, is really war as well. It is just that the war is one sided, with those who have power on one side, and compelled by hatred, decide to massacre those who do not share their religion or ideologies or whatever. You would think that the WW II Holocaust where 6 million Jews were exterminated, and another 3 million handicapped, homosexual or Christian people joined them in the grave, would be enough for post-modernists to avoid this sort of evil and hatred. However, Iraq, Bosnia, Darfur, Rhodesia, Rwanda, Darfur and others are all names we have heard of, and due to the diplomatic intricacies of international politics, these sorts of genocidal episodes seem incapable of being stopped. ④

Although the Middle East and Africa seem ripe for intensive wars, and Russia and China continue to grow in strength against a USA which is stretched too thin, and even places like North Korea and Iran boast of nuclear capability and no compunctions about using that technology, we have so far managed to avoid WW III. Iran is boldly proclaiming to all who will listen that their intention is to use their nuclear capability ( once it has been achieved – and it is close ) to “blow Israel off the map”! The more likely scenario there is that Israel, who already has nuclear capability, will launch first as soon as the threat from Iran seems imminent – they cannot afford to be the 2<sup>nd</sup> one to launch nuclear missiles.

## Oil

The world runs on oil. In 2010, the USA consumed 84 million barrels of oil per day.<sup>ii</sup> In a very real sense, those who control the oil control the world economy. We have seen this even recently as oil prices fluctuated and gasoline rose from

about 75 cents per liter to its current \$1.23 to \$1.30 per liter. In early 2011, it hit a local high of \$1.39/L. In most of Europe, it is at least double that. Although we are irritated by this cost increase, for the poor, it is devastating, and for businesses, it can mean the difference between profits and bankruptcy – which means people out of work, unavailable products and services, lack of growth in industry, etc. As China, India and other eastern countries ramp up their industrialization efforts, the demand for oil is increasing on a daily basis. With current world oil production at 97.5% capacity of harvesting known oil reserves, there is little room to increase production and current ecological groups continue to pressure the governments of western culture to stop putting wells in the ocean, on land or anywhere else. When oil platforms blow up ( in the Gulf of Mexico 2010 ) or oil tankers sink, and unstable Middle Eastern politics threaten the flow of oil, we are on the verge of an oil crisis of epic proportions and once the wrong factions get hold of the middle eastern oil reserves and cut off flow to the USA, North American society is in deep trouble, and so is the world. Currently, Saudi Arabia is selling oil to the USA, but the rest of the Arab world is not happy with this, and Saudi Arabia itself could become a target of terrorism by other Muslims and lose control of their own oil. When that happens, North America will no longer have economically feasible access to Mid-East oil.

A vast percentage of the world's oil is found in the Middle East, and virtually all of it is in the control of Muslims who see the huge wealth it creates by selling it to western countries as a necessary evil, but once the coffers are full, oil blackmail is a very real possibility. Even this year, the US policy towards Israel faltered when President Obama declared that Israel should capitulate to Arab interests and revert back to pre-1967 borders – returning the land won since then to Palestine “to foster peace”. It is virtually certain that the dependence of the US on Arab oil is behind such a change in policy. Although the media plays it like Palestine being restored to their land would bring peace, the Arab world wants Israel gone, not just smaller. ⑤

As a direct result of the critical role access to affordable oil plays in world and national economies, there is obviously political gain at stake in putting one's country in a position of being amenable to those who have oil to sell so that you have access to it and the price is right. Russia and China, as world super-powers have proximity to the Middle East and the leverage to influence the sale of oil. It is no secret that most current weapons used by terrorists are Russian made, and China's recent resurgence into industry has made it a potentially huge customer of the oil sheiks. China, in fact, has become North America's 'slave labor' center, and the short term use of cheap labor has created long term unemployment in North America, and now China's need for automobiles has risen from the 100's in the 1980's to many millions in 2011 – they are the new market for cars and industrial equipment. This is great for American sales but terrible for American workers.

Meantime Europe has identified the need to 'look the other way' when terrorism occurs, and Europe is fast becoming what one author identifies as “Eurabia”<sup>iii</sup>

because Muslim immigrants, still a minority ( but growing quickly ) have much more significant societal influence than even a majority usually has.

I recently read 3 different books that describe this very odd, very scary trend in Europe and Great Britain – Londonistan, Melanie Phillips; Eurabia, Bat Ye'or; and While Europe Slept, Bruce Bawer ). All 3 describe in detail the insidious takeover of European society and culture by Islam through diplomatic, politically correct policies aimed at forming a stronger Europe ( from Europe's view ) due to powerful connections with the oil cartels and a fear of the terrorism used as a casual weapon by the Muslims to get what they want – or else.

For example, here is a 5 point manifesto describing what this has been resting on since the 1960's, initially pursued by Charles DeGaulle and the French, who historically had many interests in North Africa and the middle east. "Eurabian doctrine rests on 5 main pillars;

1. the creation of Euro-Arab human, economic, and political symbiosis motivated by European greed and fear
2. a common goal of economic development as the source of human progress and achievement
3. the firm belief that medieval Muslim Andalusia provides an exemplary model for the construction of Eurabia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
4. the vilification and demise of Israel as the key to Euro-Arab reconciliation
5. hostility to America and obstruction of its influence in the Middle East<sup>iv</sup>

Notice points 4 & 5 carefully. In order to conciliate Islam and make a Europe-Arab union viable and a rival to the US, Europe must follow a pattern of policy decisions that do not support Israel or the USA, or they can expect rich reprisals from their Muslim "allies" in the way of oil prices &/or terrorist acts. Therefore, they have to take the position that Israel must be eliminated as a nation or there will never be peace. ⑥

"The European Union's policy towards Israel consists of 4 major elements...;

1. Europe needs the Arab Bloc in order to establish itself as a strategic rival to America
2. Recognition of the Arab stranglehold on Europe created by oil and the economic ties of the EU with the Arab world
3. The policy portrays the unbreakable bond between politics, oil & economics as a just cause. IOW, there is some sense of morality attached to it – it must be done.
4. The EU has submitted to an Arab demand – the internalization of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict which is really a regional issue that could have been settled regionally, but it has been kept alive by the imposition of unacceptable conditions on Israel and European support for the most radical Arab leaders. IOW – Europe has to take the Arab side in this conflict no matter what.<sup>v</sup>

Now, the general public in Europe may not agree with their leaders' policies, but a humanitarian spin has been increasingly put on this issue by the European

media so that the problem of Israel is seen to be the “poor innocent Palestinians” whose rights are always being trampled on by that aggressive Israel. The general public often follows the media’s lead, because they do not get to hear the other side. “If Israel would give their land back, there would be peace.”

Islamic idealism, based on the Qur’an , compels them to invade militarily and peacefully every non-Muslim country until the world is Muslim.

The other aspect of this should be obvious and we all can see it shaping up even in the US and Canada. The rise of Islamic influence is often at the expense of Christianity. It is politically correct to offend or vilify Christians for real or imagined offenses, but Islam cannot be challenged or dismissed as a false religion without violating hate crimes laws in Canada, Europe, some US states and soon, USA itself. Failing that, Islamic extremists will kill the offenders wherever they can.

I will try to pull some of the other elements together to show how the globalization of society is being shaped by various other ‘causes celebre’ so that our attention is refocused on global concerns rather than local or even national needs – all in preparation for that one world leader to come and command the allegiance of the world in order to ‘protect the world’.

## Ecology

By now, we know all the buzz words – ‘global warming’, ‘eco-tax’, the ‘green revolution’, etc. Championed by failed & embittered politician Al Gore and supported by celebrity scientists like David Suzuki, the media and Hollywood, this ‘cause’ is an expensive way to control people’s money. Even though plenty of scientists call this a phony trumped up crisis with little scientific viability, it is being shoved down our throats and will cost us big money. What’s the media appeal? Cuddly Polar bears. They sell Coca Cola and global warming.

Even if global warming is true, it is not for the reasons stated by these ‘scientists’ who must come up with crises in order to garner research money ( translated “paycheques” ), it is due to solar cycles rather than man’s industrialization and air pollution. Solar flares, sunspots, volcanic activity and other natural causes which at some point are just as likely to cause global cooling. It is telling when science shows on TV mention how glaciers show how often the world has had these global warming cycles, then illogically determine that the one this time is caused by man, not solar or planetary factors.

Scientists who point these facts out are made to look like fools in the media akin to those who believe then earth is flat. Dialogue is closed off and comments are made to the press that this is indisputable, and the need for debate is over. This ‘science’ got its’ main impetus from the media’s hatred of George W. Bush who won the presidency over their beloved Al Gore and now has a life of its’ own. It is

no coincidence that the main opposition to “global warming crisis’ cries are conservatives, many of whom are Christians.

## Money

There is a move underway to take the world to a different commerce standard. Currently, the world is based on the US dollar, which has been the standard for many decades. However, the seriously faltering US economy with an incalculable debt load ( on which they can barely service the interest payments ) is of great concern to the rest of the world, especially Europe.

It is conceivable that within the next 5 years or sooner, the US dollar will be replaced as the standard with a more stable unit based on a growing economy like China or the Euro. I heard one economist warning that the US was on the verge of devaluing its’ dollar in an attempt to stabilize it. This has been done in other countries with some limited success in staving off national bankruptcy, but the immediate impact to people like you or I is the immediate loss of a huge percentage of savings.

Much of the debt that the US has accumulated is with China and the oil rich Middle East. When the US dollar is devalued, and the standard changes to another currency, the US will be so severely crippled within the world economy that their economy and viability as a super power will be ruined. It is entirely possible at that point that a non-military takeover of the US could occur at the hands of those to whom the US owes all this money. This could be one reason that the USA does not show up in end times prophecy.

## Technology

Daniel 12:4 tells us; <sup>4</sup>But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book, until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." Although there are probably other ways to interpret this verse, it is found in a verse that is definitely referring to the end times.

There is no question that human knowledge is always increasing, and has been since Adam & Eve arrived on they scene. There have been key stretches of time where knowledge and technology thrived in one place or another. Europe has had its’ turn with the Industrial Revolution of the 1800’s; and the US seems to be on that treadmill over the last century or so. Times of war and post-wars create many innovations which can flow over into peacetime technology or innovations; and research develops medical & pharmaceutical solutions to diseases and famines which often result from wars.

However, even a cursory comparison between the 20<sup>th</sup> – 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and the rest of recorded history ( especially the last 60 years ) reveals a virtual explosion of knowledge which is expressed most often in technology and in the ability to sp[read that knowledge around the world at the speed of light. Unfortunately,

wisdom does not usually accompany the spread of knowledge & technology. For example, the same medical establishment that brings us miraculous cures also provides abortions on demand, and is starting to lean towards euthanasia.

If you were to find a cogent person who is about 110 years old, and could tap into the changes they had seen over their lifetime, the results would be astounding. Just ponder a few of the areas of technology – air travel, automobiles, ballpoint pens, books, paper, electricity, plumbing, natural gas heat, clothing, industrialization, the generation of wealth, architecture, the calculator, the computer, cell phones, I-pods, the Internet, the social network, GPS, electronic bio-chips, banking & shopping – ATM's & chip cards, On-Star, laser guided bombs, stealth aircraft, space travel, etc.

We live in a time when we are no longer amazed by the newest innovations – we are so used to techno-change that we expect big changes as a natural course of events, and the growth of knowledge, now exponential, builds quickly on the history behind it to “improve” our lives.

## Other Factors

Many other worldwide elements play into this globalization scenario that we are seeing shaping up. Even the most democratic governments like the US, Canada and Great Britain are becoming increasingly socialistic, with left leaning politicians ruling the day. The government is the thing and personal issues are significant only if they affect the whole. Socialistic health systems are preferred, which may be helpful to many, but eventually will control who lives and who dies as a cash strapped government must decide where that limited amount of money goes. Euthanasia will become an attractive or legislated alternative to chronic care, and abortion will grow in importance to eliminate the potentially handicapped who are drains on the medical bank account too. In present day China, families are limited to one child – any 2<sup>nd</sup> pregnancies are aborted by order of the state, and there is also an encouraged tendency to abort fetuses which are female! ⑨

Natural disasters like earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, massive hurricanes and fierce tornadoes are more and more commonplace – cf. **Matt. 24:7** – increasing in intensity and frequency; there are wars and rumors of wars all over the globe, both civil and international; genocides in many places; world poverty has become a focus of many within the church at the expense of evangelization; homosexuality has exploded as a movement over the last 30 years to the extent that heterosexuals are beginning to be seen as the weird ones – I would recommend that everyone read Michael L. Brown's book, “A Queer Thing Happened to America”; Woe to those who call evil good – cf. **Rom. 1:18-32** which is now the norm in our society which is under a well deserved judgment from a holy God.

Darwinian evolution has taken over as the normal view of how everything began, replacing creation in just 150 years, to the point where even dialogue is closed off and those espousing creation, intelligent design or providing evidence that evolution is a crock are silenced by the so-called “intellectuals” and are looked on as idiots.

I could have gone into much more detail on all of these elements – we have barely scratched the surface – but my intention was to show you how the culture, economy, politics and religion are morphing with mind-numbing & alarming speed into a world system which will easily accept the concept of a world leader to take charge and ‘solve’ these problems for us. People are looking for that kind of leadership, a saviour if you will ( the world’s idea of a saviour, not ours ) which seems to be the only conceivable hope for peace, economic prosperity, brotherhood and tranquil lives – the deception of Satan is almost ready to be put in place.

With this background in mind, we’ll move onto the main part of the lesson which I believe the Bible presents to us in Ezekiel 38 & 39, showing us a final puzzle piece, that last straw which allows the Antichrist to begin his career as the ‘saviour’ the world longs for.

## Ezekiel 38 & 39

There is a lengthy description of an invasion of Israel found in Ezekiel 38 & 39, which virtually all commentators believe has not yet taken place. The passage holds significant detail, and since it precedes chapter 40-48, which are the description of a Millennial Temple and the worship at that Temple, many automatically presume that this invasion must be a picture of Armageddon at the end of the Tribulation period. There is even the element of fire coming down from heaven to quell the rebellion. However, it is not quite that cut and dried. There are actually 7 major positions argued for by scholars as to identifying the time period of Ezekiel 38 & 39. ⑩

1. ) Some time prior to the beginning of the 7 year Tribulation ( months or even a year or two )
2. ) At the very beginning of the 7 year Tribulation
3. ) Before the mid point of the Tribulation
4. ) At the mid point of the Tribulation
5. ) Near the end of the Tribulation in conjunction with Armageddon
6. ) During the 75 day interlude between the Tribulation period and the Millennial Kingdom
7. ) At the very end of the Millennial Kingdom<sup>vi</sup>

It is not my intention in a Sunday School setting to examine every one of these 7 positions in detail – there is just not enough time. The arguments are involved and at times lengthy and complicated. However, I will attempt to present the evidence I believe supports the position I am convinced of, and the one I believe

is the 2<sup>nd</sup> most plausible. We will also go through the 2 chapters and at least highlight the key verses and sets of verses which lead us to an interpretive conclusion.

Before we get to that, Douglas Berner helpfully identifies 6 key elements<sup>vii</sup> within the 2 chapters which are critical in determining the solution to the problem of the timing of what Ezekiel is prophesying.

1. ) Israel is dwelling securely in the land at the time of the invasion. It is a land brought back from war, a people gathered out of many nations, and mountains which have been a continual waste.
2. ) The invasion of Gog & Magog is instigated by God to have the invading armies serve His purpose by rousing the fury of His jealousy for His people Israel, and provoking His judgment against the nations of this alliance by totally decimating the invading armies and much of their homelands in the wrath of God's intervention for Israel.
3. ) Israel is polluting the Holy Name of God and God instigates the invasion for the specific purpose of sanctifying His Holy Name among His people Israel, and among the nations of the world.
4. ) Israel undergoes a partial rebirth following the destruction of Gog and Magog and recognizes that God has turned His face back to Israel.
5. ) Israel is given a specific period of seven months for cleansing the land and for the burial of Gog's dead soldiers immediately following the war.
6. ) Israel is given a specific period of seven years for burning the weapons left by Gog's armies immediately following the war. ⑪

All of these points are important, but Arnold Fruchtenbaum stresses, *“These seven months of burying and seven years of burning are crucial in determining when this invasion occurs. For any view to be correct, it must satisfy the requirements of these seven months and seven years.”*<sup>viii</sup> To be honest, this 6<sup>th</sup> point has been of great assistance in helping me to arrive at a position on this question.

## I. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Most Likely Interpretation At the Mid Point of the Tribulation

This viewpoint has as its' strong points that, due to the period of peace caused by the Antichrist as the First Seal judgment, which starts the Tribulation, Israel is dwelling in peace and ( at least seeming ) security. They apparently have been given the allowance to build their new temple on the Temple Mount, and revived worship in the temple is going on until Antichrist goes into the temple and desolates it by blaspheming against God and declaring himself to be god.

Certainly Israel is at this time a land into which Jews have been regathered, since it is future to us, and Israel can be described that way even today. This of course assumes that the present Israel is in fact, that Israel. Since this Israel

seems to be perpetually at war or under threat of war, this time of 3 ½ years of peace fits the bill for them having been brought out of war.

The impetus for the attack from a human viewpoint could be the Abomination of Desolation, and this invasion attempt could very well be the war that is referred to in the Second Seal judgment. Some see a parallel to this in Daniel 11:40-45, but there are problems with that view.

At this time, 3 ½ years into the Tribulation period, a number of things are converging – Satan & his demons are tossed out of heaven to earth, the Two Witnesses are murdered by the Antichrist, and war against the Jews and the saints begins in earnest. It would make sense for the invasion to take place here, even if it fails because the failure results in a change in the balance of world powers, as well as a refreshing of Israel's interest in worshipping the true God. The failure of the armies from the north to successfully attack Jerusalem may inspire Antichrist to move to the next level, right in line with Satan's plans of domination and destruction of God's people. It is very unlikely that the Antichrist is the leader of this army, because he is killed during the invasion.

There are weak points in this position. For one thing, it does not line up with the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> points of the list above. There is not enough time to allow for 7 months of burial and cleansing of the land, and there are not even 7 years left in world history, so there is no time for seven years of burning weapons.

Gog is not likely the Northern king of Daniel 11. He is unsuccessful and is killed before he achieves any real goal against Israel. Daniel 11: 40-44 is not a revelation of a supernatural intervention by God to save Israel, but rather a time when Antichrist will subdue or destroy 3 other leaders ( horns ). Ezekiel makes no mention of the temple in chapters 38 & 39, which is odd if this takes place in conjunction with a temple into which Antichrist enters to start the Great tribulation. Since Ezekiel's entire book keys on the temple at Jerusalem, this is a very strange omission if the temple in fact exists when this invasion takes place. 12

It is also odd that God would spare Israel at this time in the Tribulation only to then allow Satan to wage war against them immediately following this.

## II. The Most Likely Interpretation Just Prior to the Beginning of the Tribulation

To my surprise, this became the view I am most comfortable with supporting after studying these 2 chapters for many months. My initial thoughts leaned towards a post-Millennial position, but there were too many problems with that view once I studied it. The names of Gog & Magog are in it ( Rev. 20 ), and the armies are destroyed by fire, but the rest of the argument for that position is weak.

The weakest part of this position is the idea that Israel is to be dwelling in safety or security when the attack occurs, and while the end of the Millennium and the mid point the Tribulation qualify for that aspect of the passage, many other aspects, especially points 5 & 6, do. Currently, Israel does not seem to be dwelling in safety, being under constant terrorist attacks, rocket attacks, threats of nuclear attacks and the like, they do have a secure defense system, and they are dwelling in unwallled cities. There is great legitimate speculation by many that Israel is on the verge of finding accessible oil in their territory<sup>ix</sup>, and if they do, this could radically shift western world power in their favour, which could create an era of at least temporary peace and security for Israel that we cannot yet envision.

It is also possible that prior to the Tribulation period, this time of peace, no matter how short lived, may inspire the nations named in Ezekiel 38 to risk an invasion in order to capture that wealth and erase them from the map. Israel having oil would seriously undermine Islamic control over the world oil reserves and affect the price of oil, especially to an ally such as the USA. Such a find could revitalize they currently weak position of the US support for Israel.

One aspect of the current Israel – something that leads many to think that they may not be the Israel depicted in the end times just yet – is that they are basically a secular nation with some religious Jews in it. They certainly do not recognize Christ as their Messiah yet, and their honour and worship of even Jehovah is shallow and a secondary consideration, after the land. They are set on taking pride in the gift rather than the giver of the gift. They are certainly a land that will be recovered from war if this invasion occurs in the near future and the scenario of peaceful dwelling takes place. Also, this very condition of spiritual lethargy that changes as a result of God's intervention is what is described for Israel at the time of the invasion. 13

When the armies from the north attack, and God decimates them before they can damage Israel, those in Israel will have their eyes opened to recognize Him as their God, and to see His protection of them as divinely prophesied, and then fulfilled. This failed attack will create a power vacuum from which Antichrist can rise to power, and perhaps even claim that he is behind the victory over this failed army, perhaps even claiming to be the long awaited Messiah ( **Matt. 24:5** ). It would not be the first time that Satan stole the credit for something God had done.

This neatly opens the door for a 7 year peace treaty to be engineered by Antichrist as is predicted by Daniel, and even makes room for a peace offering by the Antichrist to allow Israel to take over the Temple Mount and build a temple there as part of the treaty. If this takes place before the tribulation starts, there is time for 7 months of burial as well as 7 years of burning weapons, especially if it occurs 3 ½ years prior to the peace treaty, because by the 3 ½ year point in the Tribulation, Israel will be under siege by the Antichrist, and will have no time to carry out burials or weapons destruction. There is no idea of the Antichrist in the Ezekiel account, so if he is on the scene, he is in the wings awaiting an

opportunity to rise to power, and this failed war may give him the very opportunity he seeks, and kill off some of his rivals at the same time ( Dan. 7:20 – three fall ).

How does this pre-Tribulation attack compare with the timing of the Rapture, which as we have seen, is also pre-Tribulational? Although the pre-Tribulation Rapture is an event at the start of the Tribulation, nowhere in Scripture is it said to be the starting point for the Tribulation – we tend to assume that. Instead, the event that triggers the 7 years is the peace treaty that Antichrist negotiates with Israel – the First Seal. This is what begins Daniel’s 70<sup>th</sup> week, which relates to God dealing with Israel.

Although it is obviously impossible to be dogmatic here, a logical sequence of events would be for the Rapture to occur first, followed almost immediately by this invasion. Here are some of the best arguments for that.

So far, the US and Canada support Israel as do most true Christians, even if its’ at the expense of affordable oil. It is the liberals within the USA which would prefer to cast out Israel in favour of Arab oil. So, if the Rapture occurs and the church is gone worldwide, but with a huge contingent of people gone from North America, the US would be paralyzed and their military might at least temporarily be affected, a huge opportunity arises for the countries that are listed in Ezekiel 38 to launch an invasion against Israel which they presume will now be unhindered. Once the Rapture occurs, who is left? The Jews, atheists, Muslims, apostates and liberals, Eastern religion adherents, most Roman Catholics, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Buddhists, Hindus and the indifferent masses. Since II Thessalonians 2 tells us that the Holy Spirit will withdraw His restraining power, the people left on earth at first will be bent towards evil. Israel will be alone in the center of many enemies, and without allies.

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Islam will see this as a sign from Allah and feel that the time is ripe to dominate the world, and to invade Israel and finally wipe them off the map. It is no coincidence that virtually every nation named in Ezekiel 38 as part of the attacking coalition is currently heavily Muslim. We’ll see that shortly when we look at the text.

Doug Berner posits, *“It is quite possible and even probable that the removal of the church and the restraining force, which allows the revealing of the man of sin and an intense rise of iniquity and chaos throughout the world, will play a contributing role in the timing and sudden onslaught of this invasion of Israel. Russia and its’ Islamic allies will be minimally impacted and distracted by the Rapture and it would make sense for them to want to take advantage of the state of disorganization within the United States caused by the disappearance of many people, including some key American leaders.”*<sup>x</sup>

While the Rapture is God's closing act for the Church age, the war of Gog & Magog appears to be the opening salvo leading to the Day of the Lord and the Tribulation.

### III. The Nations Involved      Ezek. 38: 1- 6

The first 6 verses here identify the main participants in this army that will be assembled, the prophecy against the leader of this horde as well as a clear statement that it is God who instigates this action in v. 4. One of the things we must do, and it is not as simple as some might think, and there are various ideas as to who these nations are, is to attempt to identify ancient nations with who they now are, because most if not all of the names have changed.

The main character is Gog, and if you have done any studies in eschatology, you have seen this name before. Now, many say Gog = Antichrist, but this is very unlikely, as he is killed in the battle described here ( Ezek. 39:2-5 ). Gog is mentioned in Rev. 20, along with Magog, but that does not mean that Rev. 20 is a parallel to this account. More likely, those 2 names are used in Rev. 20 as symbolic of the heart of rebellion present in Rev. 20, rather than names of real persons. Although there are some parallels, there are a number of reasons why this account in Rev. 20 is not what Ezekiel is describing in chapter 38 & 39. One of the strongest is the fact that at the end of the invasion, birds of prey and animals are bidden to come and eat the carcasses of the fallen. Now that is reminiscent of Rev. 19 and the end of the Tribulation, but the Millennium features a covenant between God and the animals which precludes their desire to eat meat – they all become vegetarian. ( **Isa. 65:25** )

15

This Gog, in Ezekiel, is not a person's name, but is rather a title ( like Pharaoh, King, President, Prime Minister, etc. ), and he is said to be of the land of Magog – the place he rules over, so Magog is a nation or perhaps a coalition of nations. Gog is also said to be the chief prince of Meschech & Tubal. Some translations say he is the Prince of Rosh, which means, according to over 500 uses of "Rosh" in the OT, the "chief prince", not necessarily 'Russia' like so many say. That assumes the word is not a proper name; if it is, then it could mean Russia.

Magog is thought by scholars to be the countries that are along the southern border of the former USSR – the "stan" countries – Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgystan and Afghanistan. Magog is a name that could refer to the ancient Mongols, and in fact, in Arabic, the Great Wall of China, built to keep the Russian Mongols out of China is called the Wall of Al Magog. In Islamic eschatology, Gog & Magog are tribes hidden away in a remote northern region of ice and will be released by Allah to invade Israel at the time of the end. This concept is captured in Surah 18:95-100, and here is what Surah 21:96-97 says;

*"Until the Gog & Magog are let through ( their barrier ), and they swiftly swarm from every hill. Then will the True promise draw nigh of fulfillment: Then behold! The eyes of the unbelievers will fixedly stare in*

*horror: Ah! Woe to us! We are indeed heedless of this; nay, we truly did wrong.”*

Meshech & Tubal have been traditionally seen as Moscow & Tobolsk in Russia, mainly because of the similarity of the names, but recent scholarship is casting a lot of doubt on this. Now, these areas are more likely regions of Turkey, Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan – north of Israel, but west of Magog. In v. 5, other nations who accompany Gog and the others are:

- Persia – to the east of Israel, and now modern day Iran ( the name, Persia was changed to Iran in 1935 )
- Cush or Ethiopia – to the south of Israel in NE Africa, and likely encompasses Sudan as well
- Put – modern day Libya in North Africa
- Gomer – Germany and may include South Russia and the Ukraine
- Beth-Togarmah – Turkey
- V. 6 – and many people with them

In other words, Israel is surrounded yet none of the named countries actually border Israel. Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia are not mentioned by name, so they could be the “many peoples” with Gog, but that is uncertain because they are not named. So these are the players – as far as we can determine by ancient names, but note vv. 3-4 – God’s sovereignty, and then look at vv. 10-12 – man’s responsibility for his actions. This is a great example of compatibilism. God has a purpose for Gog and this army, and Gog and his horde have an evil purpose for what they want to do. 16

#### IV. The Human Side

vv. 7-13

In v. 7, the army is to prepare and be on guard because they will be summoned ( v. 8 ) after a long time. In v. 8, the time mentioned is “in the last years” ( HCSB ) or “in the latter years” ( ESV ). At that time they will go against a land restored from war, and regathered from many peoples to the mountains of Israel which had been a ruin.

A key element in v. 8 is that it supplies the first of 4 statements ( cf. also 38:11,14; 39:26 ) that the people are now living securely or in peace. Since the land has already been identified as Israel, at what points in history has Israel ever dwelt securely in her land, and been attacked in the way these 2 chapters describe? Certainly not in OT times, with the possible exception of a small window of time when Solomon was king, but turmoil within then tore the nation apart, and attacks from the outside then came after the nation became 2 separate entities.

Even once Israel returned from the exile which these attacks generated, there was no real peace nor a failed attack that parallels this one. Israel has now been back in the land since 1948, and under constant fear of attack and a brief history of skirmish and war after war, but no parallel to Ezekiel has occurred since 1948

either. It cannot be said today that Israel is now dwelling in security, not with the threat of terrorist attacks, the specter of nuclear attack being brandished by Iran, and the general flow of unpopularity growing, even among longtime allies like the USA.

Looking ahead in the prophetic passages, only the 3 ½ year peace in the first half of the Tribulation finds Israel at peace ( & it's a false peace of course ), although they don't know it's a false, temporary peace, and the Millennial Kingdom show Israel at peace in the Scriptures. In both situations, the peace is shattered by war – the second seal judgment in one case, and the final Satanic rebellion in the other, when the rebels are destroyed by fire from heaven before it can mount their attack on Jerusalem. It is this key aspect of the passage that makes the end of the Millennial Kingdom attractive as the time frame Ezekiel is predicting. However, the Rev. 20 account does not arise from the north, and the wildlife issue already noted are evidence against this. The battle of Armageddon at Rev. 19 also does not fit many of the facts presented in Ezekiel 38-39.

So what is the time frame? Well, although a dogmatic view cannot be presented from outside of Scripture, a speculative but logical view is found on p. 3 of this lesson which appears to fit the facts of what we do have in the book of Revelation and other eschatological passages.

We saw from 38:4 that God controls this horde, and in v.8 we presume that it is God who will summon them to attack, even if that summons comes through Satan. Verses 10-12 describe the human responsibility element. They do not do what they do because they are puppets ( a charge aimed at Calvinists consistently for their belief in the full sovereignty of God ), but because they desire to do so. They mean it for evil, but God intends it for good – cf. Gen. 50:20 and Isa. 10:5-11.

Notice their target's situation & location – v. 12 – “people gathered from the nations and acquiring cattle and possessions who live at the center of the world.” ( HCSB ); “center of the earth” ( ESV ). In Ezek. 5:5 we are told that God set Israel in the midst or center of the nations so it is possible that this is a reference to that. Israel is, after all, surrounded on all sides by enemies forming this coalition against her; Israel being like a giant bullseye, and almost from the time of her inception as God's nation, has been the focal point of much of world history, especially the history of war and genocide.

Now, in v. 13, 3 more countries are named – Sheba ( Saudi Arabia ); Dedan ( uncertain etymology but most believe this is somewhere in the Persian Gulf area ), and Merchants of Tarshish ( Spain or another country referred to occasionally in history as Tarshish near the Red Sea ). Tarshish can also mean “merchant ships”. The point of this verse is almost tantamount to a registration of surprise by these 3 groups as they question the reasoning behind this invasion.

## V. The Advance of the Army      vv. 14-17

This army will know when the time is right ( see page 3 this lesson ) and will make their strategic move on Israel. It will occur “in the last days”, so we know this not referring to any OT history or church age event. According to vv. 15-16, this will be a vast army, described as being like a cloud covering the land, and their target is unquestionably Israel, “My people.”

Notice again in v. 16 – God saying, “I will bring you against My land.” So a sovereign God is the first cause of this event and as always, there is a glorious purpose at the forefront of that – *“You will come up against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the land. In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.”* God will be seen to be Holy and the nations will know Him as a result of this event. Verse 17 - Is this not what God has prophesied in times past?

## VI. God’s Supernatural Defense of Israel    vv. 18-23

As the invasion force advances towards Israel, God’s wrath flares up and a great earthquake occurs, which is severe enough that all living things on the planet, & even in the seas tremble because of it. Mountains are leveled ( thrown down ), cliffs collapse and every wall falls to the ground.

In v. 21, God will call for a sword against Gog on “all My mountains” – God is still in control, and every man’s sword will be against his brother. This sounds a lot like Zech. 14:1-15 which is speaking about the battle that occurs right before Christ returns – notice v. **10,12-15**. (18)

On top of that, in Ezek. 38:22, God will judge this army with plagues and bloodshed, torrential rain, hailstones, fire & brimstone, and notice again God’s purpose in **v. 23**.

## VII. The Defeat of Gog’s Army      Ezek. 39:1-8

We’ll look only briefly at Ezekiel 39. In the first 8 verses, God describes His victory over Gog. The invaders get as far as the mountains of Israel, and then their weapons are knocked out of their hands and they fall on the mountains of Israel. The birds and wild animals will feast on their carcasses, calling to mind Rev. 19:17-21. God will send fire on Magog and those living securely on the coasts and islands ( probably those supporting this invasion, but not participants ), but why? Verses 6-8 provide the answers - *I will send fire on Magog and on those who dwell securely in the coastlands, and they shall know that I am the LORD. <sup>7</sup>And 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 shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. <sup>8</sup>Behold, it is coming and it will be brought about, declares the Lord GOD. That is the day of which I have spoken.*

Verse 7 is intriguing – “I will make My Holy name known in the midst of My people, Israel.” Up until the Tribulation, as far as we know, Israel ( the 1948 Israel ) does not know God’s holy name, and they certainly don’t honor Christ. They are secular and generally faithless and almost atheistic. This is one reason that many believers do not support Israel as it is now, and refuse to believe this is the promised end times Israel. But it is this event that God uses to open the eyes of a secular Israel according to this verse, making it unlikely that this invasion takes place at the end of the Tribulation ( because by then, Israel will have been saved ) or at the end of The Millennium ( same reason ), and narrows the time frame down to the 2 most likely possibilities I outlined earlier in this lesson - Just after or concurrent with the Rapture or just as Antichrist defiles the Temple.

Verse 7 also adds that the nations will then also know that “God is the Lord, the Holy One of Israel”. Certainly, if this occurs around the Rapture & therefore the Tribulation is imminent, the nations will know that God is the Holy One of Israel, and Israel will finally realize that they had rejected their Messiah. It will be revealed during the 7 year Tribulation and the first eye opener for Israel will be, for the first time in centuries, a physical deliverance of the nation by none other than God – that will be obvious.

## VIII. Cleansing the Land vv. 9-16

The key elements in this section are related to the timing, a large clue to tell us when this battle might occur. In v. 9, the weapons stripped from the army by God will be gathered and burned for 7 years. This really narrows down the options. It virtually eliminates the mid-Tribulation period, and even the beginning of the Tribulation; neither leaves enough time to provide 7 years of unhindered access to the weapons in order to burn them. The end of the Tribulation or Pre-Millennial is still possible, and even seems to connect with **Ezek. 39:4, 17-20**. However, a period just following or at the Rapture and the start of world peace by 3 ½ years is a better choice. It allows 7 years to do this without having to defend oneself. 19

We tend to assume that the Rapture is the event that kick starts the Tribulation, but the Rapture is an imminent event and could easily occur a few years prior to the First Seal Judgment. The Rapture, and this attack, made pragmatic by the Rapture and all it portends, could provide the impetus to begin this attack on a relatively ally-less Israel. It could also give the golden opportunity for the Antichrist to rise to power, with many of his rivals having been killed in the attack. His rise to power, being seen as a peace-loving negotiator could take a few years until his position is secure and he makes a peace with Israel. He could be the one claiming to have solved the world’s perpetual peace problem, and Israel seems to be always at the modern center of that issue, so bringing the peace process to Israel is the key to world peace.

v. 12 – It will take 7 months to bury the dead, & for the animals to eat their carcasses. All the people of the land ( v. 13 ) will bury them, making this a national project, and one that is honourable - “their fame will spread” – and perhaps the humanitarian efforts of Israel to provide this honour for their enemies also is an impetus for the world to see them in a different light, allowing Antichrist to gain popularity by bringing peace into Israel. Certainly, there has to be something that compels the nations to allow Israel to rebuild their temple on the Dome of the Rock ( which may be destroyed during the great earthquake ), so that it is extent when the Antichrist defiles it half way through the Tribulation. A lot of this is speculative of course, but I believe the scenario I have presented here fits with the prophecy of Ezekiel, Revelation facts, as well as the progression of the world’s history looking forward as much as we can.

From here, vv. 17-29 describe a progression towards the Millennial Kingdom, which we know arrives at the end of the Tribulation period of 7 years, but the second main purpose of the Tribulation ( besides world judgment ) is the salvation of Israel en masse – cf. **Rom. 11:25-27**, and note **Ezek. 39:25,28**. This 2 chapter account is sandwiched between Ezekiel 37 ( the dry bones come to life ), and chapter 40-48 where a Millennial Temple and the worship in it is described in great detail along with the return of God’s glory to the temple for good, and Ezek. 48:30-35 describes the New Jerusalem. It would be easy to look at Ezek. 38 & 39 and conclude that this battle is the one described in Rev. 20, but too many details just don’t fit that account, although a number of good theologians believe that way.

Ezekiel 39:25-27 for sure does not have to be describing an instantaneous blessing awarded to Israel, but could easily be describing a process ( like 7 years ) by which Israel learns who Christ is and sees God’s power revealed, and they are delivered just as they were in the Exodus account. They will see God’s sovereignty and power revealed in the judgments, experience His divine protection and His saving grace, and then as Ezek. 39:22 says, *“The house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God, from that day forward.”*

Next lesson – Lesson # 42 – Revelation 13:1-10 The Antichrist

<sup>i</sup> Source – Muslim Population Statistics – internet site accessed March 2011

<sup>ii</sup> Ron Rhodes, *The Coming Oil Storm*, Harvest House 2010, p. 7

<sup>iii</sup> Bat Ye’or, *Eurabia – The Euro-Arab Axis*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006

<sup>iv</sup> IBID, p. 147

<sup>v</sup> IBID, p. 111-113

<sup>vi</sup> Douglas Berner; *The Silence is Broken! God Hooks Ezekiel’s Gog & Magog*; Douglas Berner; 2006; p. 278

<sup>vii</sup> IBID; p. 279

<sup>viii</sup> IBID, p. 279, quoting Arnold Fruchtenbaum.

<sup>ix</sup> Ron Rhodes, *The Coming Oil Storm*, Harvest House 2010, p. 131

<sup>x</sup> IBID, p. 327