The Gog & Magog Enigma
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Introduction
Enigma – a person or thing that is mysterious, puzzling, or difficult to understand. During World War II, the Germans used an encryption device named Enigma to send & receive coded military messages. The Nazis considered the cipher unbreakable, but in fact it had been decrypted with great effort by the British Ultra project at Bletchley Park, & this was to prove decisive in the ultimate Allied victory. No matter how intricate a man-made code, with sufficient motivation or military intelligence it can usually be broken. But what about a code generated by God? Now THAT decoding effort would seem well nigh impossible. Then again, if the Scriptures reveal truth to men, what would be the Lord’s point in giving a whole section of apparently unbreakable Biblical code? But such seems to be the case for most Christians with Gog & Magog.

Gog & Magog – just saying the words makes many Bible believers wince. Little doubt the fearful names of Ezk38-39 evoke both dread & fantasy among the faithful. “Just sit back & let me tell you about the future conflagration in the land of Israel!” a self-proclaimed prophecy expert may tell you, as you wince & seek to change the subject (“Oops, now I shouldn’t have brought THAT up! Note to self...”). On the other hand, most of us treat Ezk38-39 as fly-by territory in our annual treks through the Bible – “I’m confused & don’t get much out of Gog & Magog, so I’ll just breeze through it like I do the genealogies in Numbers & Chronicles.”

Is this really all we’re to make out of this elaborate passage? Did the Lord just leave it to the seminarians to endlessly debate its contents, while the great unwashed masses of Christianity are left out in the wintery cold of ignorance, receiving no warmth from two whole chapters of Scripture? People rightly make much of & base their whole lives on a verse or two of the Bible – the Great Commission (Mt28:19-20) readily comes to mind. Will we really ignore two whole Biblical chapters because we find them confusing or uncomfortable? Some make arrogant prophetic assertions about cloudy matters (cf 1Tm1:6-7), while others steadfastly maintain that ignorance is bliss & next to godliness – the less you know about such things or talk about them in polite company, the better. As far as the application, some say Ezk38-39 concerns the distant past, such as events with the Scythians or Antiochus Epiphanes, while others contend that the text is about our own near future, impacting our view of ethnic Israel & the land of Palestine today. Which is it? Should we even care?

Yes. Since the God of heaven has revealed (not concealed) Himself in the Scriptures, then what the prophets say is profita. We do not have Scriptural license to declare certain passages or topics out of bounds because they engender bewilderment or heated debate. Do you lay off speaking about Jesus to the unregenerate because it keeps the peace with them? Neither should we ignore certain Biblical passages because we find them prickly or distressing. Could not the bumpy ride of deliberation draw us closer to the knowledge of the Holy One, if done in a spirit of meekness & gentleness? More importantly, the Lord Himself makes clear that the events of Gog & Magog will exalt His Name. “I will magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, & make Myself known in the sight of many nations; & they will know that I am the Lord” (Ezk38:23). “My holy name I will make known in the midst of My people Israel; & 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” (Ezk39:7). “And I will set My glory among the nations; & all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed & My hand which I have laid on them” (Ezk39:21). Not once but thrice the Lord Himself states that the conclusion of the Gog & Magog affair will magnify His Name to the nations. Doesn’t this alone warrant further investigation? At the very least, it prohibits us from willfully ignoring its contents, enigmatic though they may be.

Can we fathom the unfathomable BEFORE it comes to pass? The Biblical answer is, “Probably not.” However, we have Scriptural precedent for inscrutable passages that can be understood only AFTERWARDS. A good example is found in Zch11:4-13. The shepherd who pastures the flock doomed to slaughter was paid his wages of 30 silver pieces. “And the Lord said to me, ‘Throw it to the potter’—that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver & threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter” (Zch11:13). Surely these verses were confusing prior to the Messiah’s coming, even to Zechariah – putting to the lie the non-Biblical notion that the HUMAN “authorial intent” is the key interpretive driver (cf Dan12:8). It is only after the fact that this text is understood aright. Judas was paid 30 pieces of silver for betraying Jesus; later, stricken of conscience, he attempted to return the money, but was rebuffed by the Jewish leaders, so he threw the coins into the Temple & hung himself in the Potter’s field. The Jews took the “blood money” & purchased the selfsame field for the burial of strangers, renaming it the Field of Blood (Akeldama). Could all of this have been deciphered beforehand from Zch11? No, probably not – not unless God granted someone unrecorded additional revelation. In Zch11 we see the Lord’s prophetic genius in showing He had ordained the events, but revealing it in such a way that doesn’t clue in the rebellious & unwitting actors taking part in the Messianic drama. If it was clear to all exactly what would come to pass before the fact, the Jews would have understood what was to take place & refused to play their respective parts. Instead, by making the revelation to Zechariah opaque, hundreds of years prior to the Messianic stage production, it becomes clear only after the fact what the Lord Himself had orchestrated. For Gog & Magog, we can surmise that if the events are future to our day, then no amount of literal or figurative speculation can untie the prophetic knot, lest the future participants be forewarned. If, on the other hand, these events are in our past (but future to Ezekiel), then we might expect that some careful examinations of Gog & Magog would unlock the meaning, as in the Zch11 example. In other words, Ezk38-39 may have been confusing to Ezekiel & his contemporaries, but, if the Gog & Magog affair is from a bygone era, then the Scripturally faithful should be able to comprehend it & rejoice in its contents. Rather than being a source of consternation, if Ezekiel chapters 38 & 39 are history to us, then this prophecy will exalt the Lord & bring joy to the hearts of genuine Christians today; but if they are future to us, then stamping them with a big question mark & setting them aside is likely for the best, though to be sure this is a dissatisfaction non-solution.
This brings us to the general New Testament Messianic principle that bears on our analysis of Ezk38–39 – & what could be more important than things pertaining to our Lord & Savior, Jesus Christ?! Peter tells us, “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful searches & inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ & the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things into which angels long to look.” (1Pt1:10-12). If ever there were a passage that fits the description of being confusing to the prophets themselves, surely it must be that of Gog & Magog! No doubt Ezekiel puzzled at what was revealed to him, wondering about the Messianic future. If a prophetic passage is a thoroughgoing enigma, then maybe the New Testament Messianic anchor of 1Pt1:10-12 will firmly establish us, keeping us away from the ship sinking rocks of crazy speculation. Yes indeed, we may rightly expect that Ezk38–39 not only glorifies God, but also exalts His Messiah. Doesn’t this alone make it worth a closer look?!

### Puzzle Pieces

Expert puzzlers do not “cheat” by looking at the picture on the box, but they do follow the general rule of setting out the edge pieces to frame the puzzle. We’re not given the picture on the box with Gog & Magog, but Ezekiel chapters 38 & 39 give us plenty of edge pieces, criteria that need to all be simultaneously satisfied. We are not at liberty to emphasize some while glossing over others – all of the edge pieces should neatly frame the final picture. There’s to be no cheating or using scissors to “fix” certain pieces – if the Lord of heaven revealed things to us, then all of them must go together without “fudging” the answer. After laying out the edge pieces, we can then evaluate various suggestions to see what people & timeframe best fit the host of quite specific criteria, thereby enabling us to flesh out the center portion of the puzzle. Like a fairly simple child’s puzzle, we only have a handful of interlocking edge pieces. Let the enumeration of the criteria commence!

#### (1) God Glorifying & Messianic

As mentioned above, the Gog & Magog solution must bring glory to God among the nations; if a suggestion does not magnify God with the Gentiles, then it must be rejected out of hand. Also already discussed is that there is likely some Messianic tie-in. Surely Ezk38–39 is inscrutable to Ezekiel, & thus fits the description given in 1Pt1:10-12 of a prophetic passage that would require “careful searches & inquiries” by the prophet himself as he sought “to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ & the glories to follow.” In the absence of compelling evidence to the contrary, it would therefore seem best to look for a Messianic component in Gog & Magog’s fulfillment. We will see much of Jesus as we consider the other conditions given in the text, more so than ever you would have anticipated with just a cursory Gog & Magog glance.

#### (2) Frequently Foretold

An often overlooked criterion is plainly stated in Ezk38:17: “‘Thus says the Lord God: ‘Are you he of whom I have spoken in FORMER DAYS by My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied FOR YEARS in those days that I would bring you against them?’” Whoever Gog & Magog are, they must have been the subject of several previous prophecies, not merely one or two. By itself this condition excludes many suggestions as to the identity of Gog & Magog. For example, Greenhill (& much later, Rydelnik) suggests that the “Agag” of Num24:7 should rather be translated “Gog,” as in the LXX. While this translation may be acceptable, this does not really help solve the Ezk38–39 riddle. At best this is only one previous prophetic reference to Gog, & zero for Magog, while 38:17 implies several preceding Old Testament (OT) passages. The answer to the Gog & Magog enigma must entail numerous previous OT references to the same affair described in Ezk38–39, not just one or two scattered & debatable passages.

#### (3) What’s In A Name?

But who were / are / will be Gog & Magog? These names are essentially unknown outside of Gen10 (plus 1Chr1:5 & 5:4), but in itself that may provide the needed clue. In the Scriptures, the obscure names themselves often give the intended meaning. For instance, “Jeremiah said to him, ‘Pashhur is not the name the Lord has called you, but rather Magor-missabib’” (Jer20:3), which means, “terror on every side.” It is unlikely that Pashhur’s friends actually called him Magor-missabib – “Hey, Terror-on-every-side, how are the wife & kids?” Rather, the name itself gave a prediction of what the Lord would do to this rebel, that he would face terror from the Lord on every side. In a similar vein, the valley of Jehoshaphat (Jl3:2,12) is not an actual location; rather, Jehoshaphat means, “the Lord judges,” & God “will enter into judgment with them [the nations] there.” Note the proximity of the application – “Jehoshaphat,” or “the Lord judges,” is applied to the valley immediately prior to the Lord saying he would enter into judgment there with the nations. Such is often the case with descriptive names, wherein the immediate context gives the application of the moniker. Another instance involves Solomon: “So she bore a son, & he called his name Solomon. Now the Lord loved him, & He sent word by the hand of Nathan the prophet: So he called his name Jedidiah [beloved of the Lord], because of the Lord” (2Sm12:24b-25). Again, there is no record that Solomon was routinely called Jedidiah; the name itself pointed to God’s relationship with this crown prince. Scriptural examples could be quickly multiplied; but suffice it to say that when a name is not readily associated with a person or place in the Bible, the moniker itself may convey the intended meaning, & this will be supported by the immediate context.

Let us first consider the Rosh, Meshech & Tubal listed in 38:2-3. Some contend that Rosh sounds like Russia (only in English, mind you, NOT in Hebrew), & this prophesies the future envelopment of the land of Israel by the Russian bear’s great hordes, only to have them be miraculously repulsed & exterminated by God – all based on some fanciful English etymology! Using a similar linguistic approach, one could say that “heaven” is “hell” because they both start with the letters H & E! Surely there is a solution with more keel & ballast, something a bit more stable on the Scriptural ocean. Since the nations are obscure & debatable at best, maybe a better approach is to consider what the names themselves convey in Hebrew. To our satisfaction, we find that they mean “venom” (Rosh, Strong’s #7219), “to draw or drag” (mashak, Strong’s #4900, with altered vowel pointing), & “inhabited world” (tebel, Strong’s #8398, with altered vowel pointing).
pointing). It is therefore likely that venom, drag, & worldwide (or inhabited world) highlight aspects of the Gog & Magog drama. Now we need to look for proximal validation – are there venom, drag, & worldwide aspects nearby to the text of 38:2-3? Yes, indeed! “Vomont” comes well with the “evil plan” of 38:10, & also that the Lord was against Gog & Magog (“set your face ... & prophesy AGAINST him,” 38:2); “drag” squares with hooks being required to bring out Gog & Magog (38:4); & “worldwide” is in keeping with the enormous involvement of many nations, as listed in 38:5-6. Here is yet another Scriptural example where the names themselves give the intended meaning, fleshed out in the nearby context. No particular ethnicities or nations are in view with these terms. God would oppose the evil plan (venom), Gog & Magog would be “dragged” out to destruction, & there would be “worldwide” participation in this affair – all of these are close at hand to Rosh, Mashak, & Tebel.

But isn’t it “wrong” & well nigh sinful to alter the Hebrew vowels? Isn’t this varying some of the “jots & tittles,” contra Jesus’ injunction of Mt5:18-19? In defense of the above vowel alterations, please note that the original Hebrew had only consonants, with vowels understood at the time of writing but possibly forgotten later, especially for obscure or rare words. The vowels are not part of the original text. Our current Hebrew Old Testament, the Masoretic Text (MT), has the complete vowel pointing system (dots & such applied to the consonants), which were added over 2000 years after Moses’ day by the unregenerate Jewish Masoretes, the Christ-denying scribes from the 6th to 10th century AD. Usually the context dictates the vowel pointing & thus is accurate. However, with difficult, murky, or Christ-exalting passages, it may occasionally be “legal” to revisit the vowel pointing by the Masoretes, since these vowels were not part of the original Hebrew & therefore were not divinely communicated text (of Rydelnik). We believe that such is the case here in Ezk38-39 – the ambiguous nature of Meshech & Tubal may have resulted in some Masoretic fishing for vowels to make sense of the consonants, & these vowels can be altered without doing violence to the inspired text.

Returning to the concept that the names themselves provide the intended meaning, might this selfsame approach point us in the right direction with respect to the enigmatic & fearsome names of Gog & Magog? As ever, our skilful Lord weaves a prophecy such that the faithful will understand (usually afterwards), but the participants themselves are clueless. If the actual names of the leader & people were spelled out in this passage, then the affected parties could read & heed the warnings, & the frightful events might be averted & God’s plans thwarted. No, the prophecy is given in a crafty manner so as to avoid tipping off the actors in the divine drama. It could well be that the names Gog & Magog are similarly used so as not to alert the players of their impending demise. However, if the names are the point (as above), their sense in Hebrew is not at all obvious. The words “Gog” & “Magog” have no particular Hebrew meaning, nor do they signify anything by morphing their vowel pointing. Can we yet make heads or tails out of these words?

Recall that the original Hebrew was only consonants with no vowels, the latter being added by the Masoretes centuries later. Let us suppose that our heavenly Father used an uncomplicated cryptographic technique for Gog & Magog, such that a simple letter replacement unlocks the meaning. What might that cipher be? We propose the replacement of the last consonant (on the left – Hebrew is written right to left) with the consonant following the first letter. As an English example, suppose we only wrote consonants with vowels implied, like the Jews. We see a seemingly nonsensical word, JNL – what could it mean? Replace the last letter, L, with the one that follows the first letter. J is followed by K, so we swap out the L for K, & the word becomes JNK, or “junk” with an appropriate vowel. Though the example is silly, the code itself is quite simple.

With English letters & our unpretentious cipher, MGG (Magog – Hebrew vowels are not in the original text) becomes MGN, or magan, with different vowel pointing. N (7) is the letter that follows the leading M (5), & therefore replaces the last letter in the proposed code. Written in Hebrew, מגוג becomes מגג with our letter swapping cryptography. “Magan” means, “to deliver up, deliver” (Strong’s #4042). This is a delivery unto destruction, as in Gen14:20, where God delivered (magan) the 5 kings into Abraham’s hand. In like manner, גוג (Gog) becomes געג (gud, with different vowel pointing) – D (7) being the letter subsequent to G (5) in Hebrew. “Gud” means “to invade, attack” (Strong’s #1463), & just so happens to be the succeeding Strong’s entry to #1462. Gog. An example of the use of “gud” is given by Habakkuk, where the prophet waited “quietly for the day of distress, for the people [Babylon] to arise who will invade [gud] us” (Hab3:16).

With the proposed deciphering, then, “Gog & Magog” become “gud & magan,” or “invaded & delivered up.” Maybe this humble decoding mechanism is too pedestrian for the tastes of some; but it does give appropriate meanings to the enigmatic names which appear to have no other particular Biblical or etymological significance. This easy letter replacement rule means that the leader Gog either invades or is invaded, while the nation Magog is delivered up to destruction. That Ezk38-39 describes a massive invasion accompanied by a nation or nations being delivered over to obliteration hardly requires verification – most can agree that these are detailed in the passage at hand.

If this analysis is correct – that the names themselves contain the intended meanings, & that a simple cipher was employed by Yahweh to mildly cloak the divinely intended target – then we would expect the answer to the Gog & Magog conundrum to contain an invasion (magan) & consequent devastation & ruin (gud, delivered up), with Rosh, Mashak, & Tebel pointing towards venom (God Himself being against their evil plan, 38:2,10), drag (hooks to bring them out, 38:4), & worldwide participation (38:5-6), respectively. All of the word meanings are verified by the immediate context, as we would expect if the words themselves are the point. We should not be looking for leaders & nations with these or similar monikers, despite the best efforts of our latter day end times prognosticators.

(4) Location, Location, Location

As to the location of these events, Ezk38:8 says, “... in the latter years you will come into the LAND that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the MOUNTAINS OF ISRAEL which had been a continual waste ...” Is it not clear that the Gog & Magog eruption will occur on the mountainous (OK, at least hilly) land of Israel? However, care should be taken about a definite positional conclusion, since “mountains” are often used pro-
phetically of earthly rulers & powers. A hint that Ezk38:8 might not be as literal as some suppose is given in, for example, the KJV → “against the mountains of Israel, which have been ALWAYS waste.” Certainly it is a bit of a stretch to say that the physical mountains of Israel have always been a waste, with no let up whatsoever. There have been times of great prosperity, such as during the days of Solomon; so how can the prophet speak of unending ruin in Palestine? More likely a figurative component must accompany our explanation of the mountains in Ezk38:8: “What is grand in nature – mountains, heavenly bodies, stately trees – is used to express what is dignified & important among men – kingdoms, those in authority. Therefore, political changes are represented by earthquakes, tempests, eclipses, rivers to blood, etc.” (JS Russell, quoting Angus). We see, then, that the term “mountains” may be speaking figuratively as well as physically of the land of Israel.

Indeed, in the passage under consideration, God says, “In My zeal & in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the LAND OF ISRAEL. The fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all the creeping things that creep on the earth, & all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence; THE MOUNTAINS ALSO WILL BE THROWN DOWN, the steep pathways will collapse & every wall will fall to the ground.” (Ezk38:19–20). While the setting is clearly given as the land of Israel, there will also be mountain leveling, walls disintegrating, & steep paths crumbling. Is this speaking of the physical mountains of Israel being flattened? Probably not. This is likely more akin to John the Baptist’s ministry, where John is said to fulfill Is40 by filling in every ravine, bringing every mountain low, & straightening every path before the Messiah’s coming (Lk3:4–6). Did John the Baptist organize public works with flashing signs, lowered speed limits, increased fines & orange barrels, plus a shovel wielding work crew, many standing around doing very little? Not hardly. His preparatory message cut through the mountainous piles of Jewish legal waste & pointed the nation towards the soon coming Messiah. In John the Baptist we have a fine Biblical example of the figurative use of natural obstacles to represent the then present (1st century AD) spiritual conditions; & at least some segment of Ezk38–39 is similarly figurative, what with mountains, walls, & pathways all caving in.

Ezk38:12 adds the intriguing geographic depiction that destruction & despoiling are “against the people who are gathered from the nations ... who live at the CENTER of the world” (Amplified footnote “navel”). The KJV gives an alternate sense, “dwell in the midst of the land.” “The land” in the Bible, without further qualifications or descriptions, is almost invariably “the land” of Israel (Chilton). The literal Hebrew means on the “height” of the land, which goes well with the foregoing “mountain” metaphor. What “heights” or “navel” are being referenced in the Gog & Magog passage? It does seem that the Scriptural GPS (Global Positioning System) directs us towards Palestine, but again, a figure of speech is likely included as well.

“And even the name of the city will be Hamonah [horde]” (39:16) – this is the gravesite. If time will be no more after the Gog & Magog affair, who cares what the city will be called? Again, Biblical place names often served as a reminder to later generations of the events that occurred at the named spot; but if Ezk38–39 is about the end of all time, then what generations will be around afterwards to remember & reflect on the hammer of God against the city? If God has installed a new OS (computer Operating System), with a new heavens & new earth, isn’t it hard to believe that there will be much left of this “Hamonah” site for later generations to observe & learn, what with the earth scrubbed clean & renewed? Then again, to date we have no city named Hamonah in Palestine, so how can this have been fulfilled in the past? Greenhill may help us untie the prophetic knot; he says that some, “say this city is Jerusalem, reading it, ‘The name of the city shall be from her multitude;’ that is, the city of Jerusalem.” Yes, but don’t we historically need an actual place named Hamonah to align with this passage, if it occurred in the past? Not necessarily. For example, in Is19:18 one of five cities is prophesied to be the City of Destruction – hardly an epithet likely to stick to a town for very long. “Hey, stranger, where are you from?” “The City of Destruction, over near the new mall.” Not a likely ancient interchange. A place name may be prophetically given from the Lord that is simply symbolic of the events that will take place there, as shown above with the names Rosh, Meshech (Mashak) & Tubal (Tebel). Greenhill’s suggestion that the burials will be in Jerusalem may have significant merit after all, in which case the Gog & Magog episode may well be centered on Jerusalem & its environs, & this quite possibly in the past, even without a physical location named “Hamonah.”

Ezk39:6 gives another important but often overlooked locational clue. “And I will send fire upon Magog & THOSE WHO INHABIT THE COASTLANDS in safety; & they will know that I am the LORD.” This verse indicates that the scene of turmoil was or is to be on the coast. This simultaneously gives us a hint, not only to the setting, but also to the identity of Magog. Of the other 4 uses of הָאָיֵם (hāʾēyim) in the OT – Is66:19, Ezk26:15,18 & 27:35 – all indicate coastlands. Wherever Magog is to be found, it must be on the coast; & this fact alone obviates many suggestions concerning the identities of Gog & Magog.

So then, one must locate Magog on a coast. Now, just like “land” in the Scriptures without further adjectives generally indicates God’s land (Chilton) – Palestine so we might suppose that “coastland” without qualifier points to the shores of Palestine’s nearby Mediterranean. Backhanded support for this assertion is to be found in Is66:19, “the distant coastlands,” where the adjective “distant” accompanies “coastlands” to show that these shores are not close at hand to Israel. In contrast, when nearby Tyre is referenced by Ezekiel himself in 26:15,18, the translation is simply “coastlands,” its Palestinian proximity requiring no additional descriptors. The implication, then, is that Magog lives in the vicinity of Israel, on the coast of the Mediterranean. True, some have posited that Ezekiel is referencing the Dead Sea (Jamieson-Fausset-Brown; hereafter JFB); but there is little civilization or plant life on the Salt Sea shores, which are currently shrinking due to upstream Jordan River fed irrigation. Indeed, there is even less to the east of the Dead Sea (see the next point). No, we must deduce from the Biblical data that Magog is on the Mediterranean coast, close at hand to Israel. Any proposal for Ezk38–39 that puts Magog at some great distance in a land not known for its coastline must be rejected.
Further evidence for this geographical designation is given by 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, & it will block off those who would pass by." Gog & Magog will be interred east of the sea, resulting in potential travel disruptions – but which sea? On this we are on rather solid Biblical footing. The "sea," as a body of water without further modifiers, is invariably the Mediterranean Sea. For example, Moses tells Israel that when the land is apportioned among the 12 tribes, "its termination shall be at the sea" (Num34:5) – in context, there is no question that this refers to the Mediterranean Sea. When other seas are indicated, an adjective is joined to the word, such as "Salt Sea" (Gen14:3; Num34:3;12; etc.). This also shows that the "coastlands" are unlikely to be the shrinking coasts of the Dead Sea, else Ezekiel would’ve instead penned "Salt Sea." We can safely conclude that travel east of the Mediterranean – again, in Palestine itself or in close proximity thereunto – is affected by the Gog & Magog troubles.

Of course, the coastal route through Israel was a main trade artery between the heavily populated lands to the northeast (think Assyria, Babylon, & Persia) & Egypt to the southwest. If Ezk39:11 is about business traffic disruptions – & this is debatable (see point #15 below) – then the interruption to transit gives us a hint about the timeframe for Gog & Magog. If the Ezk38-39 events are in our own near future, not in the past, then helicopters & airplanes could easily bypass any armed conflict disturbances in Palestine. "We interrupt this eschatological program with a WETT travel forecast bulletin: The will be no travel disruptions today caused by turmoil in the land of Palestine; aircraft will ensure little disruption of commerce." A highly unlikely & unnecessary eschatological forecast for our day! Nothing much in our future would be "blocked off" as required by 39:11. If the phrase "it will block off those who would pass by" refers to future commercial traffic – & it might not – then this fact alone would point towards an historically past fulfillment of the Gog & Magog sequence, when overland trade routes could be effectively blocked by a land war. This could be one of several chronological indicators in Ezk38-39 showing that the Gog & Magog episode likely has already occurred.

Without further Scriptural data, it appears that the Gog & Magog affair will take place in the land of Israel, though some non-literal component may be a part of the description. In other words, "the mountains of Israel" (38:8) could as easily apply to the spiritual & political state of Israel as it could to the land’s topographical features; & this ambiguity is likely purposeful by the Revealer of Truth. This dual meaning – physical plus metaphorical – must be accommodated in any proper understanding of Ezk38-39.

(5) Time, Time, Time

The timeframe indicated in the Gog & Magog passage is essential, giving us important clues as to what episode is being addressed by the prophet. One may say, "Oh, that’s easy – all of this happens ‘IN THE LAST DAYS’ (38:16), which means at the end of all time!" Ah, my friend, be not too hasty in concluding what seems "obvious." For example, Heb9:26 says that, "... now, once at the END OF THE AGES, He [Jesus] has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." Does this mean that the cross will be at the end of all time? Of course not. Likewise, Heb1:2 says, "... in these LAST DAYS [God] has spoken to us in His Son ..." Is God waiting until time’s end to speak to us through Jesus? Once again, evidently not. Examples could be quickly multiplied, such as that in Dan8:17,19, where the days of Antiochus Epiphanes (160s BC) are spoken of as "THE TIME OF THE END." JS Russell quotes John Brown on the matter: "The period of the close of the one dispensation & the commencement of the other is spoken of as ‘the last days,’ & ‘the end of the world,’ & is described as such a shaking of the earth & heavens as should lead to the removal of the things which were shaken." (Hag2:6; Heb12:26,27). (Discourses & Sayings of our Lord, vol1 pg199,200). Clearly, then, such Biblical phrases as "the last days," "the end of the ages," & "the time of the end" are not necessarily prophetic code words for eschatology, the end of all time; it could rather be a reference to the end of the Old Covenant & the inauguration of the New.

Indeed, there are sharp indications from Ezk38-39 that the Gog & Magog events do not actually occur at the world’s end. Firewood for heating & cooking is spoken of in 39:9-10, which points to a more archaic era. What type of weapons are used in the battle? Swords, spears, bucklers, shields – all of which pertain to combat up through about the 1600s AD. Also, walls (or the lack thereof) are a prominent defensive feature. Since protective walls for cities went the way of the dodo bird with the invention of modern artillery, these too must speak of warfare prior to the modern era. By the way, the invention of explosive shells completely obviated masonry defenses in the 19th century. Some with a futurist bias may contend that ancient weapons & defenses are spoken of by Ezekiel to symbolize modern warfare, but this puts them in an awkward position, since they are then uncomfortably using a decidedly figurative (or non-literal) explanation to support a supposedly literal hermeneutic. No, unless one wants to resort to the gloss that ancient weapons & defenses will somehow be miraculously, yea, inexplicably reinstated in the future (which, surprisingly, some do), we must conclude that Gog & Magog took place prior to the modern era, & no later than about the 1600s AD.

This bookends the back end of the time for Gog & Magog – before about 1600AD – but what about the front end? Ezekiel wrote chapters 38-39 no later than the 25th year of the exile (Ezk40:1), & Ezk38:8 says, "AFTER MANY DAYS you will be summoned; in THE LATTER YEARS you will come ..." Both of these phrases, "after many days" & "the latter years," involve some chronological distance from Ezekiel’s time. We are therefore justified in concluding that the events of Gog & Magog are not only post-exilic – after about 516BC, the standard date for the end of the captivity – but are likely a healthy span of time thereafter. In round numbers, then let’s suppose that the fulfillment of Gog & Magog cannot be prior to about 400BC, since earlier than this could hardly be considered "many days" after the return of the exiles. It is therefore safe to conclude that the Ezk38-39 episode occurred sometime after 400BC & but prior to 1600AD. It’s a broad time range – 2000 years! – but at least it’s a start in the right Gogging direction.

But wait – there’s more! “The latter years” of Ezk38:8 must have some specific signification as well. “The latter years” of what? This phrase is used in Dan2:28: "However, there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, & He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will take place in THE LATTER DAYS." Since Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of the Colossus extended from his day to the Roman Empire (feet of clay & iron), “the latter days” implies the time of the Messi-
To summarize our timeframe discoveries thus far, the weapons & defenses in Ezk38-39 are obviously from a bygone era, before about 1600AD. The latter days & “[a]fter many days” point to a significant period of time after Ezekiel’s day, probably no earlier than 400BC. In addition, these phrases may well direct our attention towards the 1st Advent, “the latter days” of Dan2 when the Messiah came & set up a kingdom of an entirely dissimilar composition than the preceding world empires, one not of masonry but of widespread spiritual content.

(6) Ezk37-39 Sequencing

Note that if the chapters of Ezekiel are to be taken chronologically, then Ezk37 historically occurs prior to chapters 38 & 39. If so, then this helps us understand the era of Gog & Magog’s conclusion. Ezk37:24-28 says that AFTER the Babylonian exile (37:21), when Israel & Judah are reunited (37:22) & idolatry is permanently cast aside (37:23) – as happened after the Babylonian exile – THEN “My servant David will be king over them.” When did God’s servant David ascend the throne? Well, Acts1:9-11 isn’t called “the Ascension” for nothing! If the chapters of Ezekiel are chronologically sequential, then Jesus is established as king (Ezk37), which is followed by the Gog & Magog episode (Ezk38-39), subsequent to the cross & after Jesus was elevated to His heavenly throne (Heb1:3).

It’s true, some insist that Jesus won’t become king until the end of all time, during their posited future earthly Millennium, thus making Jesus currently a king without much of a kingdom. Well, I might as well say that I’m a billionaire, awaiting the time when someone will give me a billion dollars – such is a king with no kingdom! Unfortunately for these futurists, Peter didn’t exactly agree with their Scriptural assessment. In no uncertain terms (Acts2:30-33), Peter asserted that Jesus had, in fact, been elevated to the Davidic throne – in heaven, not on earth – & this despite the virulent opposition of the bloodthirsty Jews. Bypassing the system-driven bias against & denigration of King Jesus’ current heavenly reign, the rest of us are convinced that the Son now rules until He has put His enemies under His feet, with the last to fall subject to Jesus being death itself (1Co15:25-26). Christ’s kingdom is present now, & has been since the cross; those who ignore the Biblical evidence are likely blinded by the mask of a system that blocks out the Scriptural light.

This is in accordance with Dan2, where the stone cut without hands – Jesus’ kingdom – crushed the Roman Empire (the statue’s feet of iron & clay) & became an earth-filling mountain; but it was of an entirely different composition, not being based on the material of the statue (earthly kingdoms) that preceded it. Besides, the stance that the Messianic kingdom is entirely future makes Jesus an outright liar. In Jn18:36, Jesus told Pilate, “My kingdom is NOT of this world.” This is categorically false if, in fact, Jesus’ kingdom was to be earthly but future. If Christ had been honest, according to Dispensational principles, He should have told Pilate, “My kingdom is not YET of this world, Pilate. You & the Romans have nothing to fear; a few thousand years will elapse before my kingdom will be set up in Jerusalem.” This is a nearly insurmountable futurist obstacle; namely, if Jesus’ reign is entirely earthly & future to us, then He lied to Pilate. Moreover, the Jews attempted to make Jesus the very king that Dispensationalists forward, an earthly Jewish king, after the feeding of the 5000 (Jn6:15). If Jesus came to set up such a kingdom, why did He demur on such a plumb job offer? If the Jewish kingdom had been established at Jesus’ First Advent, would the cross never have happened? Peter, Paul, & Jesus Himself all contend that Jesus’ kingdom was present in their day but of an entirely different composition, in keeping with the Dan2 stone cut without hands. Jesus said, “’The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Look, here it is!’ or, ‘There it is!’ For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst” (Lk17:20,21). If further evidence is required, consider Lk9:2,6,11, where proclaiming the kingdom is used interchangeably with preaching the gospel. The problems with the futurist kingdom postponement system are legion (cf Crenshaw & Gunn), & such denigration of Jesus’ mission & current rule deserves to be cast into the swine & drowned. Besides, if Jewish rejection postponed or undercut Jesus’ First Advent mission, couldn’t Jewish sinful rebellion delay or cancel the Second Coming? And this outlook is currently being asserted by some who declare their fealty to “Calvinism” or “The Doctrines of Grace,” calling themselves soteriologically “Reformed” – can you believe it?! Let us state in no uncertain terms what the Scriptures assert from beginning to end, that man’s sin does not thwart God’s plans! Jewish disobedience did not delay the kingdom & “stop the prophetic clock,” nor will it postpone Christ’s Second Advent.

Fortunately, fueled by such passages as Rom14:17 & Col1:13, our latter day Progressive Dispensational friends – happily, today’s majority report – recognize that Jesus’ kingdom is both present & future. Instinctively, the faithful know that they “are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken” (Heb12:28), one not of brick & mortar, nor of earthly crowns & thrones – no, no, Jesus’ kingdom is far more than the Queen of England can offer! The rock cut without hands brought (past tense) a kingdom that became & ever increasingly is becoming an earth-filling mountain – the gospel goes to every corner (Rom10:18) without hindrance!

Returning to the chronological point, if Ezekiel’s chapters present an historical timeline, then Jesus’ installation as king (ch37:24-28) precedes the Gog & Magog affair (ch38-39). Of course, this would imply that the Third or Ezekiel’s Temple (ch40-48) comes thereafter; but that is the subject for another day.
Let us now take a step back & summarize points (5) to (7). Setting up our bookends, we chronologically conclude that the Following up on the issue of ancient city walls, Ezk38:11 says of Gog's evil plan, "You will say, 'I will go up against a land of Regarding the lack of walls described in 38:11, I suppose one could suggest a post-Pexpilic timeframe, prior to the reconP...  

As with mountains, walls can have a metaphorical as well as a literal prophetic application, as demonstrated in Zch2:12:18-20, with, "EVERY man's sword will be AGAINST HIS BROTHER" (38:21). There are precious few post-exilic instances of engulfing Jewish civil wars — one only, really — so this criterion alone greatly reduces our timing choices. Dan2 has the Messianic rock cut without hands coming during the Roman Empire (feet of clay & iron) & smashing the whole visionary statue, with the rock then becoming an earth filling mountain; all of this took place in "the latter days" (Dan2:28). In like manner, the Gog & Magog episode is said to take place in the "latter years" (Ezk38:8) & "last days" (38:16), & this may well imply a completion during Messianic times (1st century AD). This also squares nicely with the assumption that Ezk37–39 are chronologically sequential. 37:24–28 says, "My servant David will be king over them," & when was Jesus installed as king? Jesus ascended to His throne in heaven & presently rules, with no postponement to the future. The Ascension happened in Acts1, & Peter testified of Jesus’ Davidic rule in Acts2:30-33. Afterwards, assuming Ezk37–39 gives us a timeline, the Gog & Magog events transpired, subsequent to the Ascension. Jesus is glorified & then great destruction occurs, along with a Jewish civil war. Hmmm ... I think I see where this is heading. Of course, all of this ties in nicely with our expectation of a Messianic link to this enigmatic passage (per 1Pt1:10-12). Wouldn’t it make sense that — somehow, some way — Jesus is magnified in the difficult Gog & Magog passage? 

Let us now take a step back & summarize points (5) to (7). Setting up our bookends, we chronologically conclude that the actions of Gog & Magog are likely after c. 400BC, since the “many days” elapsing after Ezekiel’s time has to entail more than just a few years consequent to the return of the exiles (516BC); but that these events are prior to c. 160OAD, when modern combat weapons (cannon, guns) became commonplace. In addition, walls for defense & firewood for heating & cooking all point toward a more achernic era, well before our time. A horrible Jewish civil war must also be a component of the Gog & Magog episode, with “every man’s sword .. against his brother” (38:21). There are precious few post-exilic instances of engulfing Jewish civil wars — one only, really — so this criterion alone greatly reduces our timing choices. Dan2 has the Messianic rock cut without hands coming during the Roman Empire (feet of clay & iron) & smashing the whole visionary statue, with the rock then becoming an earth filling mountain; all of this took place in “the latter days” (Dan2:28). In like manner, the Gog & Magog episode is said to take place in the “latter years” (Ezk38:8) & “last days” (38:16), & this may well imply a completion during Messianic times (1st century AD). This also squares nicely with the assumption that Ezk37–39 are chronologically sequential. 37:24–28 says, “My servant David will be king over them,” & when was Jesus installed as king? Jesus ascended to His throne in heaven & presently rules, with no postponement to the future. The Ascension happened in Acts1, & Peter testified of Jesus’ Davidic rule in Acts2:30-33. Afterwards, assuming Ezk37–39 gives us a timeline, the Gog & Magog events transpired, subsequent to the Ascension. Jesus is glorified & then great destruction occurs, along with a Jewish civil war. Hmmm ... I think I see where this is heading. Of course, all of this ties in nicely with our expectation of a Messianic link to this enigmatic passage (per 1Pt1:10-12). Wouldn’t it make sense that — somehow, some way — Jesus is magnified in the difficult Gog & Magog passage? 

The use of swords guarantees that this took place in the past, when ancient weapons were the means of war. Who exactly fought one against another is not clearly specified. Could it be like the destruction of one nation’s army by another, as during the days of Jehoshaphat, when Ammon, Moab, & Edom each destroyed the other (2Chr20)? Perhaps, since many nations were summoned for this epic struggle (38:5–6). Such an explanation, however, does not actually describe 38:21, when “[e]very man’s sword will be against HIS BROTHER.” Persians & Ethiopians engaging in mortal combat against one another, the confederation having disintegrated, could hardly be described as brother against brother. The term “brother” is suggestive of personal relationships within a nation; & with no additional qualifiers, it is most likely speaking of Jewish internecine warfare — Jew against Jew. Note also that, “EVERY man’s sword will be against his brother.” This is no mere minor skirmish within Judaism; a nasty Jewish civil war is the best solution to 38:21. As a tantalizing precursor to Gog & Magog’s solution, we will note that while there has often been much infighting & intrigue amongst the Jews down through history, see, for example, the intertestamental period described by Josephus’ Antiquities — there really has only been one truly dreadful Jewish civil war after Ezekiel’s day, one so ghastly & shocking as to line up with, “EVERY man’s sword will be AGAINST HIS BROTHER” (38:21).

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As with mountains, walls can have a metaphorical as well as a literal prophetic application, as demonstrated in Zch2:
"Then I lifted up my eyes & looked, & behold, there was a man with a measuring line in his hand. So I said, 'Where are you going?' And he said to me, 'To measure Jerusalem, to see how wide it is & how long it is.' And he walked ..." (Zch2:1-5)
Zechariah obviously uses “walls” in a spiritual sense for the Lord’s protection of Jerusalem, so we cannot out of hand reject such an application in Ezk38 to reconcile the unwalled land having every wall fall down. It could be that Israel of the time of Gog & Magog was unwalled because God’s protection was withdrawn, & this lack of divine defense would result in the destruction of Israel’s physical walls in which they foolishly trusted.

On a personal note, I first encountered this “walls” explanation in Owen’s massive 7 volume commentary on Hebrews. Owen’s application of Gog & Magog in relation to Heb1:13 (3:234) was that the people of God appear feeble & unpro...
tested, as without walls, & the church’s enemies think they can easily encircle & destroy it; but time & again throughout history this assumption has proven to be erroneous, & the enemies themselves are eradicated & brought to shame. However, later evil generations learn not from their predecessors & repeat the same aggression against God’s church time & again, & they necessarily fail & are ruined. Even if they temporarily gain their point & swallow a segment of the church, the devouring worm is contained therein & sucks the enemies dry of life. To quote: “What advantage if they drink a little precious blood & find sweetness in it, if it make them sick, & swell, & die? The beloved city [the church] still abides, & their misery shall never end.” I found this “walls” application compelling, & it made me consider the unwalled cities of Ezk38 in a new light.

We note that there are only 2 occurrences of the Hebrew “porāzōw” (יָרַע), Zch2:4 (“without walls”) & Ezk38:11 (“unwalled villages”). The exact same word, only used in these 2 passages, points towards an interpretive connection. The Interlinear translation of Ezk38:11 is, “... against the land of the unwalled.” The “land of the unwalled” lines up nicely with a reverse application of Zch2, that “unwalled” in Ezk38:11 means without the Lord’s sovereign but unseen shield. Since Zch2 is dealing with God’s protection of Jerusalem, could Ezk38:11 be the removal of the Lord’s invisible wall around Jerusalem?

What, then, can we conclude about the walls in a successful explanation of Ezk38-39? Walls are absent (38:11) but are knocked down (38:20), so it’s not unreasonable to suppose that at least one of these is a figure of speech. Zch2 may give us a helpful interpretive clue, where the protective wall is the invisible defensive hand of God; but this didn’t mean that physical walls were not also present. For instance, Nehemiah is rightly remembered for his rock wall efforts around Jerusalem, all the while depending on the unseen wall of God’s protection. The very need for walls during the time of Gog & Magog, & the peril of their absence, is yet another pointer towards the time of Ezk38-39’s fulfillment.

(g) Nations Against (Not With) Gog

A remarkable aspect of Ezk38 is the geographic reach of the nations involved. Persia was an enormous empire in its day to the northeast of Israel (today’s Iranians are of Persian descent); Ethiopia is south of Egypt, & is Biblically also called Cush; Put (Libya) is in western North Africa (Pulpit); Gomer, the Cimmerians of Homer (Odyssey11:13-19), were from the shores of the Black & Caspian Seas (Pulpit); while Ezk38:6 gives the house of Topgarham (or Beth-Topgarham) as being in the extreme north. Any satisfactory solution to the Gog & Magog passage must explain how such widely dispersed nations, with quite disparate national interests, would act in concert against the tiny nation of Israel. Of what financial or military benefit would such an expedition simultaneously be to all of these nations? Also needing elucidation are the logistical & financial aspects related to this incursion into Palestine. Significant staff level military planning, followed by such logistical issues as transportation & supply, along with the vast expenditures of wealth – all of these would be required to pull off such a sweeping venture against the militarily & financially inconsequential land of Israel. Also, Palestine lay at a great distance from most of the tabulated nations, especially if they’re traveling mostly by foot. Such a horde wouldn’t exactly sneak up on the Israelis, now would they? Moreover, a massive discharge of time & treasure necessitates a substantial cause – Gog & Magog cannot be just the stray maraudings of an ornery & belligerent nomadic band! What cause could result in such an enormous invasion, & this with limited spoils of war as the reward?

Such a colossal invasion of Palestine also begets the leadership question – who exactly would have the power to gather up so many incongruous soldiers & direct their actions? How would they be trained to fight together as a unit, what with all of the different languages involved? How would one even assemble all of them in one place for military excercises? Unless we despair of a solution – Fairbairn says it’s inconceivable that such a composite world army would act in concert like this – the solution to the Gog & Magog enigma must find a common interest for involving widely scattered nations, with the requisite strong leadership to gather them together & pull off this amazing incursion. Think just of the logistics involved! These facts obviate more than a few historical suggestions. In sum, then, the Gog & Magog affair must include (1) a sufficiently strong unifying power with centralized leadership; (2) a mammoth piggybank, a treasury with an abundance of cash for such a costly military operation; & (2) a significant cause – with such a full scale invasion, this can’t just be the result of a militarily mild irritant! Somebody – probably lots of somebodies – in Israel made the army’s commander pretty mad, & he’s going to make them pay for it!

And what do these nations take back home to the wife & kids? It better be worth their while, right? Amongst the booty are listed “cattle & goods” (38:13) – but how on earth could, & why would, such distant nations haul cattle back home? “Hey, Sarge, can you help me load up this cow on the ship to Libya? She’s a bit cantankerous!” More politely, Schröder says, “To take cattle & goods of that kind must recommend itself poorly to hordes which have come from such a distance.” Once again, the remedy to the Gog & Magog malady must include some reasoning for this peculiar detail, not just some vigorous hand-waving on why we can successfully ignore it. The Lord God Almighty gave the specifics for a reason; it’s not our place to overlook what we find confusing or inconvenient.

Some may contend that this mighty demonstration of military magnificence will miraculously transpire in the future in ways we cannot now understand. Those who hold to the Secret Rapture, Great Tribulation, & future earthly Millennium sequence are left with an unnoticed conundrum. When the church is (supposedly) secretly raptured – quietly caught up to be with Christ, thereby avoiding the impending Great Tribulation – will all of those Dispensational backdrops, magazines, DVDs, & assorted bookstore paraphernalia be raptured as well? If not, could not the nations read the explanations given in all of those “left behind” books, understand how foolishly it would be to invade Palestine, & thus refrain from so doing (after Yerby)? China might say, “We are not marching our 200 million man army across thousands of miles to invade Israel, only to be incinerated by the finger of God! We have little to gain & much to lose, it’ll cost us a lot, & those books & periodicals all say that we’ll just be defeated & burned up on the mountains of Israel. We’re not going!” Unless one supposes that all of those paperbacks, DVDs & magazines are also secretly raptured along with the church, it is hard to believe that any nation would take up such an expensive, foolhardy & doomed invasion.
Now it is generally assumed that the listed nations are in confederation with Gog & Magog, but this may not be the case after all. Ezk38:5, 6, 15, & 22 all have “many peoples WITH you,” but the most common translation for the Hebrew (יִתְנָק) is not with, but AGAINST. The translators appear to have predominantly assumed that these nations are joining with Gog & Magog, but the Hebrew can with greater certainty be translated that they have come AGAINST the leader (Gog) & land (Magog). Surely this casts some additional light on the identification of Gog & Magog, & must be accounted for in the resolution of Ezk38-39.

If the nations (or Gentiles) are against Gog & Magog, this would explain the apparent reluctance of the latter to fight, as given in 38:4 – “I will turn you about & put hooks into your jaws, & I will bring you out.” If hooks in the jaw are necessary to drag Gog & Magog into battle, does this not imply a certain degree of unwillingness to fight? Greenhill translates 38:4, “& I will turn you back” (rather than “& I will bring you out”), then gives some additional alternatives: “Lavater & Œcolampadius read these words, ‘I will crush you,’ the Vulgate, ‘I will lead you about,’ some rabbis, ‘I will deceive you,’ others, ‘I will bring or turn you back. You think to have your pleasure on mine, but I will have my pleasure on you, & turn you which way seems good to me.”

However, the translators of the Hebrew, the point is clear – Gog & Magog will be dragged out by Yahweh to their demise. Some level of deception (per the rabbis) may also be included – Gog & Magog may think that they will succeed, but in fact they will suffer the opposite fate, a turn of events that surely sends shock waves throughout the nation of Magog. In connection with the above assertion that the GENTILES (the literal rendering of “nations”) fight against (rather than with) Magog, does this not imply a SEMITIC origin for the nation of Magog? Ah, this alluring suggestion will be expanded below when attempting to identify the shadowy figures of Gog & Magog, the goal of this study.

Note also that the prophesied invasion cannot just be unpleasant or destructive. In God’s eyes, it must be evil (38:10). It cannot simply be, “Hey, Gog & Magog, you behave yourselves! Your incursion is upsetting my lunch plans! Could you please leave now?” No, if the plan itself cannot be called wicked in the sight of God, then it does not fit the Biblical description. Besides, the plan seems to have been ginned up by Gog & Magog, not the tabulated nations. This evil plan entails going up against “the unwalled … who live at the center of the world” to gain booty (38:11-12), but the Lord will oppose & overthow their objectives, turning the tables on the attackers. How does all of this fit together? A victorious Gog & Magog interpretation will include an evil plan.

Finally regarding the nations involved, how on earth does one explain Ezk38:7, “Be prepared, & prepare yourself, you & all your companies that are assembled about you, & BE A GUARD FOR THEM”?! An army this massive, how could it possibly need a guard?! Fortunately, the Pulpit Commentary says that this translation is manifestly incorrect. Appropriate translational options (per Pulpit) are, “one who gives them law” (Michaelis & Hävernick); “one who is their authority”, (Hengstenberg; Schröder says this is equivalent to, “they are obedient to you”); & “one who serves them as an ensign,” i.e., acts as a leader or commander (Ewald & Smend). Hâvern (in Schröder) offers, “And you are a law to them, as leader & commander-in-chief.” Interestingly, Jerome’s Vulgate translates 38:7, “show yourself to be an EMPEROR among them.” Well, surely an emperor had the power & resources to assemble such a vast horde of disparate peoples to achieve his purposes, & this is much more reasonable translation than suggesting that a colossal army itself required its own (unspecified) guard. If one prefers the 38:7 translation “guard,” then his Gog & Magog solution must explain how this invading multitude itself required a guard. If guarded, then, pray tell, by whom? If rather one thinks that a leader is in mind, then who or what is it? Hmmm … when was the last time a real live emperor was associated with the events in Palestine?

In summary, it appears from the Hebrew that the assembled Gentiles are likely coming against (not with) Gog & Magog. If the Gentiles are against them, then this implies a semitic origin for Gog & Magog. A colossal expenditure of time & treasure is necessary to pull off the invasion, with some unifying authority (not a guard) underwriting & directing the engagement. The booty that heads off to the distant nations includes difficult to transport & lower valued items like cattle. Meanwhile, Gog the leader & Magog the nation are reluctant battlefield participants, with hooks from Yahweh being required to bring them out. The plan itself, likely by Gog & Magog (not the nations), is evil in God’s sight, not just a low level nuisance to others. With such disparate criteria, it’s no wonder that some (e.g., Fairbairn) despair of an adequate resolution to the Ezk38-39 puzzle.

(10) Trade Disrupted?

“Our left field” is USA slang meaning oddball or crazy. The expression may well have come from the Cook County asylum behind the left field wall where the Chicago Cubs played baseball in the early 1900s (Wiki). An “out of left field” aspect of the prophesied Gog & Magog sequence is its effect on trade, as given in 38:13 – “Sheba & Dedan & the MERCHANTS of Tarshish with all its villages will say to you, ‘Have you come to capture spoil? Have you assembled your company to seize plunder, to carry away silver & gold, to take away cattle & goods, to capture great spoil?’” This statement seemingly comes “out of left field,” with no apparent connection to the context. Then again, the preceding verses (38:11-12) & this one (38:13) both speak of spoil & plunder being taken, so it is likely that the merchants’ griping is tied to the pillaging done in connection with Gog & Magog. Maybe enough ransacking & robbery transpired in relation to the invasion that prices were depressed, & thus those whose livelihood was tied to trade were adversely affected by their reduced income. A successful answer to the where & when of Gog & Magog must include some impact on trade, such that these trading nations grumble (at least figuratively) concerning the events of Ezk38-39.

(11) Visitation By God

Note also that Ezk38:8 says, “After many days you will be VISITED” (NKJV), which is more in accord with the Hebrew (תִּפָּקֵד) than the NASB “you will be summoned.” A visitation by God upon Gog & Magog – such phraseology reminds us of passages like Num16:29, when a “visitation” by God upon Korah & his confederates resulted in the earth swallowing them up in judgment. The idea, according to Greenhill, is that Gog & Magog will not face a common judgment & death, but rather some extraordinary punishment. This sense of “visited” is in keeping with 38:18, when God
announces that His “fury shall come up in my face” (KJV). The Lord God Almighty is red-faced with anger against Gog & Magog, who will be visited with a divine punishment. Few debate this point; but still, one’s Ezk38-39 answer must include God’s anger against & visitation (in judgment) upon Gog & Magog. Napoleon’s invasion of Russia in the 1800s, Iraq threatening Iran, or something similar will probably not do.

(12) 7 Years & Months
We now turn to the rightly famous “sevens,” namely, the seven years of burning & seven months of burials described in Ezk39:9-16. Though an argument can be forwarded that these timeframes are figurative (Fairbairn), it seems that the chronological specificity cannot be wholly ignored, & it would be better to suppose that the resolution to the Gog & Magog quandary has some component that includes these timetables. There are, however, curious aspects in the description that require further elucidation. Listed first for the flames are bucklers (small shields) & shields. These ancient defensive battlefield accoutrements typically had a high metallic content, if not being made entirely of metal, & therefore they would not be especially flammable. “Can I get more lighter fluid for this pile of shields?” is not a likely request by the Ethiopians, for example.

Of course there is also the problem of around 360 million corpses being interred in the land of Israel. What stench & dis ease would accompany such carcass piles! This calculation by Fairbairn is quite simple. One million Israelite men burying 2 cadavers per day for 7 months, excluding Sabbaths, gives 1 million men times 2 bodies per day times 182 days (7 x 30 minus 28 Sabbaths) equals 364 million burials. This would be a rock bottom minimum, especially if Palestine had more than a million men & some of the men were more active than others. This number of graves is difficult to fathom, especially given the pestilence on the land that would accompany so much decaying flesh. What kind of mortality rate does this imply? The most destructive & grisly of modern combat eras, the American Civil War (1861-1865), had a mortality rate of “only” about 15-20%. Let us suppose that we had twice that, an enormous & unheard of mortality rate of 36% for the Gog & Magog forces. This would mean that a billion man army had invaded Israel – 364 million corpses represents a 36.4% mortality rate for a billion man army. Note also that if Israel was a nation of a million men, then this would mean that the Gog & Magog invasion represents a nearly 1000 to 1 ratio of invaders to defenders – ridiculous numerical overkill, to be sure! Something seems utterly amiss in this whole equation, & this must be explained without resorting to waving the magic prophetic wand & muttering some incantations like, “It’s all just figurative,” or, “God will do something amazing at time’s end that we cannot now comprehend.” The exacting qualities of these proph.ecies, all of the particularized details – these must have some realistic grounding within the explanation of Gog & Magog.

Yet another memorable & peculiar aspect of the burials is in 39:15. The passage says that the searchers will “set up a marker” by any bones discovered, but literally it reads, “build a monument” (NASB marg) or “build near it a pillar” (Pulpit). Wouldn’t it be easier to just bury the bone rather than building a silly monument? This bespeaks of something other than a physical fulfillment. Pointing in the same direction is the sequencing depicted in 39:17-20, where the birds & beasts are called upon to eat flesh AFTER the 7 years of carnage & 7 months of burials – now what could possibly be left for them to eat, once the men have traversed the land to mark for burial all of the residual bones, & the grave-diggers have followed behind & interred the remains? Note also that though the birds & beasts are directed to eat the flesh & drink the blood of mighty men (39:20), yet rams, lambs, goats & bulls are enumerated in 39:18 – a feast more akin to the Temple sacrifices than to the slaughter of battle. Did some little black sheep take part in the Gog & Magog battle, wherein they naturally fought quite poorly & were slain? They then remained unburied for 7 months, though all the other bones were buried, & afterwards the birds & beasts are finally summoned to consume them?? A very unlikely scenario indeed! In accordance with a Temple application of this directive to the birds & beasts, God says that they will eat “of my sacrifice [תֵּלֵבָּה mizzibbhî] which I have sacrificed [תֵּלֵבָּה zâbhbî] for you. Thus you shall be filled at My table [בְּשֵׁלַחְנִי]” (39:19-20 KJV) – the Hebrew words all pointing towards the Mosaic economy’s Temple sacrifices. Because the feast prepared for the birds & beasts lists the Temple offerings & takes place after 7 months of mop-up burials, the solution to the Gog & Magog conundrum probably includes something to do with the Temple sacrifices; & it may include the cessation of these Mosaic offerings, since birds represent the judgment or even the termination of a nation (see below).

Along the same lines, from the department of redundancy department, we find in 38:7, “Be prepared, & prepare yourself.” If one is prepared, has he not prepared himself? Ah, but once again, the Temple sacrifices rear their collective sacrificial heads, for the “prepare” (Strong’s #3559) is the selfsame word used for preparing a sacrifice to the Lord, as in Num23:1 & 29. It is also used in the well-known Am4:12, “Prepare to meet your God.” Maybe the repetition of “prepare” points both towards Gog & Magog preparing to meet their God (therefore referencing Israel, not the Gentiles) & facing sacrificial slaughter in a judgment from Yahweh.

There is an interesting correlation between the 7 years of burning & the famous “Christmas” passage of Is9:6-7. The celebrated verses read, “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; & the government will rest on His shoulder; & His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, on the throne of David & over his kingdom, to establish it & to uphold it with justice & righteousness from then on & forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this.” However, the preceding disjunctive verse presents a bit of a mystery. Is9:5 reads, “For every boot of the booted warrior of Midian,” no doubt referring to when the Lord used Gideon to defeat the Midianites (Jdg6-8); but there is no record of burning the warriors’ sandals & garments in the account of Gideon. How can the Is9:5 burning be explained in connection with a Messianic prediction, & how might this tie in with the burning of weapons described in Ezk39:9-10? Confusing though this may be, can we at least surmise that the close connection of Is9:5 with Ezk39:9-10 indicates
that both “burning” passages have Messianic import? If so, then this is another positive pointer to the Messiah in Ezk38-39.

Seven years of burning many weapons that are not especially flammable. A burning connection to the Messianic passage of Is9:5-7 – but what is the correlation? Burials in the hundreds of millions. A billion man army invading a nation of a million men – a thousand attacking for every single defender. Building monuments beside bones rather than just interring them. Birds being summoned to eat after everything has been buried. “Strange” hardly begins to describe these conclusions; “bizarre” or “irrational” seem to be better monikers. Such oddball occurrences concerning Gog & Magog – maybe the solution to Ezk38-39 lies in an entirely alternate route. We discount the Scriptural particulars at our own peril, doing violence to the Word of God; but neither can we appeal to the so-called literal hermeneutic & arrive at Biblical conclusions without insurmountable difficulties. The Gog & Magog storyline seems to be a locked briefcase stuffed with fascinating military secrets. How will we unlock it?

(13) For The Birds

Here’s an additional Gog & Magog oddity – the birds & beasts are to “be filled at my table with horses & chariots” (39:20 KJV). How a bird eats a chariot is left unexplained. “It’s figurative” is likely true, but for some, such an approach is cheaply selling the literalist farm – for a “song,” in keeping with the bird metaphor. On the same principle, why then cannot much of Ezk38-39 be figurative? So what does it mean, this bringing in of birds & beasts to indulge at the Lord’s table? The prophetic meaning of “bird judgments” was initiated in Joseph’s interpretation of the baker’s dream. In Gen40:16-19, the chief baker was told that the birds he saw in his dream meant the baker’s impending demise. Joseph takes his leave of the baker with these encouraging words, “… & the birds will eat your flesh off you.” In the Scriptures thereafter, birds are often used figuratively of the utter destruction of individuals (Pharaoh, Ezk29:5; 31:13; 32:4; covenant breakers of Judah, Jer34:18-20; parent mockers, Pr30:17) or nations (Judah, Jer7:33-34; 16:4; 19:7; Cush, Is18:6). Any right assessment of the Ezk38-39 episode must include such a “bird judgment,” an absolute devastation from God upon Gog & Magog.

The same idea of the Almighty’s judgment against the nations as given in a “bird judgment” is also expressed via earthquakes. We see this figure of speech also employed by God in 38:19-20. “In My zeal & in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there surely be a great EARTHQUAKE in the land of Israel. The fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all the creeping things that creep on the earth, & all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence; the mountains also will be thrown down, the steep pathways will collapse & every wall will fall to the ground.” Earthquakes representing earthly powers being shaken or removed is another common prophetic depiction – one need look no further than Heb12:25-29, where the shaking & removal of earthly kingdoms is contrasted to the kingdom of Christ we are receiving that cannot be so shaken. The same sentiment is given against Jerusalem’s (Ariel’s) enemies in Is29:6-7. The Lord used foreign armies to bring Jerusalem low, & then a great reversal occurred for those invading foes:

“But the multitude of your enemies will become like fine dust, & the multitude of the ruthless ones like the chaff which blows away; & it will happen instantly, suddenly. From the Lord of hosts you will be punished with thunder & EARTHQUAKE & loud noise, with whirlwind & tempest & the flame of a consuming fire. And the multitude of all the nations who wage war against Ariel, even all who wage war against her & her stronghold, & who distress her, will be like a dream, a vision of the night.”

Thunder, noise, & an earthquake clearly tell of the humbling of the once mighty powers that had come against Jerusalem – in this case, the King of Assyria (Matthew Henry), whose armies were decimated by God during Hezekiah’s day (Is56-37; 2Ki18-19). Tying back to the theme mentioned above of God’s glorifying Himself by the explosive Gog & Magog events (Ezk38:23; 39:1-2), the Lord expressly says that He made a name for Himself (& Hezekiah) when Sennacherib’s army was decapitated, to the tune of 185,000 dead (2Chr32:23). It is likely that the Ezk38:19 earthquake in the land of Israel is metaphorical for the collapse of great powers opposing the Lord & His people.

JS Russell explains the prophetic usage of such word pictures as birds & earthquakes:

“[The utterances of the Old Testament prophets] ... may be called hieroglyphic pictures representing historical events in highly metaphorical imagery. ... Social & political revolutions, moral & spiritual changes, are shadowed forth by physical convulsions & catastrophes; & if these natural phenomena affect the imagination more powerfully still, they are not inappropriate figures when the real importance of the events which they represent is apprehended. The earth convulsed with earthquakes, burning mountains cast into the sea, the stars falling like leaves, the heavens on fire, the sun clothed in sackcloth, the moon turned into blood, are images of appalling grandeur, but they are not necessarily unsuitable representations of great civil commotions, — the overturning of thrones & dynasties, the desolations of war, the abolition of ancient systems, & great moral & spiritual revolutions. In prophecy, as in poetry, the material is regarded as the type of the spiritual, the passions & emotions of humanity find expression in corresponding signs & symptoms in the inanimate creation. Does the prophet come with glad tidings? He calls upon the mountains & the hills to break forth into song, & the trees of the forest to clap their hands. Is his message one of lamentation & woe? The heavens are draped in mourning, & the sun is darkened in his going down. No one, however anxious to keep by the bare letter of the word, would think of insisting that such metaphors should be literally interpreted, or must have a literal fulfillment. The utmost that we are entitled to require is, that there should be such historical events specified as may worthily correspond with such phenomena; great moral & social movements capable of producing such emotions as these physical phenomena seem to imply. ...”

It is highly unlikely that “literalism” is central to the interpretation of Ezk38-39, especially when the Bible nowhere explicitly or implicitly forwards this notion as the key that unlocks all prophetic conundrums. Where in the Scriptures is prophetic literalism exalted to the right hand of God? Could this not rather be a manmade system foisted upon the Word of God? Go ahead – prove from the Bible alone that prophetic literalism is the God ordained cipher for unlocking the mysteries of what is foretold. Alas, prophetic literalism is a theory that dissipates upon Scriptural contact; that dry
Yet one more in a long line of curiosities from Ezk38-39 is, “And I will turn thee back, & leave but the SIXTH part of you” (39:2 KJV). This is variously translated, indicating uncertainty about its meaning. Many versions having something akin to, "... I will turn you around & lead you on" (NKJV) or "... drive you on" (NASB). Why the translational confusion? The Hebrew is literally, “I will SIXTH you” (Greenhill), which doesn’t make a whole lot of sense — maybe this is why an alternate translation is sought? Keil & Delitzsch (KD) advocate, “afflict you with six punishments.” This is in accord with Hengstenberg's suggestion (in Schröder) that the six punishments of 38:22 are in view (“... pestilence ... blood ... @ torrential rain ... @ hailstones, @ fire & @ brimstone”). JFB prefer Cocceius’ suggestion, “I will mark you with six,” the beast’s number (Rev13:18). Greenhill says that 39:2 means the Lord will leave but the sixth part, suggesting that five-sixths of the army will be destroyed. To come to point, the successful Gog & Magog applicant must have on its résumé a “sixth” component, whether six punishments are inflicted (Hengstenberg) or a pathetic one-sixth remain after the Lord’s sickle has cut down five out of six (KJV) being the likely explanations; or is it something else?

Though being “sixthed,” a glaring omission in Ezk38-39 is any account of the actual battle. Do the armies clash at all? 38:21 tells us of civil war (“Every man’s sword will be against HIS BROTHER”). This is followed by a description of the Lord’s raining “on him & his troops, & on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire & brimstone” (38:22). Finally, the Lord says, “I will strike your bow from your left hand & dash down your arrows from your right hand. You will fall on the mountains of Israel, you & all your troops & the peoples who are with [Hebr ittāk, “against”] you; I will give you as food to every kind of predatory bird & beast of the field. You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken,’ declares the Lord God” (39:3-5). Is the fighting by God alone, with no human agents being employed? The text does not say, since next up is the burning of weapons & the burying of bodies. Why no depiction of the battle itself & the humans involved therein, but a clear indication that people are cleaning up the mess afterwards? This is passing strange, a quandary that should be addressed in solving the Gog & Magog enigma.

In keeping with the Messianic theme, consider the term “pass through” or “pass by,” used six times in Ezk39:11,14-15. The NASB reads, “On that day I will give Gog a burial ground there in Israel, the valley of those who PASS BY east of the sea, & it will block off those who would PASS BY. ... They will set apart men who will constantly PASS THROUGH the land, burying those who were PASSING THROUGH ... As those who PASS THROUGH the land PASS THROUGH & anyone sees a man’s bone ...” The repetition can hardly be missed, & must be of substance, but what exactly is the point? Interestingly, the Hebrew “abar” (Strong’s #5674) can also be translated, “trangressed, transgression.” For example, in Dan9:11, “Yes, all Israel has transgressed [abar] Your law, & has departed so as not to obey Your voice;” or Hos8:1, “... they have transgressed [abar] My covenant & rebelled against My law.” Could it be that, rather than dealing with the dark, shadowy movements of unnamed bone marking employees, these words in Ezk39 are rather concerned with the punishment of Old Covenant transgressors?

Offering an alternate translation of Ezk39:11,14-15, where the “pass through” occurrences of the Hebrew “abar” are replaced by “[covenant] transgression,” along with other alternatives (in all capitals), we read:

“And it shall come to pass on that day that I will give to INVADED a place of graves in Israel, the valley of the [COVENANT] TRANSGRESSORS to the east of the sea; & it shall stop the [COVENANT] TRANSGRESSORS. There they shall bury INVADED & all his multitude, & they shall call it The Valley of the INVADED multitude.’ ... And they shall continually sever out those who TRANSGRESS [THE COVENANT] IN PALESTINE, burying those who were TRANSGRESSING [THE COVENANT], even those left on the face of PALESTINE. In order to cleanse, at the end of seven months they shall search for the [COVENANT] TRANSGRESSORS WHO TRANSGRESS [THE COVENANT] IN PALESTINE. See, the bones of men are a MONUMENT BUILT as a WITNESS against those buried in GRAVES in the Valley of the INVADED multitude!”

In the above translation, “Gog” is translated “invaded” (“gud”) as decrypted above; & “Palestine” is substituted for “land” or “earth” to highlight the location, since “land” without qualifier in the OT generally references Palestine (Chilton). Of course this “land” of Palestine is “east of the sea,” as given in 39:11. Alternative vowel pointings are used for “witness” (“ed” instead of “ad,” until) & “graves” (“qeber” instead of “qabar,” bury). Retranslating the text, one can hardly help but think of the parallels to Jesus’ accusation against the Jewish leaders of His day, that they were, “like whitewashed TOMBS which on the outside appear beautiful, but inside they are full of DEAD MEN’S BONES & all uncleanness” (Mt23:27). These very covenant transgressors, who opposed the incarnate Son of God with their crusty man-made accretions to the Law of God (cf Mt15), would soon — within 40 years of the cross — become a monument to futility in their antagonism to the Lord Jesus Christ.

This translation is decidedly different from that conventionally given, but it makes a lot more sense than orange vested work crews who redirect traffic while they build monuments — for building monuments is literally what the Hebrew says — next to any discovered stray bones. It also explains the repetitive nature of “passing through.” It’s not an issue of transportation (passing through), but rather of Mosaic violations & the consequent covenant sanctions against the transgressors. And who partook of said covenant? Ethnic Israel, who consistently & egregiously violated the covenant. If covenant transgressions rather than the movements of grave markers & diggers are in view in 39:11,14-15, then an
accurate Gog & Magog analysis will probably have a strong component of Mosaic covenant sanctions meted out against the Old Covenant (Israeli) transgressors.

(16) Expiation, Execution & Exile

Transgressions & the Messiah in the same passage?! We would then expect that matters concerning sin & forgiveness would also be contained in Ezk38-39 – & we find it to be so! However, we also discover a baffling contrast, where sins are concurrently remembered & forgotten. How can this be?! First on sins being remembered, we have 39:23-24 – “The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against me, & I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, & all of them fell by the sword. According to their uncleanness & according to their transgressions I dealt with them, & I hid My face from them.” Clearly Israel’s sins would be punished, & the surrounding nations would understand this to be the reason for their exile. Hard on the heels of this harsh retributive language, however, we have the encouraging words of 39:25-27 – “Therefore thus says the Lord God, ‘Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob & have mercy on the whole house of Israel; & I will be jealous for My holy name. They will FORGET [Schröder “expiate”] their disgrace & all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their own land with no one to make them afraid. When I bring them back from the peoples & gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations.’ Now here is an oddity indeed! The Israelites will FORGET their disgrace & treachery, though typically the Lord calls upon them to remember their malfeasance & infidelity! Moreover, the Gentiles will understand this as well, both that the Lord punished Israel for iniquity (v23) & that Israel’s disgrace will be forgotten (v27). If I’m a “nation” (Gentile), I think I’d be mighty confused by all of this! The proper elucidation of Gog & Magog must account for this puzzle, that sins are simultaneously recalled & forgotten.

The KJV of 39:23 reads, “And the heathen shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity: because they trespassed against me.” Greenhill points out that the Hebrew says the house of Israel was led into captivity IN (not for) their iniquity – but what captivity? In connection with Gog & Magog, there seems to be some future exile for Israel, subsequent to the Babylonian captivity of which Ezekiel was a part (in the 25th year, 40:1) – but what captivity future to Ezekiel is being addressed, & how is heading off to captivity commensurate with their sins being removed?

Notice that the Gog & Magog episode closes with the capstone of blessings: “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” (39:29). We know of only one Scriptural citation for the actual (not prophesied) outpouring of the Spirit, & that is the justly famous Acts2 Pentecost event. Is this being referenced in 39:29, or is there some future gushing forth of the Spirit upon Israel? An intriguing suggestion by Maldonate (in Greenhill) seems to go hand in glove with an Acts 2 application. Instead of translating 39:28, “& I will leave none of them there any longer,” Maldonate proposes, “None of those predestined” – now doesn’t THAT speak of the elect who comprise the church & enjoyed the outpouring of the Spirit in Acts2?! Could it be that the physical Israelites are not in view after all, but the forgiveness of sin by the cross & the deluge of the Spirit upon the church after the Ascension, as described at the end of the gospels & in Acts1-2?

Speaking of an all-encompassing mercy to Israel, there are other questions raised by the text at the end of chapter 39. 39:25 says that God would “have mercy on the WHOLE house of Israel.” By no measure has any return from exile in the past included ALL of Israel; it has always been just a remnant. Then there is 39:28: “Then they will know that I am the Lord their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, & then gathered them again to their own land; & I WILL LEAVE NONE OF THEM THERE ANY LONGER.” Setting aside for the moment the issue of another exile – not the Babylonian, but a later one – we have the peculiar statement that not one will remain in exile. The translation of 39:28 may not be without problems (see below); but if “I will leave none of them there any longer” is accurate, it cannot apply to today’s Palestinian politics. Not even the most ardent Zionist supposes that the present day Jewish residence in Palestine includes every single Jew without exception; & therefore the resettling of the land by modern Jews cannot really fulfill the requirement of the questionable Ezk39:28. Then again, from whence did these returning exiles come, since 39:23 says, “& ALL of them fell by the sword.”? If they ALL fell by the sword, who will remain to go into exile & then return?

To summarize the execution, expiation, & exile threads, the answer to the Gog & Magog riddle must include several seemingly disparate components. Israel will go off to exile for their sins AFTER the Gog & Magog event – this is NOT the Babylonian captivity, from which Ezekiel himself wrote in about the 25th year (Ezk40:1). The Gentiles will recognize this exile as God’s punishment upon them for iniquity. The whole house of Israel – no exceptions seem allowed – will have their sins forgiven & be returned from exile, & the nations will understand this as well; but how can this be, when ALL of the sinful Jews had previously fallen by the sword (39:23)? By unexplained means some will remain to go into exile in disgrace & then all of them (none left behind) return with their sins forgotten, though it appears they have all been put to death in battle. Is it any wonder that the Gog & Magog text generates such confusion?! But there is a suggestion in the passage itself that indicates this problem may not be as difficult as first supposed; namely, the ready understanding by the nations of these happenings. If the nations understand, cannot we?

Restating the difficulties associated with Ezk39:21-29 in chronological sequence, we have the seemingly mutually exclusive episodes of ¹ ALL fall by the sword (v23), but then inexplicably some will remain to ² head off to exile for their sins – their transgressions being remembered by them God (vss23-24); but subsequently ALL of them – no exceptions – ³ return with forgiveness & sins forgotten – the very sins they were called upon to bear in mind (v25-28); & now they even have ⁴ the Spirit poured out on the whole house of Israel (v29); but ⁵ these happenings must be, in fact, easily comprehended by the nations (vss21, 23, 27) – the Gentiles “get it,” without any apparent confusion. Would that we had such comprehension as the Gentiles possess … but then again, maybe we already do!
(17) Millennium?

Some insert a Millennium after Ezk38-39, since what follows is the supposed Millennial (or Third) Temple of Ezk40-48, with its reinstituted bloody sacrifices EXPLICITLY FOR ATONEMENT (42:13; 43:19-26; 44:27-29; 45:15-25). Note that we cannot allow the Dispensational gloss (Ryrie, Chafer, others) that these sin sacrifices are memorial when this unequivocally contradicts the Scriptures. The Levitical priesthood will be set up once again – will this supplant Jesus & His Melchizedekian High Priesthood in the Millennium? Apparently so, since Jesus the prince will have the sinful human priests offer animal sacrifices on His behalf (46:2). A retrograde maneuver to the primacy of the Old Covenant, complete with sin-tainted mortal priests, is what some look forward to in their soon coming Millennium! The problems with such a view are innumerable. We can safely let the futurist Zionists wallow in the blood of their self-inflicted wounds, knowing that it will of necessity collapse under the weight of its own substantial tweaking & modifications to avoid the massive Scriptural obstacles to Zionism. To my Dispensationalist friends, doesn’t the constant adjusting & updating of your system make it seem like you’ve started down the wrong path in the first place, since you have to keep making major course corrections to avoid sapping off the Scriptural charts with unbiblical conclusions? There is so much balin’ wire & duct tape on the Dispensational system that few but the professionals can keep all of it straight; something seems gravely amiss.

Returning to Gog & Magog, we note that there is no actual mention of any Millennium in Ezk38-48 (this includes the “Third” Temple). Neither is there an unequivocal reference to Jesus’ physical throne, to Jerusalem, to a secretly raptured & then resurrected group of saints who physically rule with Jesus in Jerusalem, or any of the abundance of additional fantastic conclusions that some have drawn from the book of Revelation, & by rapidly moving sleight-of-hand, inserted into Ezk38-48. Some would call this Ezekiel’s version of the Great Tribulation, that supposedly future 7 year conflagration that they extract from Revelation. Then again, for the better informed, Gog & Magog causes a fair degree of Millennial heartburn. The problem is clear once stated. In Ezekiel, the vision of Gog & Magog PRECEDES the Third (or Ezekiel’s) Temple, the supposed Millennial Temple with its reinstituted Levitical priesthood & bloody sacrifices. In other words, in Ezekiel, Gog & Magog comes BEFORE the Millennium. In Revelation, however, the Gog & Magog episode, given in 20:7-9, comes AFTER the Millennium of 20:1-6. How can Gog & Magog both precede & follow the Millennium? Unless one appeals to diplopia (Adams’ term; in playground parlance, “a do-over”), this causes a bit of futuristic fumbling. It is difficult to fathom how some can insist that Ezk38-39 clearly shows the Great Tribulation prior to the Millennial future of Ezk40-48 – an earthly Millennium imported wholesale from Rev20 without overt Biblical warrant – while Gog & Magog actually takes place after the Millennium in Rev20. Such folk apparently ignore (or are ignorant of) the Scriptural timing conflict between Ezekiel 38-39 & Rev20:7-9. Is an extra-Biblical futuristic & Zionistic scheme attempting to supersede & circumvent the Scriptural evidence? [Who’s a “supersessionist” now?] Did God not know that He put Gog & Magog AFTER the Millennium in Rev20 but BEFORE the supposed Millennial Temple of Ezk40-48? No, the positioning & timing by the Lord Almighty in these two separate passages is indeed quite purposeful & must be adequately accounted for in an accurate identification of Gog & Magog.

While we’re on the subject, let us recall what Rev20:7-9 actually says will take place with Gog & Magog after the 1000 year reign of Christ (the Millennium):

“When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, & will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog & Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth & surrounded the Campbell of the Saints & the beloved CITY, & fire came down from heaven & devoured them.”

Some will point to this passage & exclaim, “See, this is Armageddon, the battle at the end of time against Jerusalem! The Muslim extremists (or another villainous nation appropriate to the current headlines) are in their corner ready to invade Israel!” Alas for such Chicken Little “the end is near” hyperventilators, this eschatological shoe doesn’t quite fit. First off, Armageddon happened way back in Rev16:16, four full chapters before Rev20. Of course, it doesn’t help that the Hebrew “har,” mountain, does not describe the purported location at all – there is no “mountain of Megiddo” (Har-megiddo, or Armageddon), only Mt Carmel & the plain of Jezreel being nearby. Fighting in a plain near Megiddo does NOT agree with the events taking place on a mountain – this cannot be Armageddon, the non-existent Mountain of Megiddo! Next, Gog & Magog in Rev20 surround the CAMP, which does not align with being in a CITY very well. If you’re camping, you’re not likely in a city. This camp is of the SAINTS, but Jerusalem is currently occupied mostly by Jesus-rejecting Jews, who by no New Testament measure can be called saints. This can’t be about an end times attack upon the unregenerate Jews in Jerusalem. Then again, substituting vocal volume for argumentation (their system is under siege), some may contend that in Rev20:7-9 Jerusalem is populated by resurrected saints reigning on millions of little thrones scattered about the city; but it would be hard to imagine that one who has been resurrected has much fear regarding an invasion by mortal men, now wouldn it? And aren’t they supposed to be camping, not sitting on thrones? Could it rather be that “the beloved city” is that spoken of in the book of Hebrews, that those in Christ “have come to Mount Zion & to the CITY of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb12:22)? Indeed, Abraham dwelt in tents, “for he was looking for the CITY which has foundations, whose architect & builder is God” (Heb11:10). Could it not be that Gog & Magog, both in Ezekiel & Revelation, deal with the same type of event; namely, that the church – the camp of the saints, the heavenly Jerusalem – is badly persecuted but miraculously rescued by the Lord Almighty? One’s Gog & Magog outlook must agree with its application in the book of Revelation, & tossing it all into the “a miracle occurs” futuroist bucket & saying that God will sort it all out is a Biblical evasion (“a cop out” of the highest order.

(18) Ezekiel 39:28?

“But wait!” my futurist pal may exclaim, “Doesn’t 39:28 make plain that Israel must be restored to Palestine, the very thing that happened in 1948?”

“Then they will know that I am the Lord their God BECAUSE I MADE THEM GO INTO EXILE AMONG THE NATIONS, & THEN GATHERED THEM AGAIN TO THEIR OWN LAND; & I WILL LEAVE NONE OF THEM THERE ANY LONGER.” (Ezk39:38 NASB)
“See?! It’s right there!” exclaims my Dispensational friend. “Israel as a nation will return to the promised land, so obviously the events of Gog & Magog pertain to our day & age, & then to our immediate future, when the Secret Rapture will whisk the church away & the Great Tribulation will begin, with the rise of the Antichrist & all that other stuff! The prophetic clock restarts & God renews His work with ethnic Israel, the parenthetical & ineffectual church having been taken out of the way. Worldwide evangelism, a bitter failure for the church, will be remarkably successful by those 144,000 evangelists. I’ve read the paperbacks & seen the movies, all supported by big name theologians! What do you have to say about THAT, Mister Amill-Smarty-Pants?!?” Well, my hard-breathing Dispensationalist friend, please be not too hasty in your conclusions, for the Septuagint (hereafter LXX) of Ezk39:28 is quite different:

“And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, WHEN I HAVE BEEN MANIFESTED TO THEM AMONG THE NATIONS.” (Ezk39:28 LXX)

The words in capital letters give the exact same passage as highlighted previously. Obviously the LXX reads quite differently (& much shorter!) than that translated from the Hebrew – so different, in fact, that it is tough to reconcile them. Well, how can I put it gently? The Masoretes, those non-Christian keepers & transmitters of the Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) who lived hundreds of years after Jesus’ day, may have had a theological axe to grind; the Bible may have been modified in the 6th to 10th centuries AD by unbelieving Zionist hands.

Who were the Masoretes? They were the unregenerate (Christ-rejecting) Jews who preserved the Hebrew text from the 6th to the 10th centuries & added a system of vowel points to the consonant-only Hebrew Bible. The oldest extant complete Masoretic Text & the Hebrew text gold standard is the Leningrad Codex of 1008AD. Note that the Masoretes were hundreds of years after Jesus & the Apostles, & that the oldest extant complete codex is from 1000 years after Jesus’ time & 2400 years after Moses put down the Pentateuch. Consider also that to be a Jew in the 6th to 10th centuries meant to be one of the proper bloodline who rejected Jesus. This is the same single criterion as forwarded by today’s Jewish media critic Michael Medved, that being a Jew means having the right pedigree while saying that Jesus of Nazareth is NOT the promised Messiah. Per this Jewish outlook, as soon as a Jew is converted to Christianity he ceases to be a Jew. Returning to the Masoretes, can we trust the textual preservation of those who avowedly spurned God’s ultimate revelation, Jesus (Heb1:1-2)? Not surprisingly, one may discover some issues.

Old Testament textual modification by the later unbelieving Jewish custodians is the very point fleshed out by Rydelnik with respect to another passage. On occasion, the Masoretes altered the Bible if the text did not comport with their agenda. A salient example is Judg18:30. A wicked Levite had joined the Danites in idolatry, & the older Hebrew texts, as reflected by the LXX, say that he was the grandson of Moses (“Jonathan, the son of Gershom, the son of Moses”). Uncomfortable with this (per Rydelnik), the Masoretes CHANGED THE WORD OF GOD to read “son of Manasseh” instead of “son of Moses,” thus deflecting the Biblical blow against their hero, Moses. This explains the difference between the MT & LXX for Judg18:30. If the Masoretes were willing to “adjust” the Scriptural text in this instance to preserve Mosaic hegemony, what else might they have changed?

Whenever one compares the Old Testament quotes made by Jesus & the Apostles with the Masoretic Text-based OT passages themselves, discrepancies often appear. This is usually explained by saying that Jesus & the Apostles quoted from the LXX, since that was the text widely used at the time by the Greek speaking world; but could it rather be that the LXX gives a more accurate reflection of the ancient Hebrew text, & that Christ-rejecting, Pharisee-exalting alterations from the Jews crept in thereafter?

As highlighted by some, the LXX was the last translation of the OT preserved by the pre-incarnation (before Christ) community of faith, the genuine believers under the Old Covenant. Legend has it (Wiki) that the 5 books of Moses were translated by 70 (or 72) Jewish scholars in 70 days, hence the Roman numeral designation LXX – quite a remarkable feat, if the legend is to be believed. This translational effort was done at the request of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (283-246BC), the Greek ruler of Egypt & son of Alexander the Great’s general, Ptolemy I Soter (323-283BC), who took Egypt upon Alexander’s death. Ptolemy II wanted the Hebrew Scriptures in Greek for inclusion in his Library of Alexandria. All of this took place around the middle of the 3rd century BC (~250BC). Later translations were made of the other OT books, & these were of varying quality. The translation was completed by about 132BC. However, as late as the 2nd to 3rd centuries AD, Theodotion’s translation of Daniel replaced the previous LXX version.

Dean Burgon makes the salient point that an older translation gives us a textual snapshot from the date of its rendition. If Moses was translated into Greek around 250BC, this cements the translated text of that time. Variations may occur to the Hebrew & Greek thereafter, but these would of necessity follow different redactive courses. If the two textual traditions differ – namely, the MT & LXX – then how can we know which is accurate? Enter the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS): Most scholars saw the LXX as inferior to the Hebrew Bible called the Masoretic Text (MT). With the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls [in 1947], this all changed. Ancient Hebrew scrolls [from as early as 200BC] were found that follow the LXX, not the MT. The DSS showed that the LXX had an underlying Hebrew Text that was different from the MT. John Allegro in The Dead Sea Scrolls documents that when the LXX & MT contradict, the LXX most often agrees with the DSS. (Allegro 59-83).” [doxa.ws]

The Dead Sea Scrolls are telling us to trust the Septuagint (LXX) more than the Masoretic Text (MT); & it doesn’t hurt that this obviously agrees with the OT quotes of Jesus & the Apostles.

Preachersinstitute.com spells out this same argument (emphasis added):

There was a time when many Protestant scholars assumed that the Septuagint was an often loose translation of the Hebrew text, & that when it differed from the Masoretic Text, it was due to changes made by the translators. However, since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, we now know that the Septuagint is based on a different & older Hebrew text than the Masoretic text. The Hebrew Text that has served as the basis for most translations of the Old Testament into English is based almost entirely on the Leningrad Codex, which dates from 1008AD. In comparison to the textual evidence that we have for the New Testament Greek text, this is a very late manuscript. It is an exam-
ple of the Masoretic recension, which is usually dated to have been shaped between the 6th & 10th centuries AD. This is well after the Septuagint was translated (3rd century before Christ), the Peshitta [Syriac] (1st & 2nd centuries AD), or the Latin Vulgate (4th century AD). According to Christian tradition, the non-Christian Jews began making changes in the Old Testament text to undercut the Christian use of Old Testament prophecies concerning the coming of Christ. ... The Hebrew Text that we now have was preserved outside the Church. The Septuagint & Peshitta texts were preserved within the Church, & so the Church believes that the text of the Old Testament has been authoritatively preserved in these textual traditions. Furthermore, it is clear that the text that Christ & the Apostles used most closely matches the Septuagint rather than the Masoretic text.

What are some of the differences between the MT & LXX? Bibleandscience.com gives us a compendium of examples: Jeremiah is one seventh shorter in the LXX than in the MT. ... Not only is the LXX shorter, but the arrangement of verses is different. The Dead Sea Scrolls 4QJer are very similar to the LXX with the shorter text, & the different arrangement of verses. ... The LXX of Ezekiel is about 4-5% shorter than the MT. One example is Ezekiel 7:3-9. The LXX of Ezekiel seems to reflect a shorter Hebrew text, the MT being a later expanded edition. The MT adds parallel words & phrases, exegetical phrases, harmonization, & new material. Ezekiel 36 is longer in the MT. P. Chester Beatty 667 of the LXX lacks verses 23-38. This implies that the Old Greek [LXX] reflects an early stage of development of the Book of Ezekiel.

This last bit on Ezekiel’s expansion in the MT is important for our consideration of Ezk39:28, where this textual detour began. The selection is binary; either one believes the MT translation:

“Then they will know that I am the Lord their God BECAUSE I MADE THEM GO INTO EXILE AMONG THE NATIONS, & THEN GATHERED THEM AGAIN TO THEIR OWN LAND; & I WILL LEAVE NONE OF THEM THERE ANY LONGER.” (NASB)

or the LXX:

“And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, WHEN I HAVE BEEN MANIFESTED TO THEM AMONG THE NATIONS” (LXX).

There is no middling. If you trust the non-Christian Masoretes from hundreds of years after Jesus’ day – those whom the church testified against, who altered the Biblical text to undercut the Christian use of the OT & to boost their own agenda – then go with the MT. We believe, rather, that the preponderance of textual evidence favors the LXX, pre-Christ.

If the LXX translation correctly reflects Ezekiel’s original Hebrew text, then the case is greatly weakened for ethnic Israel’s return to Palestine before the Messiah – whom the Jews say is definitely NOT Jesus – comes in the first place. For those in the church who accept the MT of 39:28, however, there is an insurmountable problem. Does the present re-population of Palestine represent ALL of Israel, with none “left behind,” per the MT translation of 39:28? Certainly not. How can this be reconciled? I suppose some futuristic application could be posited, where all of the Jews without exception will return to Israel’s shores before the Great Tribulation, but this is a tacit admission that the “none left behind” criterion of 39:28 doesn’t actually apply to the Jews’ present political condition. There can be no partial fulfillment of, “I will leave none of them there any longer.” Either ALL of the ethnic Jews are gathered back to Palestine, or NONE of this passage applies to their present circumstances in the land. One cannot have it both ways, where Ezk39:28 both applies & doesn’t apply to Israel’s current governmental situation in Palestine.

In sum, then, we are convinced that the LXX on Ezk39:28 accurately reflects the original Hebrew text: “And they shall know that I am the Lord their God, WHEN I HAVE BEEN MANIFESTED TO THEM AMONG THE NATIONS.” God’s glory will be made known to the Gentiles by the Gog & Magog catastrophe, as previously stated in 38:23; 39:7,21 – & could not 39:28 be a fourth God glorifying passage? Does this not also imply that the non-Gentiles, or Jews, are receiving a whipping by the Lord for their rejection of the Son, per the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants (Mt21:41-44)? Little wonder that such an outlook might motivate the Jesus-rejecting Masoretes to alter the Biblical text.

Evaluating the Options

One key fits a lock. Puzzle pieces go together in a certain way – using system driven scissors is cheating! The gears & springs of a pocket watch are carefully assembled in the right sequence & location to properly operate. These are illustrations of our present Gog & Magog situation. The Lord Himself has given us an abundance of interlocking Scriptural parts in Ezk38-39, & all must correctly align in a tight fashion, without recourse to equivocations & fudging. No, we need no doctrinal duct tape or theological five pound hammers to make it all work; there will surely be only one possible solution, only one key that fits the lock! Avoiding the Biblical conflicts, skirt ing the Scriptural issues, ducking & weaving like a prize fighter as he shields himself from each Biblical impasse – all of these are theolog ically out of bounds, & such antics call into question the agenda of the advocate. Each suggested solution to the Gog & Magog enigma must square up & get punched in the face by the actual Scriptural facts, not by some softballs tossed by strawmen! It is likely that only one solution will remain standing when the bell rings & the match between the Bible & the proposed Gog & Magog alternatives is over.

Clearly Gog & Magog is a seminal event in the annals of Israel. Its fulfillment cannot be secreted away in some dark corner of the past. In the post-exilic history of the Jews in Palestine, there have really only been a handful of events that can be deemed militarily pivotal. Chronologically these are: 1) The persecution by Antiochus Epiphanes & the subsequent Maccabean revolt (168-164BC– 3½ years, or the famous time, times & ½ a time of Dan7:25), resulting in a free Jewish state from 163-63BC; 2) Pomphey’s conquest of Palestine in the name of Rome, 63BC; 3) The Jewish War (66-73AD), the destruction of the Temple (70AD) being precisely 40 years after Jesus’ crucifixion (30AD) & dead center during the imploding of Israel, 3½ years after the war began (the middle of the week, Dan9:27); 4) The Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-
Moving onward, we come to the most popular present day solution to the Gog & Magog conundrum; namely the suggestion by some – mostly theologians from the 1800s – that the Gog & Magog affair was fulfilled in about 625 BC when the Scythian hordes wreaked havoc upon Palestine during the Maccabean Revolt.

Let us consider the other suggestions in turn to see if any fit ALL of the Scriptural criteria.

Excluded from this list is the suggestion by some – mostly theologians from the 1800s – that the Gog & Magog affair was a fulfillment of events that occurred in the time of Antiochus Epiphanes (38:8,16); it is not well known among the nations (or by us!) & thus does not glorify God, contravening 38:23; 39:7,21-29; it did not result in extensive death & burials (contra 39:9ff; there is noMessianic connection; & so forth. The Scythians apparently were a popular 19th century solution to the text of Ezk38-39, but a little chronological distance from the milieu that popularized it amongst the theologians of that century shows that the Scythian bucket has too many holes in the bottom; it can hold no Biblical water.

Let us consider the other suggestions in turn to see if any fit ALL of the Scriptural criteria.

1. Antiochus Epiphanes’ invasion & wars with the Jews are seminal, resulting in the annual Hanukkah celebration of the Temple’s cleansing. However, if Antiochus Epiphanes is to be identified as the leader Gog, then he would have been terminated in Israel, & there we should find his grave; but Greenhill says that he fell in either Babylon (1Macc6) or Ecbatana in India (2Macc9). Also, his invading forces were never conquered & decimated in Palestine to the extent indicated in the Gog & Magog episode. It is difficult to see how Antiochus’ activities could have transpired in the “latter years” or “last days” (38:8,16), though Dan8:17,19 can be offered in support (“the time of the end” associated with Antiochus’ pummeling of the Jews). While Antiochus’ armies were extensive, there is no record of his troops being drawn from the tabulated nations of 38:5-6. Collapsing walls (38:20) nowhere figure in to Antiochus’ actions, since most of the battles with the Jews occurred in the open fields; nor was there any particular trade disruption (38:13) during this era. We could continue, but the point is clear; while Antiochus Epiphanes’ storming & devastation of Israel are historically monumental, there are too many Biblical particulars from Ezk38-39 that do not align with the events of his time, & therefore we may safely conclude that Gog & Magog were not fulfilled during Antiochus’ day.

2. Nowhere have we read the suggestion that Gog & Magog represent Pompey’s conquest of Judea for Rome (63 BC), though this was a substantive martial event in Israel’s history, ultimately bringing the Idumean (Edomite) Herod the Great to the throne; but Pompey & the actions of others immediately thereafter have few of the Gog & Magog hallmarks given above, so this suggestion can rightly be bypassed.

Skipping the Jewish War for the moment, we turn to the tremendous devastation of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-135 AD). While it is true that this was a decisive national event, resulting in the final removal of all Jews from Aelia Capitolina (née Jerusalem), the fact remains that Bar Kokhba is a rebellion shrouded in mystery, with few of the intricacies from the Gog & Magog narrative fitting the revolt. We can safely set aside this proposal, yet another that to our knowledge has not yet been forwarded as an Ezk38-39 solution.

Once again, we briefly trot past futurism to address the agnostic. we don’t & can’t know the answer to the Gog & Magog question. This assertion may in fact be true of us personally, but it is decidedly unsatisfactory from a Biblical perspective in an absolute sense – there’s a great gulf between, “I don’t know!” & “No one can or ever will know!” Did God really give us two whole intricately detailed prophetic chapters so that centuries of Christians can remain hopelessly confused? And this from a passage that purports to glorify God (38:23; 39:7,21), which it certainly does NOT if we haven’t a clue what these two chapters are talking about? Like an uncut watermelon, this is difficult to swallow. In addition, some contend that ignorance is bliss, & that godliness is promoted by paying no attention to portions of the Bible. Using this same line of reasoning, why not promote “love” by not bringing up the gospel with your unsaved friends? Why not ignore the Bible’s teachings on predestination because some find the conclusions uncomfortable? The Scriptures never give us license to obviate certain topics we find thorny or controversial. Maybe the very demanding & arduous portions will draw us closer to the knowledge of the Holy One Himself as we attempt to sort out the text. True, “I don’t know,” is a Biblically acceptable answer; but, “I don’t know, you don’t know, no one can or will ever know, so please don’t bring up the subject in polite company!” is categorically unscriptural, a hot potato that should not be held too long.

Moving onward, we come to the most popular present day solution to the Gog & Magog conundrum; namely a conflagration future to us that either ushers in or is subsequent to the earthly Millennial rule of Jesus on a physical Davidic throne in Jerusalem. It is difficult to critique a position prior to the events taking place – “Hey, miracles will occur in the future, so how can you say I’m wrong?” However, there is sufficient evidence within Ezk38-39 to discount this currently prevalent position. The first is the very problem of timing; namely, that Gog & Magog precedes the supposedly future Millennial Temple in Ezekiel, but Gog & Magog follows the Millennium in Rev20:7-9. So, then, which is it – is Gog & Magog before the Millennium or after it? Literalism seems to preclude a both/answer – neither Ezekiel nor Revelation forward two Gog & Magog events – so one must choose either a pre- or postmillennial Gog position. The military explosion of Ezk38-39 seems to square better with the presumed future 7 year Great Tribulation preceding Jesus’ earthly Millennial reign, as forwarded by today’s Dispensationalists; but Rev20 couldn’t be clearer that Gog & Magog occurs after this Millennium, just prior to the final consummation. This is only one of a host of problems with the futuristic view of Gog & Magog. Of course, the travel, firewood, weaponry, & defenses (walls) indicated in Ezk38-39
are all ancient; & it is decidedly unfair to declare one’s fealty to literalism & then turn-around & deny said literalism by contending that the swords & walls are figures of speech about modern warfare. Pick your poison. Thou shalt be either literal, or thou shalt not. You cannot be literal when convenient, figurative when literalism is inconvenient, & yet still pound your shoe on the table about being the only ones who takes the Bible seriously. Taking a stroll through the prophetic cafeteria, will you pick some items as literal, some as figurative, & yet still contend that you take a literalistic approach to the Bible & disparage all who come not to your same conclusions? No, this will not do at all! One must swallow the literalist camel whole. Taking Gog & Magog literally means that you must also take the mode of transportation (land only), heating & cooking (firewood), armaments (swords, shields), & defenses (walls) literally; & do not these put Gog & Magog in our past, not our future? Even the most hardened futurist of whatever stripe (Dispensational or otherwise) must bow the knee to the Bible on this one; selective literalism is entirely out of bounds. If it is an issue of “taking the Bible seriously,” then there can be little doubt that Ezk38-39 is not prophecy to our modern era but history.

Other objections from the Biblical text easily unfold concerning the futurist option. 38:17 tells us that the Gog & Magog episode has been frequently foretold in previous Scriptural prophecies, but it is with difficulty that the futuristic approach finds even one (Num24:7; retranslating “Agag” as “Gog); & one obscure & debatable passage is by no measure frequently foretold! Moreover, even if this one citation accounts for Gog, what of the frequently foretold Magog — is he left out in the prophetic cold, with no prior Scriptural references, contra 38:17? No, no, 38:17 is an unbreakable barrier to futurism; Gog & Magog must have numerous Biblical citations prior to Ezekiel’s day, & for this futurism cannot account.

Another futurist problem is the media that is “left behind.” If, as modern legend has it, the church will be secretly raptured away, restarting the prophetic clock with Israel & inaugurating the 7 year Great Tribulation, won’t all of the Dispensational paperbacks, movies, magazines, & sermons be “left behind” to warn the invaders (Gog & Magog) not to embark on such a foolish & expensive incursion into Israel where they will only meet their fiendly demise? Another problem – where in the Dispensational tale is there an additional exile for the Jews (39:23,28), followed by a return of absolutely every single Jew (if the MT translation of Ezk39:28 is accepted), even though everyone fell by the sword? There seems to be too much hair on this Dispensational dog, too many Scriptural facts from Ezk38-39 that do not align with a futuristic approach.

An unpleasant fact about futurism is that it plays into the Christ-denying hands of the ethnic Jews. As Trapp tells us: The Jews ... expounding this prophecy [Gog & Magog] according to the letter, conclude that Christ is not yet come, because these things here foretold are not yet fulfilled. When he does come, they say, he shall set up his kingdom at Jerusalem, gather all Israel out of all coasts unto himself there, send each one to his own tribe, & that most certainly, by the operation of his Holy Spirit. There they shall be no sooner settled, & the kingdom not yet fully established, but Gog & Magog shall bring a huge army against Jerusalem, where they shall fall by the sword, lie unburied, etc.

Expounding God’s exclusivist future dealings with ethnic Israel during a future 7 year Great Tribulation, with the anemic & ineffective church having been removed for heavenly safekeeping, is not all that far afield from the Jewish literal position that the Messiah has not yet come. At best, this an awkward outlook for the church to advocate, & one that will fade from the scene as these logical consequences see increasing quantities of daylight.

Gog & Magog Solved: The Jewish War (66–73 AD)

Who’s the last man standing? Paraphrasing Sherlock Holmes (ch6 p111), after eliminating the impossible, whatever remains must be the truth, however improbable. Number 2, the Jewish War (66–73 AD), with the destruction of the Temple (70 AD) in the middle of the 7 years after 3½ years of war, in the middle of the 70th week, Dan9:27, appears to be the only solution remaining. We now proceed to sift through the facts given above & show that, Indeed, this key fits the lock, the puzzle pieces all fit neatly together, & the watch gears are correctly assembled & the timepiece is functional. Truly God was & is glorified & the Son exalted in the Gog & Magog affair, the Jewish War of the 1st century AD.

(1) God Glorifying & Messianic

The Jewish War brought glory to God, especially among the Gentiles (38:23; 39:7,21). The situation for the early church could not have looked more desperate. The unbelieving Jews – the Harlot & Babylon of Rev17-18 – had viciously opposed the spread of the gospel, & were utilizing Roman power (the Beast) to crush the young, tender church. But lo! Instead of being demolished, the church triumphed! Rome dealt a death blow to the Jewish state – the Beast hated the Harlot & devoured & burned her (Rev17:16). Rather than crushing the church, the whole land of Israel instead was consumed by war, as detailed by Josephus. Meanwhile, the iron-fisted Roman empire itself nearly collapsed in the same time period. Nero committed suicide in 68 AD, & this was followed by the year of 3 emperors (69 AD). Contemporary witnesses declared the end of Rome, but the fatal wound was healed (Rev13:3) with the rise of the Flavian dynasty in the person of Vespasian (70 AD). Surely the Lord Almighty was magnified in the eyes of the nations as His fledgling church was not only preserved, but was victorious over its opponents – Roman might instigated by Jewish hate (the Harlot riding the Beast) came to naught, & the church was triumphant! Now doesn’t THAT bring glory to God!

Clearly there is a primary Messianic element in the Jewish War. The Jews had rejected their Messiah, declaring, “His blood shall be on us & on our children!” (Mt27:25); & so it was, as the Jewish War turned Palestine into a bloodbath. The Jews had sought to keep their place & nation by executing Jesus (Jn11:47-53). Irony of ironies, they instead lost it all by spurning God’s ultimate revelation (Heb1:1-2). Over their bloodthirsty & vitriolic objections, the New Covenant had been inaugurated. The unbelieving Jews had 40 years, from 30 to 70 AD, to repent & accept their Messiah – a period of testing much like they’d faced during the Exodus. Alas, they continued in stubborn rebellion to the Lord of Hosts, so God visitted (point #11) their destruction upon them.

The rebellion of Israel against their Messiah is detailed in the famous “Holy, holy, holy” passage of Is6. Isaiah raises his hand to volunteer to be the Lord’s spokesman, saying (as often quoted by missionaries going forth), “Here am I. Send
me!" (Is6:8). God then tells Isaiah that the people will not listen or see – exactly what happened with most of the Jews during the time of Jesus. What was Isaiah to say?

"Go, & tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; keep on looking, but do not understand.' Render the hearts of this people insensitive, their ears dull, & their eyes dim, otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, & return & be healed." (Is6:9-10)

This is the only passage quoted in whole or part in the first 6 books of the New Testament, showing its Messianic importance. The connection between its being oft quoted & the rejection of Jesus can hardly be missed. Well, our prophet of the heavenly vision was troubled. Isaiah had volunteered, & now he was divinely handed a pretty rotten job. He was being sent, but was assured beforehand that the people would not listen. Recognizing the gravity of the prophetic situation, Isaiah exclaims, "Lord, how long?" The answer from God sounds very much like what would happen to the Jews for their rejection of Jesus, what came upon them as divine retribution during the Jewish War:

"Until cities are devastated & without inhabitant, houses are without people & the land is utterly desolate, the Lord has removed men far away, & the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land." (Is6:11-12)

The nation of Israel, who with violence & a stiff neck had rejected its Messiah, would suffer a similar fate at the hands of the Romans, & the land was left desolate after 73AD. Oh, yes, there is much of Messianic substance in the Jewish War, as those who crucified their Christ were given their comeuppance, as prophesied long beforehand by Isaiah.

This is all in keeping with 1Pt1:10-12, that the prophets themselves were puzzled by the Messianic passages – & surely Gog & Magog generates much confusion! Another Messianic connection is the famous “Christmas” passage of Is9:5-7. Both Gog & Magog & Is9 have a burning of the warrior’s materiel; because there is no doubt that Is9 is Messianic, so the burning of weapons in Ezk39 also points towards a Messianic fulfillment. An additional connection to Jesus is found in Dan2. Both Ezk38:8 & Dan2:28 use the phrase, “the latter days.” Since Dan2 gives us a picture of the stone cut without hands crushing the Colossus of the preceding kingdoms during the Roman Empire (the feet of clay & iron), we know this to be Messianic; so with the Gog & Magog passage, which uses the same “latter days” phrase. This is not speaking of the end of all time, but of Christ’s first coming & the inauguration of the New Covenant. It was thus “the latter days” of the Old Covenant, not the end of all time. “Passing through,” used multiple times in 39:11, 14-15, could equally be translated “transgressions.” The Old Covenant transgressors had judgment meted out upon them during the Jewish War, in keeping with the punishments listed for covenant rebellion in Lv26 & Dt28 (see below). Finally, sins are both remembered & forgotten in 39:21-29. Sins being forgiven & forgotten is clearly a New Testament Messianic theme. In contrast, those who rebuffed their Messiah had their sins remembered & were shipped off to permanent exile. All of these facts – puzzling to prophets, weapon burning (cf Is9), “the latter days” connecting to the Messianic rock cut without hands (Dan2), transgressors against God being punished, & sins being forgiven for some & remembered against others – all of these point toward a First Advent completion for Gog & Magog.

(2) Frequently Foretold

38:17 clearly says that the Gog & Magog episode had been frequently foretold by the previous prophets; this cannot be once or twice (such as the one-off “Agag” suggestion for Num24:7). Multiple preceding prophecies is an immovable Biblical criterion that obviates many fanciful suggestions as to the completion of Ezk38-39. Does the Jewish War meet the decisive standard of being frequently foretold? Indeed, many OT passages indicate that the New Covenant would come (Jer31:31-34), that the ethnic Jews would predominantly reject their Messiah & sacrifice the ultimate Paschal Lamb (Is53; Zch11; Ps22 & 69), & that great suffering & expulsion from the land would be the covenant sanctions against the rebels (Lv26; Dt28; cf Mt21:33-46).

Of those who ignored the king’s invitation to the Son’s wedding feast & killed or mistreated the messengers (the prophets), what did Jesus Himself say His Father, the great king, would do? “[T]he king was enraged, & he sent his armies & destroyed those murderers & set their city on fire” (Mt22:7). The language of punishment upon the murderers is not accidental, nor that the city was to be set on fire. The Roman armies, God’s emissary of retribution, would fall upon the murderous Jews & burn their city, Jerusalem. In the next chapter (Mt23), Jesus says of the Temple, “Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!” (23:38). Note whose house it is now. “You Jews who’ve rejected your Messiah, YOUR house, the Temple, will be left desolate.” There can be no doubt that the shameful treatment of Jesus by the unregenerate Israelites resulted in their expulsion of the Jews from Palestine, & all of these events were frequently predicted by the OT prophets. The Jewish War fits the “frequently foretold” criterion hand in glove.

(3) Names

Who, then, is “Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech & Tubal” (Ezk38:2)? If the meanings are in the names, as demonstrated above, then we should look no further than the words themselves for our understanding of the divine point, & that the contents of the immediate context should square with the sense of these words. A rudimentary deciphering was suggested above, with a single letter change transforming Gog into the Hebrew “gud,” meaning “to invade,” while Magog becomes “magan,” “to deliver up.” Clearly Israel was invaded during the Jewish War, & the land was delivered up by the Lord to destruction. Rosh, Mashak, & Tebel (different vowel pointing for Meshech & Tubal) mean venom, drag, & worldwide, respectively, & these are fleshed out in the nearby Biblical text, which is as is we would expect if the words themselves contain the thrust of the argument. “Venom” comports with the “evil plan” of 38:10, & squares with the Lord’s being against rebellious Israel (38:2-3); “drag” lines up with 38:4, that hooks were required to bring the Jewish nation to war; & “worldwide” agrees with the multiple participating nations listed in 38:5-6.

Israel had a poisonous plan against their Messiah (e.g., Jn11-12) & the nascent church. The Jews were bent on the destruction of the son of the landowner (21:33-46) & his bride (e.g., Acts2-3) – a venomous (Rosh) & evil plan (Ezk38:10) opposed by Yahweh (38:2). Nevertheless, the Lord was going to inaugurate the New Covenant over the virulent Jewish objections, then punish the rebels & give the kingdom to a people producing the fruit thereof (Mt21:43).
However, when the covenant sanctions were on the threshold & war finally came, Josephus (Wars2.15-17) informs us that many within the Jewish nation were opposed to going to war with the powerful & unvanquished iron-toothed Roman Beast (Dan7:7). It took the cowardice of the Roman general Cestius & his flight from the nearly conquered Jerusalem to buoy the Jews in their liberation hopes (Wars2.19) – the famous “Jerusalem surrounded by armies” (Lk21:20) that clued in the church to flight from Jerusalem to Pella, per Jesus’ instructions. The Temple & Jerusalem would soon be demolished (Lk21:5ff; Mt24:1-3; Mk13:1-2), so it was time for the church’s exodus from the evil capital city. By the way, the Exodus of the people of God, the church, from their rebellious countrymen in Jerusalem – this nicely dovetails with the selvesame Exodus language in Revelation, which has the same storyline as Gog & Magog. Clearly, then, the Almighty providentially “hooked” the Jews into war (Ezk38:4). All sense was abandoned as the Jews foolishly thought they could lick the mighty Roman Empire in battle. The Lord Himself “dragged” (mashak) Israel to its destruction.

Finally, the Roman legions were composite, representing an amalgam of many nations, & the Roman Beast of iron dominated a worldwide empire. It’s not surprising, then, that a host of distant nations are listed in 38:5-6 as coming against Israel. Whether viewed as the extent of the Roman Empire or as many nations being arrayed against the Jews in the form of the composite Roman legions, it’s obvious that a “worldwide” (tebel) assault on Israel began in 66AD & ended with Masada’s destruction in 73AD.

On the ties to Revelation, it is fascinating to note that most of the “worldwide” Roman legions were drawn from Syria near the Euphrates, stationed there as border guards against the Parthians. The 4 destructive angels bound at the Euphrates – Tacitus Annals 4:5 & Dio Cassius 4:23 both tell us that 4 Roman legions patrolled there – were released against the rebellious, Christ rejecting & church thrashing Israelites (Rev9:14). 200 million (Rev9:16) is the estimated world population in the 1st century AD (Wiki) – the whole earth was arrayed against the Jewish insurgence! Sulpicius Severus records Titus’ war council where he thought that by destroying the Temple both Judaism & Christianity would be extirpated. However, we know from Eusebius 3.5.3 that the Jerusalem church escaped the coming storm by fleeing to Pella after Cestius & his troops unceremoniously fled – Jerusalem’s being surrounded by armies signaled the coming destruction, & the church skipped town, per the Savior’s instructions (Lk21:20). The bride of Christ was rescued; or, as Rev12:14 puts it, “… the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman [the church], so that she could fly into the wilderness [Pella] to her place, where she was nourished for a time & times & half a time, from the presence of the serpent.” Meanwhile, the “land” of Israel swallowed the river of Roman vengeance (Rev12:15-16) poured out against the woman (γῆ means “earth,” or, more likely in Revelation, “land,” i.e., Palestine; see Chilton). Truly the winepress of God’s wrath was trodden for 1600 stadia (Rev14:20) – in round numbers, the geographic extent of Palestine (=184 miles; see figure).

When did all of the events of Revelation take place? During the reign of king number six, per Rev17:10. Beginning with Julius Caesar, Rome had been ruled by 5 emperors, making Nero (54-68AD) the sixth who was ruling when Revelation was written (see Gentry). Maybe in this sense the land of Palestine was “sixthed,” per Ezk39:2? Recall the confusing Ezk38:7, which the Vulgate translates “Be an emperor to them.” Doesn’t Nero’s initiation of the Jewish War in 66AD align nicely with Jerome’s rendition of 38:7?! Finally, consider the rather hapless 7 churches at the beginning of Revelation. Most were sorely persecuted for the faith; but you can visit these cities today, populated by Turks & dominated by nominal Islam, & find only a few pathetic church ruins. If the futurist storyline is correct for Revelation, then Jesus is telling his suffering Asia Minor churches something akin to this: “Fear not, O my beloved church! In a few thousand years some amazing things will take place that you cannot now understand – helicopters, tanks, airplanes, attacks by the Chinese & Russians, & so forth, but I’ll only give you cloudy & confusing verbal pictures of these events which are mostly useless to you. Yes, indeed, salvation will come in a few thousand years, but you will continue to suffer & then eventually totally expire in the 600s AD at the hand of the marauding Islamic bands. Please, my suffering body, find slim comfort in these empty words!” As many have highlighted, the Lord Jesus Christ would not so mock His persecuted followers who were looking to Him alone for relief from their enemies (cf 2Th1:4-8). No, no, the words of Revelation must have contemporary relevance to provide a morsel of comfort to the fledgling church, & futurism mightily fails this crucial test. Revelation, rather, is about the same events as detailed in Ezk38-39, but with expanded & updated information that was of critical importance to the harassed & maligned early church. Those who head down the futurist trail in their explanations of Gog & Magog & the book of Revelation invariably end up in the wilderness of fallacious Biblical conclusions, having badly lost their way from the God glorifying message originally intended by the divine Author. It’s not just a simple, nearly post-modern shoulder shrug, “Oh, believe as you please, it doesn’t really matter.” Being in the weeds of illogical Scriptural deductions robs the Father & Son both of the glory they collectively deserve; & such is the case with futurism’s applications of Gog & Magog, the Olivet Discourse, & the book of Revelation. Instead of the Savior being magnified, the church is instead transfixed with current political machinations, one world government attempts, the Israeli military’s maneuvers, & a host of other modern trivia with the spiritual nutritional value of cotton candy or a twinkie.

With futurism, the focus is not on magnifying the Savior & the Almighty, but rather on excited speculations about the soon coming combat carnage visited upon those who are “left behind,” with the paperback armchair theologians engaged in whacky crystal balling – “Nothing to fear, we won’t be here!” This is voyeurism on a scale of the Roman gladiatorial contests; by the fireplace or at the TV, we look on from a safe distance at the bloodbath & massacre suffered by others in our near future, deriving some measure of cruel, sadistic pleasure in knowing that it won’t impact us. Well, if you are of this ilk, allow me please to burst your homemade prophetic bubble. Jesus decidedly did NOT design His Scriptures
to be the happy hunting grounds of predictive cranks & crackpots who stir up the faithful with their wild & consistently failed conjectures. The Old Testament standard for a prophet was 100%, & any predictive failure gained the false forecaster the death penalty (Dt18:20,22). Leading the people astray with mendacity & fabrication was a capital crime, a “hanging offense!” Our latter day bankrupt oracles of eschatology may not deserve execution, but we should at least put them out of business – stop buying their novels & other drivel masquerading as end times Scriptural exegesis! There has been a very profitable “boom in doom,” where authors of questionable credentials or motivations have been handsomely rewarded for their outrageous roller coaster rides through the prophetic word. The Savior’s glory is robbed to stuff the piggy banks of charlatans; cutting off the funds will curtail their output & thus the collateral damage visited upon the church.

The Olivet Discourse (Mt24; Lk21; Mk13) is likewise about the same affair as Gog & Magog & the book of Revelation. Jesus answered a clear question by the disciples about when one Temple stone would not be left on another, & He proceeds to describe the happenings of the Jewish War in surprising detail – an even more remarkable prediction by the Savior given the then present steady state conditions of the Roman Empire & the prosperity of the Jewish nation. The Olivet Discourse answers the question about when the Temple would be demolished; it’s about the Jewish War, not the end of all time, since that generation would not pass away until it came to pass (Mt24:34). Truly some of those standing before Jesus would not taste death until the kingdom came in power (Mt16:28) – not that they’ll live until the end of all time; nor the foolish suggestion that they would live 6 days until they saw the Transfiguration (Mt17:1ff); but that many would survive the subsequent 40 years or so until the covenant sanctions came upon the mutinous Jews, who rose up against the New Covenant & its Melchizedekian mediator. Note also that the “Jerusalem surrounded by armies” of Lk21:20 is in the same textual position as the infamous “abomination of desolation” of Mt24:15, showing the terms to be synonymous. Why did Jesus say they should pray their flight would not be during the Sabbath (24:20)? This is one of many Olivet Discourse indicators that Moses was still the Law of the land in Palestine. After the fall of the Jewish nation, the prayer that an escape be not on the Sabbath is passé, since the Old Covenant economy had been eclipsed. Yes, the Olivet Discourse foretold events within THAT (not some future) generation, & this was the punishment of the Jews during the Jewish War for their heinous treatment of Jesus.

Once pointed out, it becomes clear that the theme of the soon-coming demise of the Jewish nation for rejecting Jesus often crops up in the New Testament. God’s wrath against the evil vineyard tenants would be meted out during the Jewish War. Let us consider a few examples.

But when he [John the Baptist] saw many of the Pharisees & Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; & do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down & thrown into the fire. (Mt13:7-10)

Was John the Baptist right, that the axe was laid at the root & that the unproductive trees would soon be cut down? It is difficult to imagine John’s stern warning being watered down to, “An axe may fall on you in a few thousand years when the Antichrist comes.” No, the tree of the nation Israel was in imminent peril, & it was cut down during the Jewish War.

[After many woes against the scribes & Pharisees, Jesus concluded] “Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” (Mt23:36)

Well, did the woes & blood prophesied by Jesus actually come upon that evil & perverse generation? The Jewish War is the irrefutable answer.

“For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God which are in Judea in Christ Jesus. For you also suffered the same things from your own countrymen, just as they did from the Judeans, who killed both the Lord Jesus & his own prophets, & have persecuted us; & they do not please God & are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins: but wrath has come upon them to the uttermost.” (1Th2:14-16)

Did God’s wrath come upon those in Judea who killed the Lord Jesus & the prophets, & who persecuted the church? Indeed, the wrath of God came upon them to the uttermost during the Jewish War.

“Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart & one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ... Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, & brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, & laid them at the apostles’ feet; & they distributed to each as anyone had need.” (Acts4:32-34-35)

At first glance, this appears to be a very curious passage in support of a looming Jewish War, but further reflection clarifies the situation. Why would the early church be so short-sighted as to sell off their houses & lands to provide for the needs of others? Wouldn’t they need these possessions for the church’s long term prosperity? Ah, but if they believed Jesus’ Olivet Discourse words, that soon one stone of the Temple would not be left on another & that they should flee from Jerusalem’s destruction, then their behavior takes on an entirely new light. As with Jeremiah (Jer32:7ff), the fields & domiciles would soon become worthless because of the Roman invasion, so why not sell off the property to aid the struggling church? The same idea is hinted at in Jms5:

“Come now, you rich, weep & howl for your miseries that are coming upon you! Your riches are corrupted, & your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold & silver are corroded, & their corrosion will be a witness against you & will eat your flesh like fire. You have heaped up treasure in the last days.” (Jms5:1-3)

Could it not be that James’ warning to the rich had a sharper point for that generation of Jews who claimed to follow Jesus because their fields & treasures would become worthless “in the last days” of the Mosaic economy, when the land of Palestine was scrubbed clean of value & their treasures were confiscated by the marauding Roman Tenth Legion during the Jewish War?

“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you greetings, & so does my son, Mark.” (1Pt5:13)

Now here’s an odd passage in support of the NT’s witness against rebellious Israel & the approaching Jewish War; but contemplating it for a moment will show that it is not so strange after all. Peter was the apostle to the Jews (Gal2:8), &
the only evidence that he ever visited Rome is this very verse. What kind of substantiation is this? From the book of Revelation, many equate Babylon with Rome, & therefore Peter must have been in Rome. But could it not rather be that Peter used veiled language in referencing note Rome, but Jerusalem? Of course, John Mark was from Jerusalem, as shown in Acts12:12, & he was with Peter (1:1) when the Apostle wrote his first epistle. Doesn’t it make sense that John Mark was at home, in Jerusalem with Peter? A better “Babylon” solution is that Peter was in Jerusalem (“Babylon”) when he wrote his first epistle, & this obviously has implications for the book of Revelation’s use of the same term. [Note: Some may use the tautology that “Babylon means Babylon,” but Josephus tells us that the Jews were expelled from the literal Babylon during Caligula’s reign.]

After this detour on the Olivet Discourse, the book of Revelation, & a sampling of the rest of the NT, we return to the names given in Ezk38:2-3. The Jewish nation had a vendetta against the Jews who accepted Jesus as their Messiah — a venomous (rosh) plan (38:10) opposed by God (38:2). However, once invaded (Gog, or gud), the nation needed to be dragged (mashak) with hooks into the Jewish War (38:4). The whole Roman world was arrayed against the Jewish rebellion (tebel, worldwide), especially with troops drawn from all over the Empire (38:5-6). The result was that the land was left completely desolate after 73AD, having been delivered up (Magog, or magan) by God to destruction. Yes, indeed, the Jewish War neatly lines up with the names & events described in Ezk38:1-6.

(4) Location
The location of the Gog & Magog sequence is the mountains of Israel (38:8). However, there is probably a symbolic component to these words, since these mountains are spoken of as “always waste” — historically false in an absolute sense, whether referencing the figurative (leadership) or literal mountains. Per the 4 gospels & Acts, during Jesus’ day the metaphorical mountains of Israel, the Jewish leaders, were in a perpetual state of spiritual “waste” that was in serious need of purging, & the rulers had been this way for quite some time, as Josephus informs us (Antiquities). Also in Ezk38, the mountains are said to be thrown down (38:19-20), which is likely figurative. Specific fulfillment of this is found in the mountain flattening provided by John the Baptist (Lk3:4-6) — not a literal leveling of peaks, but the removal of obstacles in preparing the way for the Lord. The KJV says that the events of Gog & Magog will come “upon the people that are gathered out of the nations, ... that dwell in the midst of the land” (38:12). Israel had returned from exile (“gathered out of the nations”) & they dwell “in the midst of the land.” The term “land,” without qualifier almost certainly means the land of Israel (Chilton). “East of the sea” (39:11) & “coastlands” (39:6) also point towards Palestine. All of these positional aspects align with a completion of Ezk38-39 in the land of Palestine during the 1st century AD Jewish War.

Josephus informs us that millions crowded into Jerusalem for the Passover, resulting in their being trapped by the Roman siege during the Jewish War; over 1.1 million were killed (Wars6.2.4). Does this not comport nicely with the location being “Hamonah,” from the Hebrew “hamon” which means “multitude” or “horde” (Strong’s #1997 & 1995, respectively)? A great multitude of unregenerate Jews were assembled in Jerusalem for slaughter. They’d asked that the blood of Jesus be on them & their children (Mt27:25); & so it came to pass, at the destructive hands of the Romans.

As to when the Gog & Magog episode would take place, we have several lines of evidence that point to a past completion; this prophecy is NOT about occurrences in our future. The weapons (38:4,8,21; 39:9,10,20,23) & defenses (walls, 38:11,20) are all ancient to our day. Firewood for heating & cooking also points to a more archaic era (39:9-10). The trade routes would be blocked by the Gog & Magog affair (39:11), which indicates a timeframe when overland travel was the only option (no air transportation of goods). Of course, Ezk38-39 is future to Ezekiel’s day — no later than the 25th year of the Babylonian exile (40:1). Since Ezekiel says these things will happen in the latter years or last days (38:8,16), this implies some distance from Ezekiel’s time — likely no earlier than circa 400BC; but ancient weapons indicate a time prior to circa 1600AD.

However, we can be a bit more precise than this vast 2000 year span of time. Three lines of evidence point to a first century AD fulfillment. Firstly, a substantial civil war amongst the Israelites (“every man’s sword will be against his brother,” 38:21) has only occurred once since Ezekiel’s time, during the siege of Jerusalem in 70AD. While the Romans laid siege outside the walls, 3 warring factions struggled within against each other — according to Rev16:19, the “great city was split into three parts.” Jerusalem was thronged with Passover participants when the Romans encamped & initiated the siege. Eleazar & his zealots controlled the Temple, John of Gischala & his men the environs about the Temple courts, & Simon the balance of Jerusalem (see map, preteristarchives.com). They all fought against each other, thereby reducing the Roman’s task of conquest, decimating each other & inducing famine (Wars). This easily describes 38:21, when “[e]very man’s sword will be against his brother.” The location is Palestine & the warfare is brother against Jewish brother, & this took place during the Jewish War, 66-73AD, & especially at the fall of Jerusalem in 70AD.

Secondly, “the latter years” & “the last days” (38:8,16), often taken to mean the end of all time, may well refer to the end of the Old Covenant & the inauguration of the New; which inauguration, of course, took place at the cross in 30AD & was fully established with the removal of Jewish opposition 40 years later, in 70AD. Truly the rock cut without hands (Dan2:34-35,44-45) crushed all opposition, & the mountain of the gospel filled the earth — & isn’t it interesting that Daniel also says that this would take place in “the latter days” (Dan2:28), the selfsame phraseology used in Ezekiel 38? “The latter days” references not the world’s end, but to the cessation of the Mosaic economy & the institution of the New Covenant, & this came to pass in the 1st century AD.
Thirdly, if the book of Ezekiel is chronologically sequential, then the events of Ezk37 precede those of Gog & Magog. The dry bones vision of Israel’s restoration is followed by the establishment of God’s servant David (Jesus) as King of the Jews (Ezk37:24-28) – the very title placarded over Jesus’ head at the cross (Jn19:19)! So then, if chapters 37-39 of Ezekiel reflect the timing, then we would expect Christ’s cross (Ezk37) to be prior to the happenings of Ezk38-39. Once again, the chronology squares with a 1st century AD completion – first the cross (30AD), then Gog & Magog, the Jewish War (66-73AD). As a tantalizing aside, a chronological sequencing of Ezekiel implies that the “Third” Temple of Ezk40-48 is actually a vision about what took place after the fall of Jerusalem, namely, the expansion of the church – the rock cut without hands did indeed become an earth filling mountain; but that is for another time.

In sum, all timing indications in the Gog & Magog passage align with the events surrounding Jesus’ First Advent & the subsequent (consequent) Jewish War, where punishment was meted out against the covenant rebels. Moses himself testified that judgment would come upon those who rejected “the Prophet” like Moses who was to come (Dt18:18-19). When did said judgment come? Surely it makes sense that Jesus is magnified in this difficult passage of Gog & Magog, & that His Jewish enemies received the Mosaic covenant sanctions (Dt28; Lv26) in the civil war & conflagration that followed during the Jewish War. This understanding gives covenant significance to the fall & exile of the Jewish nation state, an understanding that Zionist futurism evacuates by applying this & many other Scriptures ( Olivet Discourse, Revelation) to our near future rather than to Israel’s rebellious past.

(8) Walls

The land has no walls (38:11), but the Gog & Magog episode will collapse every wall (38:20). So then, walls will fall, but there aren’t any – huh?! Chz2:1-5 likely provides the right key, since in that passage God says He will be a wall around Jerusalem – namely, walls bespeak of God’s spiritual protection of Jerusalem, even though the city would later have walls. “Unwalled” would thus be the removal of the Lord’s protective hand, though the physical walls remained to later collapse. Such happened during the Roman invasion of Palestine during the 66-73AD Jewish War. God removed his “wall” of protection of the Jewish nation, the very hand which time & again had previously saved the Israelites from decimation at the hands of their enemies. With this “wall” (38:11) – the Lord’s protection – taken out of the way, the Romans had no trouble in collapsing every physical wall (38:20). Indeed, they did this very thing. “Every wall will fall to the ground” (38:20). Doesn’t this comport well with siege warfare, where the Roman battering rams brought about the demolition of Jerusalem’s walls? Maybe there is also an allusion here to the Roman undermining of one of the corners of the Tower Antonia so that the wall fell (Wars6.1.3). Later, the foundations of Antonia itself were excavated & undercut, preparing the way for the city’s destruction (Wars6.2).

(9) Nations Against (Not With) Gog

Tremendous geographic extent is represented by the nations involved (38:5-6), & it is difficult to envision all of these disparate nations assembling & acting in concert against the militarily inconsequential & relatively low valued land of Israel. What?! They will even take cows back home as booty (38:13)?! Reach out a long way, boys, because this seems farfetched. Such a colossal invasion requires a centralized power to order & direct the troop movements, enough wealth to finance it, & a unifying purpose to bring to pass this herculean incursion. Fortunately, there is a clue in the Hebrew. The most common translation for the Hebrew (778 ittāg) is not that the nations are WITH Gog & Magog, but AGAINST them (38:5,6,15,22). These nations have not confederated themselves under the leadership of Gog, but rather have come against him & his nation, Magog.

A bizarre aspect is that such an enormous army would itself need a guard (38:7). This “guard” nut is cracked by Jerome & others; the Hebrew rather bespeaks of leadership (“show yourself to be an EMPEROR among them,” Vulgate). Hmmm ... a massive army, directed by an emperor & drawn from many nations, to invade the land of Israel – once again, this sounds very much like the Jewish War of 66-73AD. After the initial Roman failure under Cestius, Nero recalled Vespasian from retirement / banishment & commissioned him to put down the Jewish rebellion. Because of the 69AD turmoil in Rome – the year of the 3 emperors – the destruction of the Temple & the wiping clean of the Judean slate was delayed. Vespasian became emperor in 70AD, inaugurating the Flavian dynasty, the Julio-Claudian line having been cut off with Nero’s suicide. In 70AD, Vespasian appointed his son, Titus, to finish the task in Judea, & Titus’ troops destroyed the Temple that same year. Titus later succeeded his father as emperor (79AD). We thus have not one, but three emperors involved in the reconquest of Judea by the Romans – Nero, Vespasian & Titus. “Show yourself to be an emperor among them” was thus completely fulfilled in Rome’s suppression of the Jewish rebellion.

The legions that put down the Jewish upheaval drew recruits from many nations, in keeping with the tabulated nations of 38:5-6. Persia, Ethiopia, Put (Libya), Gomer, Beth-togarmah – were the four legions that comprised Vespasian & Titus’ strike force made up of troops from these nations? This is not easy to verify. What is clear is that after Augustus’ military reforms of 25BC, the legions were comprised of 50% Roman citizens & 50% auxiliaries or non-citizens from the rest of the empire, & that the Italian composition declined over time thereafter. As an example of the geographic extent of the Roman army, two auxiliary legions from Ethiopia were stationed in York, England, resulting in thousands of whites in Yorkshire today having African DNA (uk.answers.yahoo.com). Legionnaires from south of Egypt have a lasting DNA impact on the populace from the north of England – now THAT’s an empire with some serious geographical extent! With the Roman Empire being vast in extent in the 1st century AD, it could well be the point of 38:5-6 is that the whole empire was employed to put down the Jewish rebellion of 66-73AD. Vespasian began the campaign against the Jews with 2 legions, the X Fretensis & the V Macedonia. Titus came from Alexandria with XV Apollinaris, & later the force was joined by VI Ferrata – four entire legions to put down the Jewish revolt. Surely this extensive force drew troops from the empire over, likely the very point of 38:5-6. The entire empire of the Beast rising up to quash the Harlot’s revolt during the Jewish War. After the Temple’s demise in 70AD, only the hated X Fretensis remained in Palestine for mop up duty.
Of course, Rome had the fiscal resources to finance this expedition; & it had the motivation so to do, the iron-toothed Beast consistently & ruthlessly crushing all opposition so as to dissuade others from rising up against the feet of clay & iron (Dan2), the Roman Empire. So, then, the nations came not with, but against Gog & Magog – the “invaded” (gud) land of Israel being “delivered up” (magan) by God into the hand of the cruel & merciless Roman Beast. During the Jewish War, the “land” (Israel) was pummeled into submission by the iron clad gloves of Rome – kicked to death by its jack-booted overlord – with the many nations comprising the legions willingly participating at the emperor’s direction & with Roman funding. Truly the Lord Almighty doled out retribution upon those who executed His ultimate messenger, the Messiah. The Harlot (Israel) tried to ride the Beast (Rome) & stamp out the church. However, the 10 horns – especially the 10th Roman legion, X Fretensis (could this be the 10 horns?) – burned the Harlot instead (Rev17:16). God’s wrath came upon the Jews to the uttermost (1Th2:14-16), those guilty of harlotry against their God (Hos1,3). As Jesus put it in the wedding feast parable, “the king [God ] was enraged, & he sent his armies [the Romans] & destroyed those murderers & set their city [Jerusalem] on fire” (Mt22:7); the Temple, THEIR house (not God’s), was left to them desolate (Mt23:38).

(10) Trade Disrupted
Trade disruptions from the Gog & Magog episode caused consternation amongst the trading nations (38:13). Why would this be? The fall of Jerusalem in 70AD resulted in a substantial depression of prices, the market being flooded with slaves & precious metals (History Channel, “Engineering an Empire,” Rome). About 100,000 Jewish prisoners were brought back to Rome, many of whom built the famous Roman Colosseum. The funds for this gargantuan project came from the captured Jewish Temple’s riches (Wiki). Surely here is commercial instability worthy of the nations squawking! The wealth of the trading nations was imperiled by the suppression of value caused by the conquest of the Jews during the Jewish War, & they (figuratively) spoke up in great anguish – “Help! You’re jeopardizing our livelihood!”

(11) Visitation By God
Gog & Magog represent a visitation by God in judgment (38:8). Having rejected their Messiah & being virulently opposed to the nascent church, the Jews certainly suffered accordingly at the hands of the Romans during the 7 year Jewish War (66-73AD). Note that this 7 year Great Tribulation aligns nicely with the book of Revelation, with the Temple being destroyed after time, times & half a time (3½ years) in 70AD (Dan9:27). Like the judgment upon Korah & his followers, who spurned the leadership of Moses & were swallowed by the earth, so Israel suffered greatly for rejecting the “prophet” (Dt18:18-19), the one greater than Moses (Heb2:6-6) who had come to lead them into the heavenly Promised Land (Heb4). The Romans swallowed up the mutinous Jews who’d sought the overthrow of their King. In the parlance of Revelation, “the land [Palestine] helped the woman, & the land [Palestine] opened its mouth & drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth” (Rev12:16). The river of Roman wrath was swallowed up by Palestine. We see that during the Jewish War, the Jews were indeed “visited” by God in retribution, with the land (or earth) factoring into the judgment, as it did with Korah & his fellow conspirators – the land drank up the dragon’s (Satán’s) wrath, the woman (the church) being spared thereby.

(12) 7 Years & Months
The famous “sevens” of Ezk39:9-16 – 7 years of burning & 7 months of burials – also line up well with the Roman subjugation of Judea during the Jewish War. The land was afire with war for 7 years, the Romans ruthlessly crushing the Jewish rebellion; in other words, Palestine suffered through 7 years of burning, per Ezk39:9. What, then, of the 7 months of burial? The final siege of Jerusalem took 7 months (Wiki). The burying is not of the invading nations; rather, the Jewish nation itself was interred by the Jewish War. This solution is more reasonable than the notion that an invading billion man army suffered more than a 36% mortality rate, resulting in the burial of over 360 million corpses by the rather paltry 1 million Jewish male defenders dwelling in Palestine. A Jewish War explanation also addresses those who “build a monument” (the literal of 39:15) beside any discovered bones. In the OT, monuments were often erected by those who spurned the leadership of Moses & were swallowed by the earth, so Israel suffered greatly for rejecting “the Prophet” (Dt18:18-19), the one greater than Moses (Heb2:6) who had come to lead them into the heavenly Promised Land (Heb4). The Romans swallowed up the mutinous Jews who’d sought the overthrow of their King. In the parlance of Revelation, “the land [Palestine] helped the woman, & the land [Palestine] opened its mouth & drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth” (Rev12:16). The river of Roman wrath was swallowed up by Palestine. We see that during the Jewish War, the Jews were indeed “visited” by God in retribution, with the land (or earth) factoring into the judgment, as it did with Korah & his fellow conspirators – the land drank up the dragon’s (Satán’s) wrath, the woman (the church) being spared thereby.

(13) Birds
In addition, a Jewish War timeframe explains the birds being called to consume human flesh AFTER all of the burials were completed. Bird judgments, from Gen40 onwards, were symbols of sweeping devastation & death. This clarifies why the Temple sacrifices are enumerated for the summoned birds to feast upon, rather than the flesh of the now buried corpses. The Temple was demolished & the OT sacrificial system was brought to a close – a “bird judgment” came upon Jerusalem & the Temple from the hand of God. In this sense the birds “ate up” the Temple sacrificial system. A “bird judgment” was meted out upon the rebellious, Christ-rejecting Israelites, per their very own instructions – “And all the people said, ‘His [Jesus’] blood shall be on us & on our children!’” (Mt27:25). Millions of Jewish lives were sacrificed on the altar of rebellion against the Son of the Landowner (Mt21:33-45) – Josephus specifically lists 1.1 million dead. The Temple’s demise resulted in the cessation of the sacrificial “rams, lambs, goats & bulls” (Ezk39:18), which could never take away sin (Heb10:4). Oh yes, the Jewish War most definitely represented an Old Testament style “birds & beasts” judgment upon unbelieving Israel.
A few interesting parallels emerge from comparing Bar Kokhba to the Jewish War. If there were, in fact, about 700,000 Jews in hand during Bar Kokhba for 580,000 deaths, though we only started with 450,000 in 73 AD; or 450,000*e^(0.0075*59) ≈ 700,000]. If our calculation is correct, then there were plenty of Jews (about 700,000 on hand during Bar Kokhba for 580,000 deaths, though we only started with 450,000 in 73 AD. This back-of-the-envelope calculation at least gives oblique support to the interpretation that 5 out of 6 Jews were cut down or exiled during the Jewish War. Ussher (Whiston Wars n32) tallies from Josephus that about 1.34 million Jews had been killed by the Romans (Wars6.9.3); those who perished, were deported, or expatriated from the last 3½ years of the Jewish War, 70-73 AD; plus those who were killed or starved to death in the hinterlands who weren’t included in the tally, it could well be that only 1 in 6 (~450,000) Jews remained in the land after 73 AD, the end of the Jewish War.

An example of those deaths probably NOT enumerated during the Jewish War by Josephus & others is given by the recent (2013-14) excavations at Khirbet El-Magqatir. The archaeologists uncovered 8 bodies – 7 women & 1 boy – who were killed in an olive press cave in 69 AD (Bible & Spade v30 #1 p26). The fact that no men were found indicates that the women & children were placed in hiding while the men fought & died. Once the battle was over, the Legio X Fretensis (the 10th Roman Legion "of the Strait") hunted down & exterminated the women & children. It is unlikely that the deaths of these fighting men & executed townspeople from El-Magqatir – the reconstituted Ai, according to the Associates for Biblical Research – were included in any Jewish War statistics. This is probably also true for many other outlying locations. The point is that there were likely many, many Jews massacred by the Roman Beast whose bodies were not tabulated by Josephus or others – no one was left to report the deaths! – so it could well be that 5 out of 6 Jews in Palestine were killed in the Jewish War.

Unfortunately, the assertion that only 450,000 Jewish inhabitants (1 in 6) remained in the land after the Jewish War is difficult to verify. However, some later Bar Kokhba casualty rates may give indirect support to this conclusion. Dio Cassius (59.14) informs us that 580,000 Jews were killed during the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-135 AD) – this is our "hard" ex post facto population data point. If a mere 450,000 remained in the land after the Jewish War – 5 out of 6 being removed, or the land was "sixthed" – would the population be large enough 59 years later to have 580,000 killed in the Bar Kokhba rebellion? First, we need to project what the Jewish population in Palestine would be 59 years later if it began with about 450,000 people. Historic population growth rates are typically below 1%, & even less during times of war, famine & pestilence. Let’s assume a growth rate of 0.75% per annum between the end of the Jewish War (73 AD) & the beginning of the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132 AD). If the Jewish population of Palestine was about 450,000 in 73 AD, it would be approximately 700,000 in 132 AD with a 0.75% growth rate [initial population * e^(growth rate*time) = final population; or 450,000*e^(0.0075*59) = 700,000]. If our calculation is correct, then there were plenty of Jews (about 700,000 on hand during Bar Kokhba) for 580,000 deaths, though we only started with 450,000 in 73 AD. This back-of-the-envelope calculation at least gives oblique support to the interpretation that 5 out of 6 Jews were cut down or exiled during the Jewish War. Ussher (Whiston Wars n32) tallies from Josephus that about 1.34 million Jews had been killed by the Romans (Wars6.9.3); those who perished, were deported, or expatriated from the last 3½ years of the Jewish War, 70-73 AD; plus those who were killed or starved to death in the hinterlands who weren’t included in the tally, it could well be that only 1 in 6 (~450,000) Jews remained in the land after 73 AD, the end of the Jewish War.

An interesting consequence of the Israel’s being decapitated by Rome pertains to Jewish ethnicity. Why is it that most nations trace their ancestry through one’s father, but it’s a Jewish mother who makes one a Jew today? When did this change take place, since clearly before the 1st century AD one’s pedigree was determined by paternity (e.g., Mt1)? The best answer seems to be that so many Jewish males were killed during the Jewish War & Bar Kokhba that the switch was made, & from at least the 2nd century AD onwards one was a Jew if he or she had a Jewish mom. There simply weren’t enough Jewish males left to keep the Jewish ball rolling after the 2 devastating wars in Palestine! This turn in tracking descent, from paternity to maternity, puts an exclamation point on the Messianic lineage. If any later Jew claims to be the messiah after the 1st or 2nd century AD, one need only point to their lack of paternal pedigree as proof positive the he’s a false messiah. Of course, the destruction of all of the genealogical records with the Temple in 70 AD also negates the claims of future “messiahs.” How can a messianic claimant verify his lineage when all of the genealogical accounts were destroyed by the Romans? Once again, God’s stamp saying “It is finished!” is writ large across the Messianic horizon. No future messianic applicant can prove his Davidic descent; & even if he could, it would be incorrectly derived through his mother, not the father as prescribed by the Law. Today’s unbelieving Jews may be looking for a future messiah, but he can never come, for he has no way to prove that he has the right ancestry back to David – the records have been destroyed – & even if he could, he’d be incorrectly descended via his mother, & thus not have the right to rule on the Davidic throne. Clearly the Jewish nation’s being “sixthed” by God has had long lasting genealogical & messianic consequences!

After Bar Kokhba, Hadrian expelled the Jews from Jerusalem & renamed the city Aelia Capitolina, dedicating the city to the chief Roman god, Jupiter (Wiki). Hadrian also forbid circumcision & renamed the region Syria Palaestina (from whence we get the name Palestine). Jerusalem retained the name Aelia Capitolina until the Arab conquest of 638 AD (Wiki) – a 500 year name change, perfectly punctuating the divine point that punishment was upon the city that
spurned its Messiah & called for His blood to be on their own heads! This expulsion of the Jews from the land was an additional exile, as foretold in Ezk39:21-24 (see above). Isn’t it a crunchy irony that the Muslims were the ones who later readmitted the Jews to Jerusalem?

Note also that the Bar Kokhba revolt followed the Biblical famous time, times & half a time script, the war being almost exactly 3½ years long. In like fashion, the Jewish War was 7 years, the Temple being destroyed time, times & half a time (3½ years) into the war (the War started in 66AD, & the Temple was destroyed 70AD). Of course, 3½ years later the Jewish War ended at Masada (73AD). Finally, consider the 9th of the month of Av (a Babylonian name). The 1st (Solomon’s) Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians on the 9th of Av. The 2nd Temple was destroyed in 70AD on – you guessed it – the 9th of Av. Lastly, the Bar Kokhba rebellion ended on – dramatic pause – the 9th of Av. Could it be that the rhythmic 9th of Av drumbeat from our Lord is telling us something?

Returning to Gog & Magog, why is there no description of the actual battle in Ezk38-39? The emphasis is on the Lord’s judgments against His enemies, the Christ rejecting Jews, so the glory belongs to Him alone; no human agent shares the limelight in 38:18-23:

“It will come about on that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel,” declares the Lord God, “that My fury will mount up in My anger. In My zeal & in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all the creeping things that creep on the earth, & all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence; the mountains also will be thrown down, the steep pathways will collapse & every wall will fall to the ground. I will call for a sword against him on all My mountains,” declares the Lord God. “Every man’s sword will be against his brother. With pestilence & with blood I will enter into judgment with him; & I will rain on him & on his troops, & on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire & brimstone. I will magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, & make Myself known in the sight of many nations; & they will know that I am the Lord."

Apparently God did not wish to apportion some of His prestige to the invading Romans, His secondary foot soldiers of conquest. However, there are numerous interleaving gears between this passage & what we know from Josephus of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. Let us focus on 38:22, “With pestilence & with blood I will enter into judgment with him; & I will rain on him & on his troops, & on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire & brimstone. This is the second option for Israel’s being “sixthed” – namely, the 6 plagues of 38:22 were to come upon the Jews – “... ① pestilence ... ② blood ... ③ torrential rain ... ④ hailstones, ⑤ fire & ⑥ brimstone.” But did these 6 things actually take place during the Jewish War? This second “sixthed” suggestion is a bit easier to verify than the first option that only 1 in 6 remained in the land after the Jewish War.

There was indeed a ③ torrential rain that admitted the bloodthirsty Idumeans (Edomites) into Jerusalem (Wars4.4-5). The catapult stones hurled by the Romans weighed a talent (70lbs) & were painted white, thus resembling huge ⑤ hailstones (Wars5.6.3). They could be thrown a quarter mile or more. The Jews warned each other of a stone’s arrival with, “THE SON COMETH” (Whiston) – no doubt this being blasphemy against Jesus & His predictions (Mt24; Mk13; Lk21). The catapult stones hurled by the Romans weighed a talent (70lbs) & were painted white, thus resembling huge ⑤ hailstones (Wars5.6.3). They could be thrown a quarter mile or more. The Jews warned each other of a stone’s arrival with, “THE SON COMETH” (Whiston) – no doubt this being blasphemy against Jesus & His predictions (Mt24; Mk13; Lk21) of Jerusalem’s demise. Note also the tie in to Rev16:21, which says, “And there fell upon men a great HAIL out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a TALENT.” Could it be that the same event, the Roman conquest of Judea, is spoken of in both Ezk33:22 & Rev16:21? ⑤ Fire & ⑥ brimstone (Wars5.11.4) were extensively employed by the Romans, including the burning of the Temple after it fell (Wars6.4). The ① pestilence in Jerusalem was so pervasive that bodies were strewn everywhere, the stench being unbearable (See Wars6). A graphic account of a woman eating her own son is given in Wars6.5.4, in keeping with the covenant sanctions listed in Lv26:27ff. Of course, vast quantities of ② blood were shed with the execution or starvation of over a million Jews – Josephus informs us that on occasion the surfaces of the Sea of Galilee & the Dead Sea were covered with bloated corpses & blood. We see, then, that all 6 of the plagues listed in 38:22 were, in fact, meted out against Israel during the Jewish War. The previous suggestion, that being “sixthed” means that only 1 in 6 Jews remained in the land after the Jewish War, is difficult to authenticate; with this second option, however, there can really be no doubt.

The 6 plagues listed in 38:22 really did come upon the Jews at the hands of the Romans during 66-73AD, so truly the land was “sixthed” at that time, in fulfillment of Ezk39:2. So then, while the siege & fall of Jerusalem itself by the Romans is not explicitly described in the Gog & Magog text, the civil war, pestilence, Idumean incursion, & Roman stratagems are, in fact, tangentially given, & this in rather exacting detail. The battle is thus described in backhanded fashion by the six plagues measured out against the Jews during the Jewish War.

A third “sixthed” option for explaining 39:2 is provided in Rev17:10. This cross reference indicates that the sixth king will be sitting on the throne when the events of Revelation take place. As demonstrated above, we are convinced that both Revelation & Gog & Magog chronicle the same events, those of the Jewish War. Since Rev17:10 is crucial for setting the timeframe for the book of Revelation (Gentry), it has bearing on our analysis of Ezk38-39 if the two prophetic books are indeed connected. We can easily count up the Roman emperors & find which one is number six. Some suppose that the enumeration begins with Augustus, but, come on, they are called “Caesars” after the first one, aren’t they? Of necessity we must begin the list with 1 Julius Caesar, then 2 Augustus, 3 Tiberius, 4 Caligula, & 5 Claudius, which makes 6 that evil madman, Nero. The land of Palestine was indeed “sixthed” by emperor number six, Nero, who initiated the Jewish War, recalling Vespasian from “retirement” (exile) & commissioning him to put down the Jewish rebellion against Rome.

Whichever “sixthed” option one chooses – there being only 1 in 6 remaining after the Gog & Magog devastation, or that the six plagues of 38:22 were doled out in judgment upon the belligerent Jews, or that emperor 6, Nero, visited the punishment upon the land of Palestine – the Jewish War fits all three suggestions hand in glove. Could it be that the Lord of hosts ambiguously gave the Ezk39:2 “sixth” utterance because the prophetic shoe fits them all simultaneously?
(15) Transgressions (NOT Pass Through)
As demonstrated above, the curious repetition of “pass by” & “pass through” in 39:11,14P15 probably points rather to a different translation of the Hebrew “abar,” namely, “transgress” or “transgression.” This word is particularly used of Old Covenant disobedience (Dan9:11; Hos8:1), which would bespeak of covenant sanctions against the Jewish covenant breakers. What greater disobedience could there be than to reject God’s ultimate revelation, Jesus (Heb1:1-2). If the Old Covenant came with harsh penalties, how much more the New (Heb2:1-4)? Even Moses said: “I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, & I will put My words in his mouth, & he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him” (Dt18:18-19). Disobeying “the Prophet” would bring God’s wrath against the transgressors – those who “trangress,” not “pass through,” in Ezk39:11,14-15. The Prophet had indeed come, as both Peter (Acts3:22 & Stephen (Acts7:37) testified, but the ethnic Jews had rejected Jesus en masse, resulting in covenant punishments later coming upon them.

The alternate translation of Ezk39:11,14-15 offered above is repeated here:

“And it shall come to pass on that day that I will give to INVADED a place of graves in Israel, the valley of the [COVENANT] TRANSgressors to the east of the sea; & it shall stop the [COVENANT] TRANSgressors. There they shall bury INVADED & all his multitude, & they shall call it ‘The Valley of the INVADED multitude.’ ... And they shall continually sever out those who TRANSgress [THE COVENANT] IN PALESTINE, burying those who were TRANSgressing [THE COVENANT], even those left on the face of PALESTINE. In order to cleanse, at the end of seven months they shall search for the [COVENANT] TRANSgressors who TRANSgress [THE COVENANT] IN PALESTINE. See, the bones of men are a MONUMENT BUILT as a WITNESS against those buried in GRAVES in the Valley of the INVADED multitude.”

The 1st century AD tie ins are numerous & noteworthy, 39:14 says, “And they shall continually SEVER OUT those who transgress” (translation above). A separation or severing did occur during the Jewish War. The final siege of Jerusalem by Titus in 70AD was 7 months long – note that “at the end of seven months” the searching will commence, severing or separating out the covenant breakers from the recently exited New Covenant keepers of the church. Even today, one can visit the Hasmonean era tunnels where many Jews took refuge after the Temple fell. The Roman Tenth Legion relentlessly sought out these hiding places & ruthlessly exterminated all those discovered (Wars6.9.4). Those who transgressed the covenant were indeed separated out for execution, while those who kept the covenant were spared. The covenant keeping, Messiah accepting Jewish church escaped to Pella (Eus5.5.3), while the stiff-necked, cantankerous Jewish nation met its demise. When the Jewish War ceased after the destruction of Masada (73AD), the bones of God-defying Jews littered the land, a monumental witness against those who virulently rejected their Messiah. Time to call for the flocks of birds, that harbinger of divine judgment against those who had transgressed the covenant!

(16) Expiation, Execution & Exile
That sins were forgiven during the 1st century AD hardly requires substantiation for those who are redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. The cross of Christ causes those who trust Him to “forget their disgrace & all their treachery which they perpetrated against” God (39:26). Alternatively, Schröder translates, “they shall take away, i.e., expiate” their reproach or disgrace. 39:25 says that God would “have mercy on the whole house of Israel.” Ignoring the vacuous Dispensational tautology (“Israel means Israel!”), the New Testament assures us that all who are in Christ are God’s Israel by faith – they are Abraham’s descendants (Gal3:29) & the true circumcision (Rom2:28-29). Indeed, Paul makes plain that “they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel” (Rom9:6). In other words, those of Abrahamic lineage are NOT the true Israel of God (see Robertson). Those who are of the faith of Abraham, who was NOT circumcised when he was declared righteous (Rom4), are the blessed Israel of God. Based on this NT understanding, God did indeed “have mercy on the whole house of Israel” – that is, all of those who are of the faith of Abraham. For these & these only – not for the hard hearted ethnic Israelites, but for those who followed in the faithful footsteps of Abraham – their iniquities were forgotten. ❧ Hallelujah! ❧ What a Savior! ❧ And did the nations understand this? Indeed, “Their voice has gone out into all the earth, & their words to the ends of the world” (Rom11:18, quoting Ps11:4; cf Rom11:8; Col1:23; 1Th1:8).

But what of the accompanying judgment that God executed against the Jesus rejecting ethnic Israelites, sending them into exile once again in the 1st century AD? The Jewish nation was demolished & deported during the Jewish War, with no promise of return. Does this not accomplish the prophecy of 39:21-24? “And I will set My glory among the nations; & all the nations will see My judgment which I have executed & My hand which I have laid on them. And the house of Israel will know that I am the Lord their God from that day onward. The nations will know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against Me, & I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, & all of them fell by the sword. According to their uncleanness & according to their transgressions I dealt with them, & I hid My face from them.” The Jews trusted in their pedigree & Jerusalem’s long standing security (as in Jer7:3-4), but with spiritual hearts of stone this proved to be a vain hope. The Jews had claimed that Abraham was their father, but Jesus corrected them; since they were stubbornly wed to unbelief, they were rather of their father, the devil (Jn8:39-44). John the Baptist had earlier warned the Jews, “‘You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruit in keeping with repentance; & do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father’; for I say to you that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; therefore every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down & thrown into the fire’” (Mt3:7b-10). And so it was during the Jewish War, where the axe was put to the tree & the nation cut down & exiled. Jesus had made the stiff-necked consequences clear in the Parable of the Wicked Vineyard Tenants (a.k.a., the Parable of the Landowner). The tenants killed the son sent by the landowner, hoping to seize the inheritance. “[W]hen the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-growers? They said to Him, ‘He will bring those wretches to a wretched end, & will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons.’ Jesus said to them, ‘Did you never read in the Scriptures, ‘The stone which the build-
ers rejected, this became the chief corner stone; this came about from the Lord, & it is marvelous in our eyes”? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you & given to a people, producing the fruit of it. And he who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; but on whomever it falls, it will scatter him like dust” (Mt21:40-44). The kingdom was, in fact, taken from the unbelieving Jews & given to those appointed, both Jew & Gentile, who were of the faith of Abraham.

Please note that nowhere in the New Testament do Jesus or the Apostles teach that Israel will later return from exile in unbelief & repopulate the Palestine after the Temple’s demise. The supposedly stopped prophetic clock of the Dispensationalists is not a Biblical metaphor; repeating it often does not make it true; & nowhere does the Lord indicate that the church, the very bride of Christ, is some second class, weak-kneed woman who needs evacuated when troubles arrive so Jesus can return to his first love & former wife, ethnic Israel. There is only ONE olive tree of faith in Rom11. For the Zionist or Dispensational scheme to be true in Rom11, there should in fact be 2 olive trees, one tree for Israel – now dormant – & one tree for the church – currently active, but soon to be deactivated, decommissioned & evacuated. The church as a parenthesis (or Chafer’s “intercalation”) is not taught in the NT, nor is there any hint that the land of Palestine is the hope for the Jews. “Hey, Bert Goldberg! Isn’t it great that the Lord has given us, the Jews, a land covered with limestone boulders that’s half desert & difficult to farm, with few natural resources, & surrounded & infiltrated by people who hate us & want to see us exterminated?! Well, at least we’ll go to hell for rejecting our Messiah when it’s all over.” Not much Scriptural hope in that one, is there? In contrast to “the great real estate hope” of some futurists, Paul unambiguously states in Acts26:6-7 (before Agrippa), Acts28:20 (to the Jews of Rome) & Rom11 that the hope of Israel was not in returning to a semi-arid piece of nearly worthless property (Palestine), with Jesus demoted from a heavenly to an earthly throne in Jerusalem, ruling over the rebellious masses with an iron fist; no, the hope of Israel longed for by Paul was not in finding a Jewish realtor & getting an unmerciful mortgage for the ethnic Israelites (the present state of affairs), but in many of Paul’s fellow countrymen, the Jews, coming to faith in their Messiah, Jesus – now THAT’S a hope worth expectancy anticipating!

Returning to Ezk39:21-24, Israel was booted from the land because of unbelief, with no hope of a post-exilic return. “[A]ll of them fell by the sword” (39:23) – between the Jewish War (66-73AD) & the Bar Kokhba revolt (132-135AD), so many Jews were killed or deported that they became a minority in Palestine (see “sixthed” above). The nations understood that this was God’s hand of judgment against them, as Ezekiel had foretold & as Josephus later testified actually came to pass.

(17) No Millennium
It is difficult to debate what is NOT said in a passage. One would think that a seminal end times event like the Millennium would at least be mentioned in passing in the Ezekiel narrative from chapters 38 to 48, if indeed this passage concerns a future Zionist Empire with a Messiah (“not Jesus,” according to the Jews) ruling from Jerusalem. Ezk38-48’s silence on the Millennium is deafening. How can a theologian in good Biblical conscience import a whole system into a passage that says nothing about their beloved Millennium? This strains Dispensational credibility, exalting an agenda above what the Scriptures actually say. As Fairbairn says (quoted in Pulpit), “Persons who in the face of all these considerations can still cling to the literal view of this prophecy, must be left to themselves; they are incapable of being convinced in the way of argument.” By the way, what does this say of the wholesale importation of the Millennium into many other OT texts that breathe not a word of it? A person who is so blinded by his eschatological program that he furiously introduces & with verbal violence defends what is NOT in the text “is joined to idols; leave him alone!” (Hos4:17 NIV).

But why exactly do we need an intermediate state between this present age & the age to come, namely, the Millennial Kingdom? What is Biblically achieved by this Millennial middling period, which is not quite heaven but definitely better than the present earth, & closer to “Nirvana” or “Utopia”? If the Jews must be saved through Jesus to be right with God, like everyone else, then they do not need the Temple, sacrifices, land, & so forth, do they? Jesus is on His heavenly throne now – of what advantage is an earthly Davidic throne during the Millennium? Does Jesus rule more powerfully from earth than from the right hand of God in heaven? The NT Temple is the church, so why do we need a physical Temple during the Millennium? Don’t the unregenerate Jews need to be part of THIS Temple, the body of Christ, much more than they need reconstituted Levitical sacrifices? National Israel has been in the land for 70 years – of what spiritual benefit has it been to this secular, yea, mostly theistic nation? Is owning the land in the face of Muslim opposition really the hope of Israel?!

Let us bullet point some issues that require answers from our Millenarian friends:

- Flesh & blood cannot inherit the kingdom (1Co15:50), so how does one get all of those unregenerate men into the Millennium? Won’t they be burned up in judgment?
- In the Millennium, would any mortals be elders or deacons in the church, what with so many immortals in their midst?
- Will there be Millennial congregational rule, with some members being resurrected & unable to sin while others are mortal & definitely can & do sin?
- Would the Millennium force all of the resurrected saints to move to a remote location, like Saskatchewan, to be away from the Christians who are yet sinners & are upsetting their congregational meetings? Resurrected & mortal saints having church together would be a tragic mixture; wouldn’t the desire to keep the peace of necessity cause a separation within Christ’s body during the Millennium?
- In the Millennium, will your mortal neighbor marry, but you have been resurrected & so will remain single?
- In Lk20:34-36, Jesus said there will be no marriage in the age to come; so how will the resurrected saints procreate during the Millennium? It seems the population would become increasingly unregenerate, since only the mortals could have families, right? And with such lush Millennial conditions, wouldn’t the mortals breed like rabbits?
Increasing wickedness caused by the accelerated birth rate of mortals would seem to cause sin to greatly increase over 1000 years – isn’t that a bit of a problem?

- During the Millennium, a Christian woman’s first husband who died of cancer is now a resurrected saint, but she & her second Christian husband are both mortal; which one will she live with?
- If you’re a mortal Christian during the Millennium, couldn’t your resurrected Christian neighbor just show up in your house, unannounced, while you are still in your pajamas? He would be single – unable to marry, per Lk20:34-36 – & he would not have to sleep, either. Wouldn’t this cause a bit of neighborly strife?
- Will the people of God who have gone before us into eternal bliss face the specter of being raised from the dead & then having neighbors who are sinners & can curse them?
- “For as often as you eat this bread & drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes” (1Co11:26). Jesus has already come during the Millennium, so there is no longer any need for the Lord’s Table, right?
- Would you need your Bible during the Millennium, since Jesus has returned? Couldn’t you just call Jerusalem with your question to settle things?
- What of Millennial evangelism? It would be simple. “What, are you stupid?! Jesus is reigning right now in Jerusalem, so you can trust by sight, not by faith!”
- Maybe you die & then are resurrected for the Millennium, but your kids are still in the flesh, & some are yet in their sins – how will you handle this familial travesty?
- Will the Third Temple offerings of the Millennium really be memorial? Ezekiel makes clear that they are for atonement (cf Ezk43:19ff; etc). Will a reconstituted Mosaic economy actually have efficacy, as if Jesus’ sacrifice was insufficient?
- Will Jesus the Prince turn over sacrificial animals to mortal, sinful Levitical priests during the Millennium, per Ezk46:2?
- Are you prepared to cut the throat of an animal during the Millennium when you know that the ultimate sacrifice has already been presented by Jesus Christ & accepted by God?
- In the Millennium, will you routinely travel to Jerusalem to make sacrifices, as prescribed by Moses?
- In the Millennium, will the dividing wall between Jew & Gentile be re-erected, undoing Eph2?! Will your Jewish neighbors rule over you?
- Will Acts6 be reversed during the Millennium, since it should be OK for Jews to ignore the Greek widows in the Millennium, what with the Jews having political hegemony over all others?
- In the Millennium, won’t Jn16:33 be false? “In this world you have tribulation...” Well, not much tribulation during the Millennium, I suppose; I guess Jesus wasn’t quite telling the truth. When Jesus rules with an iron fist from Jerusalem, He will put down all sufferings for the saints, right? Will there really come a day when there is no effective opposition to Christianity? But then follows the militarily rebellious explosion of Gog & Magog after the Millennium, according to Rev20:7-9 – how can this be?
- If Jesus is reigning personally in Jerusalem during the Millennium, why would any Christian want to live in Georgia? Wouldn’t the earth be depopulated of Christians – all of them wanting to live near their Lord in Jerusalem, no matter how meager the provisions? Would this not be a reversal of the Gen1 & 9 cultural mandate (“be fruitful & multiply & fill the earth”)? Besides, the resurrected saints on earth could NOT be fruitful & multiply & fill the earth, since they neither marry nor are given in marriage (Mt22:30), but their mortal, sinful neighbors can & do. If there were any earth-filling during the Millennium, it would seem to be chock full of sinners, not saints, right? But then again, mortals cannot inherit the kingdom (1Co15:50), so how they got in the door is a big question mark.
- Wouldn’t the Millennial church in Jerusalem number in the millions? Who would preach on Sundays? And on what text?
- In the Millennium, is the New Jerusalem a 1500 square mile cube plunked on the earth? One must posit different physics during the Millennium to keep the earth from flopping uncontrollably with such a giant 3D city over the present site of Jerusalem.
- Here are the passages of Scripture that explain how resurrected saints, wicked men, & mortal converts will live side-by-side during the Millennium: _______.
- Here are the Biblical texts detailing 3 or more resurrections which are required by the Millennial scheme: _______.
- Here are the Scriptures that tell of multiple end time judgments, complete with the requisite unspecified time gaps, all being necessary to make an earthly Millennium work: _______.
- Here are the Bible verses prior to Rev20 that clearly explain the Millennium: _______. With substantial effort, you can shoehorn the Millennium into prior (especially OT) passages; but you certainly cannot assert that these passages actually teach a Millennium.

Describing the Millennium, some pierce the divine veil & boldly tread with unbridled futuristic speculations. There are no Scriptural depictions of unregenerate neighbors alongside mortal Christians & resurrected saints, nor of holding church during the Millennium, nor of a host of other operational details. With the Bible devoid of Millennial descriptions – it does not answer questions that it does not pose – premillennial hypothesizers can run amok with crazy futuristic fantasies, & alas, many do.

Many do not realize that the premillennial scheme forwarded by Dispensationalism requires more than a few “second” comings, resurrections of the dead, & “final” judgments. Jesus secretly captures the church before the Great Tribulation hits – that’s the second coming, part one. Then, after the 7 years of carnage, Jesus returns & sets up His Millennial Davidic throne in Jerusalem – that’d be the second coming, part two (or better, the third Advent). After 1,000 years, most Christians do not understand that Jesus’ earthly rule WILL BE AN ABJECT FAILURE, since it is followed by Gog & Magog. Some Dispensational theologians have supposed that Jesus departed the scene before Gog & Magog, then triumphantly returns once again (the fourth Advent) to enter into judgment & usher in the eternal state. Three of four “comings” of Jesus sounds like one or two too many.
Was God magnified by the destruction of His Messiah rejecting enemies, the Jews, who refused the New Covenant offer, executed their Messiah, & bitterly persecuted Jesus’ church? When it was all over, there can be little doubt that Jesus’ bride, the church, was not just spared, but elevated to an exalted position, while Jesus’ enemies – the Jews & Romans – suffered terribly. There really can be no debate that these both happened in the Jewish War of 66–73 AD, & that the Lord Almighty was thereby magnified among the nations. This is the thrust of Ezk39:28. God was magnified among the Gentiles by preserving & exalting Jesus’ church & executing judgment upon the church’s enemies, the beastly Romans & the vitriolic, unbelieving Jews., during the era of the Jewish War.
What is the point, then, of Gog & Magog? Why such extensive detail melded with seemingly insurmountable interpretive difficulties? The particularization of the passage makes quick work of erroneous suggestions & narrows us down to only one possible solution, the Jewish War of 66–73AD. No other option fits all of the Biblical facts, though some may appear to fit via glosses, omissions, & yea, even system-driven fabrications. Ezk38-39 is decidedly NOT the happy hunting ground for our latter day end times prognosticators & Cold Warmongers – far too many points show that the events are in our past, not our near future. By God’s design, however, the murkiness of Ezk38-39 did ensure that the Jewish rebels of Jesus’ day didn’t “get it” before their demise at the hands of the iron-toothed Roman beast, just as they were screened off from recognizing their Christ as each participant entirely fulfilled the Messianic prophecies concerning Jesus’ trial & execution. However, the later Masoretic (Christ hating) adjustments to 39:28 may hint that later some Jews understood the gravity of the Gog & Magog storyline, that it was against them & in favor of Jesus; so it makes sense that the Masoretes sought to dampen the blow of Ezk38-39 & give life to their Jesus rejecting futurist Messianic hopes. Clearly the Jews spurned the New Covenant offered by their Messiah & called for His blood to be upon their own heads for so doing (Mt27:25). They were violent oppressors of the early church (see Acts), instigating virulent oppressions, & often using the iron fisted beast of Rome to enforce their venomous & vituperative will – the harlot rides the beast to use the Revelation imagery (Rev17:1-6). Would King Jesus do nothing in defense of His bride, the church? Dt28 & Lv26 both detail the covenant sanctions against those who violated the Old Covenant (cf Heb2:2); & Josephus’ Wars shows us that those penalties were executed upon the haters of Christ during the Jewish War. Despite their conniving (Jn11:47-52), the ethnic Jews who spurned their Messiah definitely did NOT escape after neglecting so great a salvation (Heb2:3).

Under the old (or Mosaic) economy, covenant violations beget covenant sanctions, ultimately resulting in Israel’s expulsion from the land; these covenant penalties are most extensively spelled out in Lv26 & Dt28. Beginning with Lv26, the heavenly Judge’s sentence against criminal behavior by Israel contains a remarkable repetition of SEVEN, the selfsame number we see highlighted in the seven years of firewood collection & seven months of burials in Ezk39:9-16. Lv26 tells us the following will be the consequences thrust upon the rebellious, covenant-rejecting Israelites:

“If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you SEVEN times more for your sins.” (26:18)

“If then, you act with hostility against Me & are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you SEVEN times according to your sins.” (26:21)

“And if in spite of this you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, then I will act with hostility against you; & I, even I, will strike you SEVEN times for your sins.” (26:23-24)

Yet if in spite of this you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, then I will act with wrathful hostility against you; & I, even I, will punish you SEVEN times for your sins.” (26:27-28)

According to Lv26, seven will factor prominently in Israel’s sentence for criminal malfeasance against their covenant Lord, & seven is clearly highlighted in Ezk39. While the connection is not absolute, one measuring frequency (Lv26) & the other tallying time (Ezk39:9-16), the tie is intriguing nonetheless. If Gog & Magog deal with Israel’s punishment in the Jewish War for violating the Old Covenant & rejecting the New, then it makes sense that Lv26 & Ezk38-39 would be attached by the number seven. Not surprisingly, 7 also prominently appears in the book of Revelation; & once again, these sevens are caused by the Jewish rejection of the New Covenant, resulting in the Jewish War.

More pointed are the progressive judgment curses against Israel in Dt28 for covenant infractions. The consequences escalate if the Jews harden their hearts & continue in insurgency against their covenant Lord.

“But it shall come about, if you do not obey the Lord your God, to observe to do all His commandments & His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you & overtake you: Cursed shall you be in the city, & cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket & your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the offspring of your body & the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd & the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, & cursed shall you be when you go out.” (28:15-19)

At the outset, curses against violating the Mosaic economy beget a general malaise in body, spirit, food production, & herds.

“The Lord will send upon you curses, confusion, & rebuf, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed & until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me. The Lord will make the pestilence cling to you until He has consumed you from the land where you are entering to possess it. The Lord will smite you with consumption & with fever & with inflammation & with fiery heat & with the sword & with blight & with mildew, & they will pursue you until you perish. The heaven which is over your head shall be bronze, & the earth which is under you, IRON. The Lord will make the rain of your land powder & dust; from heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed. The Lord shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, & you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky & to the beasts of the earth, & there will be no one to frighten them away. The Lord will smite you with the boils of Egypt & with tumors & with the scab & with the itch, from which you cannot be healed. The Lord will smite you with madness & with blindness & with bewilderment of heart …” (28:20-28)

If Israel continued in covenant rebellion, the Lord would ratchet up the intensity of penalties. Now there would be plagues, much like those meted out against Egypt prior to the Exodus. There would be no rain & their enemies would be victorious over them. Note the highlighted IRON, the symbol for Rome in the Danz Colossus; this symbol will appear again below.

“...& you will grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness, & you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed & robbed continually, with none to save you. You shall betroth a wife, but another man will violate her; you shall build a house, but you will not live in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but you will not use its fruit. Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will not eat of it; your donkey shall be torn away from you, & will not be restored to you; your sheep shall be given to your enemies, & you will have none to save you. Your sons & your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on & yearn for them continually; but there will
be nothing you can do. A people whom you do not know shall eat up the produce of your ground & all your labors, &
you will never be anything but oppressed & crushed continually. You shall be driven mad by the sight of what you see.
The Lord will strike you on the knees & legs with sore boils, from which you cannot be healed, from the sole of
your foot to the crown of your head.”

Cranking up the discipline heat yet more in an effort to turn the Jewish sinners from their wicked ways, God Almighty
would send darkness upon the land (per the 9th Plague of Ex10), & the land’s increase would go to others.

“The Lord will bring you & your king, whom you set over you, to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known,&
there you shall serve other gods, wood & stone. You shall become a horror, a provenor, & a taunt among all the
people the Lord drives you. You shall bring out much seed to the field but you will gather in little, for the
locust will consume it. You shall plant & cultivate vineyards, but you will neither drink of the wine nor gather the
grapes, for the worm will devour them. You shall have olive trees throughout your territory but you will not anoint
yourself with the oil, for your olives will drop off. You shall have sons & daughters but they will not be yours, for
they will go into captivity. The cricket shall possess all your trees & the produce of your ground. The alien who is
among you shall rise above you higher & higher, but you will go down lower & lower. He shall lend to you, but you
will not lend to him; he shall be the head, & you will be the tail. So all these curses shall come on you & pursue you &
overtake you until you are destroyed, because you would not obey the Lord your God by keeping His commandments &
His statutes which He commanded you. They shall become a sign & a wonder on you & your descendants forever.” (28:36-46)

By 28:36-46, things are getting pretty ugly for the Israelites who are chafing at the Lord’s gentle bit. Captivity & the re-
sultant assimilation idolatry are their lot, with no crops or kids. But wait! There’s more!

“Because you did not serve the Lord your God with joy & a glad heart, for the abundance of all things; therefore you
shall serve your enemies whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, & in the lack of all
things; & He will put an IRON yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you. The Lord will bring a nation against
you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not under-
stand, a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young.” (28:47-50)

Isn’t it curious what metal is chosen to describe the yoke received by the defiant & disloyal Jews? IRON, the very sym-
bol of Rome & the Roman Empire in the Danz Colossus, is singled out, pointing towards a fulfillment during the 1st
century AD, when the Jewish nation was consumed by the Roman Beast with iron teeth (Dan7:7,19).

“Moreover, it shall eat the offspring of your herd & the produce of your ground until you are destroyed, who also
leaves you no grain, new wine, or oil, nor the increase of your herd or the young of your flock until they have caused
you to perish. It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high & fortified walls in which you trusted come down
throughout your land, & it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land which the Lord your God has
given you. Then you shall eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons & of your daughters whom
the Lord your God has given you, during the siege & the distress by which your enemy will oppress you. The man
who is refined & very delicate among you shall be hostile toward his brother & toward the wife he cherishes & to-
ward the rest of his children who remain, so that he will not give even one of them any of the flesh of his children
which he will eat, since he has nothing else left, during the siege & the distress by which your enemy will oppress
you in all your towns. The refined & delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on
the ground for delicateness & refinement, shall be hostile toward the husband she cherishes & toward her son &
daughter, & toward her afterbirth which issues from between her legs & toward her children whom she bears;
for she will eat them secretly for lack of anything else, during the siege & the distress by which your enemy
will oppress you in your towns.” (28:51-57)

Now things become downright grotesque. Stubborn Israelite insubordination to God’s Law begets a protracted siege,
with intense famine & cannibalism being the result. There is such an example during Elisha’s day in 2Kis:28-29, with
the next (non-Biblical) example related to Israel being given in Josephus during the siege of Jerusalem (see below).

“If you are not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this honored & awe-
some name, the Lord your God, then the Lord will bring extraordinary plagues on you & your descendants,
even severe & lasting plagues, & miserable & chronic sicknesses. He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt
of which you were afraid, & they will cling to you. Also every sickness & every plague which, not written in the book
of this law, the Lord will bring on you until you are destroyed. Then you shall be left few in number, whereas you
were as numerous as the stars of heaven, because you did not obey the Lord your God. It shall come about that as
the Lord delighted over you to prosper you, & multiply you, so the Lord will delight over you to make you perish &
destroy you; & you will be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it.” (28:58-63)

What is the ultimate evidence of Yahweh’s rejection of a nation? Surely the supernatural & sweeping plagues against
Egypt stand the test of time; they represent the pinnacle of God’s punishments against His opponents. If Israel contin-
ued in disobedience, the plagues of Egypt would come upon them. It is not surprising that the Exodus plagues also
prominently appear in the book of Revelation, which has the same storyline of God’s judgment against the Jewish re-
bel. Such Exodus style judgments, by the way, were the outcome for the Jews after the Jewish War (66-73 AD) & the Bar
Kochba Revolt (132-135 AD). They were few in number & dispersed among the nations, never to reassemble in Palestine
for over 1800 years. Indeed, Hadrian expelled the Jews from Jerusalem (Aelia Capitolina) after Bar Kochba; &, irony of
irony, not long thereafter, all Muslims were allowed to reassemble in Jerusalem.

“Moreover, the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; &
there you shall serve other gods, wood & stone, which you or your fathers have not known. Among those nations
you shall find no rest, & there will be no resting place for the sole of your foot; but there the Lord will give you a
triumbling heart, failing of eyes, & despair of soul. So your life shall hang in doubt before you; & you will be in dread
night & day, & shall have no assurance of your life. In the morning you shall say, ‘Would that it were evening!’ And
at evening you shall say, ‘Would that it were morning!’ because of the dread of your heart which you dread, & for the
sight of your eyes which you will see. The Lord will bring you back to Egypt in ships, by the way about which I spoke
to you, ‘You will never see it again!’ And there you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male & female
slaves, but there will be no buyer.” (28:64-68)
Wrapping up the covenant sanctions for covenant disobedience & sedition against their Heavenly King, the Jews would be expelled from the land & scattered among the nations, even returning to Egypt. Clearly this took place to some extent during the Babylonian exile, but that exile was current for Ezekiel & therefore not the subject of Ezk33-39. Besides, during the Babylonian captivity, sufficient numbers of Jews coalesced in such places as Tel-Abib (on the Chebar River; cf Ezk1:1); Tel-melah, Tel-harsha, Cherub, Addon & Immer (Ezr2:59; Neh7:61) so that a remnant could later return. The sweeping statements in Dt28:64-68 about the plagues of Egypt coming upon the mutinous Jews, & their ultimate expulsion from the land & being scattered among the nations, awaited a future date, coming to fruition during the Great Tribulation of the 1st century AD, the Jewish War, with the final mop-up completed in the 2nd century AD by the Bar Kochba revolt.

As to the extent of the covenant sanctions against the Jews, Paher (p80-p87) gives an excellent summary of Josephus & the Great Tribulation (the Jewish War):

In stunning confirmation of Mt24:21, the contemporary Jewish historian Flavius Josephus describes the horrors of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in the late spring & summer of the year 70. No one could leave the City. Nowhere was there corn, wheat or barley to be seen, & there was wholesale ransacking. People tormented one another for even a morsel of food. “If they still had flesh on their bones, they were deemed to have plenty of stores; if they were already reduced to skeletons, they were passed over … They snatched food from the fire while still uncooked & ate like wolves.”

As the famine intensified in Jerusalem that summer, whole families perished. A deep silence & a deathly darkness enveloped the City. While burying others many fell dead themselves. Like crazed tomb-robbers, bandits broke into houses of the dead & underground chambers & stripped their bodies of possessions, & came out laughing. With a grinning mouth & dry eyes, stronger people watched their neighbors fall dead in their tracks. After there was no more room for burials in the City, corpses were thrown over the walls to the Romans. The surrounding valleys were soon heaped with the dead, & a putrid stream trickled from under the decomposing bodies. Josephus claimed he saw 600,000 pauper bodies thrown out of Jerusalem’s gates.

Many who fled to the Romans were scourged & crucified in full view of everyone within the walls. As a grim joke, some were nailed up in awkward positions after first being flogged & needlessly tortured, so deep was the soldiers’ wrath & hatred of the Jews. Others rushed to the enemy with their bodies blown by starvation, as if by dropsy; the Romans stuffed food into their empty bellies non-stop until they burst.

On one occasion when a deserter was caught picking through his excretia for gold coins (for he had swallowed them before leaving Jerusalem), a rumor spread that all deserters were arriving stuffed with gold. The guards then cut open the refugees & ransacked their bellies. In a single night nearly 2000 were ripped up.

As the plight of Jerusalem grew worse, the innumerable corpses piled here & there all over the City emitted a pestilential stench. While making sorties, the Jewish soldiers had to trample on thousands of bodies of kinsmen on the streets. With the famine penetrating deeply throughout the City, friends & members of households came to grips with one another, if something to eat were detected.

Like open-mouthed mad dogs, desperadoes stumbled along the streets, hammering at doors like drunken men; in their helpless state they often broke into the same house two & three times an hour. They sunk their teeth into anything — even dirty belts & worn-out shoes, stalks of old hay, & also the leather from shields. People began to prey upon one another in sheer cannibalism.

Josephus tells of one mother, robbed of everything by looters, who laid hand on her own baby. She reportedly said, “With the Romans there is only slavery, even if we are alive when they come; but famine is foretelling slavery, & the partisans (looters) are even crueler than either. Come, you must be food for me …” While she spoke she killed her son, then roasted him & ate one half, concealing the rest. Sniffing the unholy smell, the partisans reappeared & asked for what was being prepared. The woman then said, “Help yourself, I’ve had my share.” But the men went away quivering.

Amid the din of Roman soldiers moving about & shouting while conquering the lower sections of the City, the Jews even set fire to some of their own buildings. The aggressors moved fast, pillaging gold objects, money, clothing & other precious items from stores & houses. Every soldier became so laden with plunder that the value of gold was said to have fallen by one half.

With no pity or cry of emotion, they thrust their swords indiscriminately into any living enemy — even unarmed women, children & feeble old men. Soon the ground could not be seen between the corpses. Said Josephus, “The whole city ran with blood, inasmuch that many things which were burning were extinguished by the blood.” Among the last building to be seized was the Royal Palace. There the Jewish partisans sought refuge & slaughtered an estimated 8400 kinsmen who had crowded into the building. Anyone on the streets & in houses quickly fell to the Romans, who found rooms piled high with the corpses of starvation. Other Jews hiding in the sewers were ferreted out, & the ground was torn up in search of enemy. They all died a violent death.

This Roman-inflicted suffering & the bloody partisan strife is indeed the great tribulation that Jesus predicted in Mt24:21, for nothing else on record matches the misery, the violence, the savageness, & wanton destruction of the Jewish Wars. The confusion, the madness of the Jewish partisans & leaders, the merciless Roman siege which brought famine, pestilence, & despair, the fighting among & within Jewish families & the murder & raping by the enraged & hate-filled Roman soldiery — all these combined to bring about the bloodiest & cruellest war in the annals of man.
Originally, Titus intended to starve the City into surrender & capture intact the glorious temples & shrines. This was the general Roman custom. But the obstinence of the Jewish soldiers compelled him to press on & step by step destroy the city, house by house.

Finally the temple itself was set ablaze, possibly by accident. The gold on the roofs melted & flowed down into the crevices & mortar joints & even to the foundation stones. Titus then ordered these supporting stones beneath the temple broken up. In the sift for gold, all of them were dislodged, scraped off the site & thrown down. Today, not a single stone of the temple can be identified as part of that once great building. Jesus’ great prophecy of Herod’s magnificent temple, “Not one stone would be left upon another …” (Mt24:3), was explicitly fulfilled.

Soon after its capture, Josephus described the City: “No one — not even a foreigner — who had seen the ... glorious suburbs of the city, & now set eyes on her present desolation, could have helped sighing & groaning at so terrible a change; for every trace of beauty had been blotted out by the war, & nobody who had known it in the past & came upon it suddenly would have recognized the place: when he was already there, he would have been still looking for the City.”

Mt24:21, which prophesied of unprecedented tribulation that would come upon the Jews, covers the entire period of the Jewish Wars, 66-70AD. In Jerusalem there were wholesale killings through internal strife & shortages of food.

The Roman invaders demolished the City’s magnificent buildings, hurled bodies from towers & walls, crucified many others, plundered & slayed thousands in the streets & in the houses, & led untold others into captivity.

God’s providence then intervened. Josephus said of Cestius: “If he had chosen at that very hour to force his way inside near the very walls of the temple, the City would have been his immediately & the war brought to an end.” But his chief of staff & several cavalry officers had accepted bribes from one of the leaders of a Jewish sect to turn him from the attempt.

Josephus concludes: “If only he had persevered with the siege a little longer he would have captured the City at once; but ... flying in the face of all reason (he) retired from the City. (He) suddenly called off his men, abandoning hope though he had suffered no reverse.”

Concerning that time, Jesus said, “Except these days be shortened, no flesh would be saved” (24:22). The “days” include the several occasions of Jewish faction fighting & the three occasions in the Jewish Wars when Jerusalem was besieged by the Romans. As the Jews are the subject of the discourse, this verse declares that a lengthy siege would have indiscriminately exterminated both Christians & unbelieving Jews.

Since the Romans would slaughter all, Jesus adds, “but for the elect sake those days shall be shortened” (24:22b). The providential opportunity for flight to safety for Jewish Christians would not have been possible, except that the days of siege & tribulation be shortened.

Verse 22 saw initial fulfillment when the Roman troops under Cestius Gallius came upon Jerusalem in November 66. They marched into the City, set fire to the suburbs, & entered the Upper City, camping out in front of the Royal Palace. On that occasion, many of God’s faithful were trapped in the besieged temple area, with the Romans stationed near the very walls of the temple.

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Josephus concludes: “If only he had persevered with the siege a little longer he would have captured the City at once; but ... flying in the face of all reason (he) retired from the City. (He) suddenly called off his men, abandoning hope though he had suffered no reverse.”

As the Romans retreated, the Jewish Christians left because they knew that the Romans would return at any time — her desolation was “at hand.” ...

In seeing the Roman activity, the believing Jews were then given the opportunity of obeying Jesus’ instruction to flee the city (Mt24:16) because it would be besieged again. For these would be the days when Jesus would be meting out justice, “that all things which are written may be fulfilled” (Lk21:22; see also Jer46:10). These writings were scrolls of the Hebrew prophets & copies of the gospels, including Matthew’s which by then had circulated for at least two decades. Also, the disciples would recall Jesus’ actual utterances of these prophecies (Mt24, Mk13, Lk17, 19, 21). Josephus declared that after the departure of Cestius, “many prominent Jews fled from the City like swimmers from a sinking ship.”

A similar Roman besiegement & providential withdrawal occurred less than two years later, in the summer of 68, by Vespasian. He, too, surrounded the City on every wall after plundering the countryside in all directions. The disciples within the City were likewise trapped. But when Vespasian received the news that Nero had met a violent end, he put off his expedition against Jerusalem, waiting anxiously to see who would step into Nero’s emperorship. This proved to be Galba.

Encamped outside of Jerusalem, Vespasian refrained from further military activity, pending receipt of a new directive from Rome. But seven months later the new emperor, Galba, was assassinated, & Otho ascended the throne. In the interim, Vespasian roamed the countryside, burning towns & farms & slaughtering soldiers & civilians alike. Forests were stripped bare & cultivated ground was trampled so heavily that it was thereafter harder to work than even barren soil.

The three Jewish factions in the City committed every imaginable crime, butchering their captives even in broad daylight, as if they were herds of unclean animals. Houses were plundered & people killed on sight. Josephus reported, “The Dead Sea too was filled with corpses which the (Jordan) river carried down to it by the thousands.” When the Jewish Zealots admitted the Idumeans into the temple, fighting erupted, & in one night 8,500 corpses greeted the rising sun.

In Rome, emperor Otho lasted but three months & was succeeded by Vitellius. Meanwhile, Vespasian crushed all opposition in the neighborhood of Jerusalem. Instability reigned in Rome & everything was in a melting pot. In keeping an eye on Rome’s uncertain politics, Vespasian was detacted from the war against Jerusalem.

Eight months later Vitellius was knifed. Vespasian was then acclaimed emperor, & he departed from Judea. He thus became the fifth Roman ruler within a thirty month period. All of this amply fulfills Mt24:6-7, “And ye shall hear of wars & rumors of wars ... For nation shall rise against nation” — a sign preceding the destruction of Jerusalem. Any discerning Christian still in the City would not delay departure.

What accounts for these withdrawals? W[as] God protecting His people? Both times a siege had begun, & each time external events prevented a capture of the City. Truly, as 24:22 states, the days were cut short for the sake of the elect so that they could flee, fulfilling prophecy, for the fainthearted Christians would be trapped with the rebellious & corrupt Jews.

God used natural means to provide an escape for His people. This fulfilled God’s promise recorded by Daniel, of this event: “… There shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: & at
This brief review of Josephus' Wars by Paher shows that the wrath of God had come upon the Jews to the uttermost (1Th2:14-16) for their rebuffing & execution of Jesus the Messiah, in accordance with their own instructions (Mt27:25). The Lord would not sit idly by & let the Jews get away with the murder of His Son & the persecution of His Son’s bride, the church. As Jesus foretold in the Olivet Discourse (Mt24; Mk13; Lk21), the 7 year Great Tribulation, the Jewish War (66-73AD), came upon the rebels for killing the Son & throwing Him out of the vineyard (Mt21:33-45). God brought “those wretches to a wretched end” (21:41). Jesus told the rebellious Jews that “the kingdom of God will be taken away from you & given to a people, producing the fruit of it” (21:43); & so it was during the Jewish War. Josephus, summarized above, clearly demonstrated that the Old Covenant sanctions of Lv26 & Dt28 came upon the covenant rebels. The Jewish rejection of the Messiah was often foretold in the OT (per Ezk38:17), & the Gog & Magog account prophesies the same in exacting detail – so much detail, in fact, that NO other event of the past or future can properly interlock with all of its itemized intricacies. Gog & Magog MUST be about the Jewish War. All other Gog & Magog solutions require glosses, omissions, & even outright fabrications of parts of the very Scriptural passage they purport to explain, often to bolster an unbiblical agenda. Only the Jewish War fits all of the complexities revealed by God in Ezk38-39.

This seems cruel to the Jews – some may even say antisemitic. Is there no hope for Israel? Paul said he wore his chains for the sake of the hope of Israel (Acts28:20) & then spoke to the Jews in Rome about the gospel, “preaching the kingdom of God” (28:31). This is at the end of Acts. If the kingdom was rejected by the Jews & postponed much earlier than this – say, Mt13 or so, as some contend – then apparently Paul missed the memo & continued right on preaching the kingdom to the Jews. What kingdom was this? Not some land grant a few thousand years later from the future Palestinian occupants, but the gospel of Christ – this is & ever will be the hope of Israel. Paul’s longings in Rom9-11 was that his countrymen might accept the good news about Jesus (Rom11:14). In the future, Paul looked for “all Israel” to be saved (Rom11:26), not by possessing some semi-arid piece of low rent real estate, but through accepting their previously rejected Messiah. By the way, “all Israel” was used in the Old Testament as an overwhelming proportion of any current Israeli generation. For instance, “Gather ALL ISRAEL to Mizpah” (1Sm7:5) did not mean every single Israelite past, present & future – “Hey Joe, looks like we’ll have to dig up all those corpses again so that all Israel can assemble at Mizpah!” No, no, “all Israel to Mizpah” meant summoning all of that current generation. In like fashion, Paul (& we) look forward to a great ingathering of “all Israel” to the cross – now won’t THAT be spectacular! Isn’t that a hope far better than the current Jewish unbelief in Palestine, suffering the antagonism of the surrounding Arabs, & heading for perdition because of their Messianic rejection?

Paul said to Agrippa, “And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers” (Acts26:6). Did Paul anywhere indicate that this hope was for Jesus’ demotion from His current heavenly glory to a man-made Davidic seat in Jerusalem, with millions of tiny little thrones around the dusty city, each being occupied by a resurrected Christian with precious little to do? “Imagine me sitting on a little thrown on the Mount of Olives, with millions of other little thrones, without enough subjects to even have one to blacken my boots! I abdicate now!” Stafford continues, “That there was a Jewish expectation of a Millennium of some kind, & that it has had some influence upon Christian eschatology, is freely admitted. But that this Jewish notion is found in the New Testament is denied. This false idea, like many other false ideas, has come into Christian thought from Judaism, but does not belong there. ... The idea of a civil government on earth for a thousand years is not found in a single utterance of Jesus, Paul or Peter; much less that Christ is going to ‘set it up’ when He returns.”

The hope of Israel is NOT in a restored earthly Davidic kingdom – the same false Messianic hope displayed by the 1st century AD Jews & denigrated by Jesus & the Apostles; yea, the same hope that many unbelieving Jews have today, where Jesus is decidedly NOT their Messiah, & with the kingdom “postponed” because of past Jewish disobedience. Oh, no, the hope of Israel is far better than that lowly, earthly, fleshy expectation that was roundly rejected by the Jews & denigrated by Jesus & the Apostles; yea, the same hope that many unbelieving Jews have today, where Jesus is decidedly NOT their Messiah, & with the kingdom “postponed” because of past Jewish disobedience. Oh, no, the hope of Israel is far better than that lowly, earthly, fleshy expectation that was roundly rejected by the entirety of the New Testament. Jesus’ kingdom is emphatically NOT of this world (Jn18:36), NOT observed with the eyes of flesh (Lk17:20-21), & NOT constructed of the same materials as that of the preceding world empires (Dan2) – it’s NOT cut from the same cloth as Rome or Babylon but instead with Jewish national hegemony! No, the Rock cut without hands set up Israel during the days of the Roman Empire, & the hope of Israel was & ever will be that they repent & are saved; & one day, we are sure from Rom9-11, they will! Now THAT is a hope worth having! And what will be the end? “Now if their [Jewish] transgression is riches for the world & their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be! ... For if their [Jewish] rejection is the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance be but life from the dead?” (Rom11:12.15). Do you look for a “sign of the times?” When you begin seeing all of your Goldberg & Cohen friends turning to Jesus, then look up, for your redemption draweth nigh! This hope of Israel, which is already Scriptural, is far more attractive (far less antisemitic) than reassembling the Jews in Palestine only to have them squashed like cornered cockroaches by the Antichrist during the Great Tribulation, is it not? Eternal life for the Jews who turn en masse to Jesus, followed by the resurrection of the dead & the ushering in the eternal state, is a bucket load better & exceedingly more Biblical bargain for Israel than being in Palestine in unbelief while being pummeled by the resurrected Roman Empire headed up by a yet undiscovered Antichrist. The hope of Israel is entirely in Jesus as their Messiah, not in property & political dominance. What good is it to reign for 1000 years or 2 years & yet go to hell in unbelief?
The Germans did NOT want the British to decipher their encryption machine, Enigma, during World War II. In contrast, God DOES want us to understand the Gog & Magog storyline. The Revealer of Truth does not give us impossibly complicated coded messages just to taunt us – “Nyah-nyaah-nah-nyaah-nyaah, I get it but you don’t!” No, the solution is hidden in plain sight, & that answer is the Jewish War of 66–73\(\text{AD}\) (7 years), with the Temple being destroyed in the middle, after 3½ years (time, times & half a time). The puzzle pieces all fit neatly together, the watch gears interleave & operate properly – no stopped prophetic clock! – & the key fits all the pins in the lock, fulfilling ALL of the above listed criteria in one prophetic fell swoop. No other suggestion can boast such a snug historical fit to the actual Gog & Magog Biblical facts. Moreover, God was & is glorified among the nations by the annihilation of His Jesus-opposing enemies, & He was & is magnified among the Gentiles by the preservation of Christ’s bride, the church. Finally, the passage has much about Jesus – His death on the cross & victorious resurrection & ascension, where He now rules in favor of His church at the right hand of God. He provided purification for transgressions (sins are forgotten, 39:25-26), & he executed judgment upon & exiled His enemies, the Old Covenant transgressors (39:21-24). The Jews rejected the Prophet greater than Moses (Dt18:15,18-19), & those who wouldn’t listen were called to account by God. Yes, Ezekiel & the other prophets probably scratched their balding prophetic heads while they “made careful searches & inquiries, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ & the glories to follow” (1Pt1:10-11). However, Ezekiel & his historical associates of this frequently foretold (38:17) event needed some additional insight; namely, “It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things into which angels long to look” (1Pt1:12).

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Note: Updated English applied to older texts (thees & thous become you, including the KJV)

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