

GOG OF THE LAND OF MAGOG AND THE BATTLE FOR JERUSALEM: FULFILLED OR UNFULFILLED?

BY

GERRY WATTS

There are numerous books and articles and websites today that are devoted to the subject of Biblical Prophecy, and many allege that these prophecies are being fulfilled in our own day - thousands of years after the prophecies were originally given. This is particularly the case when it comes to prophecies concerning the nation and land of Israel. One of the most popular themes of the modern day prophecy movement is the Battle of Armageddon (based on Revelation 16:12-16) and the war of Gog and Magog (based on Ezekiel 38-39; also Revelation 20:8).

The common Dispensational Futurist viewpoint is that these things are still yet to be fulfilled in the very near future, involving a war over Jerusalem, yet there is still much speculation concerning the modern identity of the nations mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39. The popular scenario at this time of writing (though this could change, as it often has in the past!) is that Russia will head up an Islamic coalition that will invade Israel to destroy her. I was greatly influenced by this interpretation for many years due to the system of Pre-millennial Dispensationalism. It is only in recent years that I've come to see things much more clearly, and I have to say that much of my previous teaching on this subject was quite wrong. Once I broke away from the popular dispensational mindset, the truth began to open up to me more readily.

The truth of the matter is that these things have already been fulfilled within the ancient history of the nation of Israel. We don't have to look for them to be fulfilled in our modern era, applying all kinds of speculative theories. There are a lot of people who will inevitably frown upon this because they like the buzz of chasing the latest prophecy predictions that seem to make some sense out of current worldly events. They also think that it somehow validates the Bible and brings it up to date, when in actual fact, this kind of speculative prediction brings the Bible into disrepute when the prophecies are not fulfilled as one thinks. I would say that the Bible has already been validated as the Word of the Living God - for the vast majority of its prophecies have already been fulfilled!

This is not to say that there isn't an allegorical fulfilment of 'Gog and Magog' in relation to the Church at the end of this age (taken from Revelation 20:8), but it is evident that in relation to Israel after the flesh under the Old Covenant, these things have already been fulfilled. When approaching any Old Testament text, we must take ourselves back to the original historical context of the prophet and seek to understand the unfolding of God's purposes in the ancient history of Israel and the nations first. We now have the blessing of hindsight, if we become acquainted with ancient history, to see how these things were fulfilled.

Yet for those of us who are Christians, as followers of Jesus the Messiah, when we come to the era of Christ and His Apostles in the 1st century AD, the writings of the New Testament needs to become our lens for looking back at the Old Testament prophecies (i.e. how to interpret them correctly concerning their ultimate fulfilment), as well as our lens for looking forward to the unfolding future from the 1st century AD onwards.

The common mistake of Premillennial Dispensationalism is to look back at the OT prophecies **through a Jewish Old Testament lens rather than through a Christ-centred New Testament lens - and to then apply this 'literalistic' OT interpretation to the future.** The unfolding future (i.e. this present age since the 1st century AD, particularly since 70 AD) needs to be viewed through the divine lens of the New Testament. Only then can we see that the entire OT has been ultimately fulfilled in Christ Jesus and His New Covenant people, who are the true Israel of God.

In this article, we are going to consider a few of the major prophecies that are often used to support the theory of a future war of Armageddon in Israel - particularly Ezekiel 38-39 and Zechariah 12-14, amongst others. It will be shown that these things have already been fulfilled in the ancient history of Israel.

An Old Covenant Fulfilment

As we begin to consider the prophecy of Ezekiel 38-39, one of the first things we must realise is that these things were prophesied to ancient Israel while they were under the Old Covenant. Therefore, these things must've occurred before the official end of the Old Covenant system in 70 AD, by which time the spiritual Messianic kingdom and the New Covenant had already been established through Jesus Christ. And its important to add here that the New Covenant is NOT a revamped version of the Old Covenant with the focus on a fleshly Israel, a physical land, a physical Temple with all its services, and a worldly city of Jerusalem. A New Creation has already arrived instead! The common mistake of Premillennial Dispensationalism is to go back to focusing on the Old Testament types and shadows instead of the New Testament reality in Christ and a New Creation.

In fact, towards the end of His ministry, in relation to the then-future events of the Jewish war, and the prophesied destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 70 AD, Jesus stated clearly that those days were to be the "...days of vengeance, **to fulfill all that is written.**"

"Now whenever you may be perceiving Jerusalem surrounded by encampments, then know that her desolation is near. Then let those in Judea flee into the mountains, and let those in her midst be coming out into the country, and let not those in the country be entering into her, **for days of vengeance are these, to fulfill all that is written.** Yet woe to those who are pregnant, and to those suckling in those days; for there will be great necessity in the land **and indignation on this people.**"

And they shall be falling by the edge of the sword and shall be led into captivity into all nations. And Jerusalem shall be trodden by the nations, until the eras of the nations (or times of the nations) may be fulfilled."

(Luke 21:20-24 CV)

This clearly indicates that ALL prophecy concerning ancient Israel, particularly that which was to be fulfilled before the coming of the Messiah and the establishing of the New Covenant, as well as including the judgment that would follow the establishing of His kingdom, should have already been fulfilled before (or during) the events of 70 AD! The prophecies of Daniel hinted at this completion of Old Testament prophecy in relation to the coming of Messiah in Daniel 9:24 & 12:7.

Also, there isn't any indication in the words of Jesus in the above text that Jerusalem or the Temple would be restored to its former position of glory in Israel, or that the Jews would be restored to the land under the terms of the Old Covenant as in days of old. Jesus just says that Jerusalem will be trampled by the nations until the end of this age, which is described as the 'Times of the Nations' (as opposed to the previous 'Times of the Hebrews'). So all the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Restoration of Israel had to have been fulfilled before, or in relation to, the First Coming of Jesus as the Messiah (i.e. by the 1st century AD).

There are many descriptions within the prophecy of Ezekiel, particularly that which involves ancient warfare and the ancient names of the nations, that could only be fulfilled in the ancient past. To try and apply it to modern warfare and modern nations creates a huge problem. Admittedly, there are difficulties with this prophecy whatever system of interpretation one holds, but it certainly makes a lot more sense when it is viewed in its ancient Old Covenant context.

I will now proceed to show that these things were fulfilled in Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Seleucid Empire during the times of the Maccabees in the 2nd century BC. The awful atrocities of Antiochus, and the infamous 'Abomination of Desolation' in the Temple of Jerusalem, have gone down as one of the worst eras in Jewish history occurring before the 1st century AD (next to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities, that is). That is, from the time of the restoration of Israel to the land, which followed Ezekiel's ministry in the 6th century BC, through to the events of the 1st century AD, the most significant event in the history of the Jews in Palestine was the wars of the Maccabees. As far as I'm aware, there isn't any other major war in ancient Israel during this period that could be the fulfilment of this prophecy apart from the Seleucid War with the Maccabees, begun by Antiochus IV Epiphanes.

It is true that some of these details could apply to the Roman/Jewish War of the 1st century AD, and in some respects it does receive its ultimate fulfilment in 70 AD when the unbelieving Jews themselves became the object of God's wrath, because they had now become the enemies of God and His Son. Nevertheless, there are also many other details that just don't fit the events of that war at all. Therefore, I conclude that all the evidence points to the wars of the Seleucids and the Maccabees as the fulfilment of these things, though some of it may have been looking ahead to the later Roman/Jewish war and the outpouring of God's wrath upon Israel, for that was the ultimate Day of the Lord for Israel and Jerusalem, which concluded the transition from the Old Covenant to the New.

These things were also predicted in quite some detail in the prophecies of Daniel, who was also a contemporary of Ezekiel at the time of the Babylonian Captivity. Then during the early stages of the restoration of Israel from the captivities, the prophet Zechariah also prophesied concerning these things. Even the Jewish Feast of Hanukkah was originally established to commemorate these momentous events

concerning the miraculous victories of the Maccabees by God's power. So we should expect to see the warning and prediction of these things in the writings of some of the Hebrew prophets - and that's exactly what we have in Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah. In type and shadow, many of the earlier prophets also prophesied this invasion when they spoke of 'the Assyrian' attacking from the north, as we shall see.

Also, the prophecies of Ezekiel and Zechariah foretold the restoration of all the tribes of Israel, followed by a golden era of peace and blessing in the land under a renewed covenant. This would then be followed by a growing era of apostasy which would lead to great judgment by a northern power, similar to that of Assyria and Babylon before it. Ultimately Israel would conquer their enemies through the help of Yahweh, and this would lead to further blessing and independence, which would ultimately lead to the coming of Messiah and His Kingdom. Upon reflection and hindsight, it becomes clear how these things have been fulfilled in history.

Amazingly, God has made sure that we have an historical record of these things to largely show us how they were fulfilled. We have the writings of Flavius Josephus, particularly in his *Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Jewish War*, as well as the Apocryphal writings of *1 & 2 Maccabees* (although *1 Maccabees* is believed to be more historically reliable than *2 Maccabees*).

Having said that, we must accept the fact that there are certain elements of Ezekiel's prophecy that, in relation to its fulfilment, cannot be verified from history as yet, but that does not mean that these things didn't occur. There are many biblical places and events that have not as yet been verified from history either archaeologically or otherwise, but that doesn't mean that these things didn't exist or occur.

So either way you look at it, there are going to be some problems with interpreting this prophecy, yet I believe that there is enough evidence to accept that its fulfilment has already occurred. The popular Futurist interpretation, on the other hand, has numerous hurdles to overcome in applying this prophecy to modern warfare!

So let us consider this important prophecy step by step.

Gog of the Land of Magog

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal; prophesy against him and say: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws and bring you out with your whole army—your horses, your horsemen fully armed, and a great horde with large and small shields, all of them brandishing their swords. Persia, Cush and Put will be with them, all with shields and helmets, also Gomer with all its troops, and Beth Togarmah from the far north with all its troops—the many nations with you.

(Ezekiel 38:1-6 NIV)

As strange as these ancient names may sound, they can all be found in the Table of Nations in Genesis 10. Magog and Meshech and Tubal, Gomer and Togarmah,

were sons of Japheth, the son of Noah. Most scholars and commentators would agree that, during the time of Ezekiel and the Babylonian captivity, in the early 6th century BC, these Japhetic tribes dwelt in the region of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), some as far north as modern Armenia and Georgia. (The Magogite tribes became generally known as the Scythians). Therefore, the prophecy was declaring that a northern kingdom or Empire, composed of these nations in these areas, would attack Israel. There is nothing in the original Hebrew text that linguistically links Russia or Moscow with the identity of these nations, as many suggest.

Many other peoples would also be a part of the fighting force, including Persia or Elam (modern Iran) in the east, and Cush (Ethiopia) and Put (modern Libya), who dwelt alongside Egypt in North Africa. Now this doesn't necessarily mean that the heads of all these nations formed some kind of coalition, but in all probability it just means that the peoples from these countries would belong to the overall fighting force, probably as mercenaries or auxiliaries. It was common in the ancient Empires to enlist or enforce soldiers from many nations that lay within the territory of the Empire to fight for them as mercenaries or auxiliaries. This is evidently the case here.

Gog is obviously derived from *Magog* as representing the chief ruler of this Empire. It is evident that this name is to be viewed as a symbolic title for the king (or kings) leading this coalition. Like the titles Pharaoh or Caesar, Gog does not have to be limited solely to one man. Therefore, it can refer to Antiochus Epiphanes and his successors. Verse 17 goes on to say that this 'Gog' was formerly mentioned by the prophets of Israel, who prophesied for years that this northern enemy would come against them. Yet there isn't any mention of the name Gog elsewhere in the prophets.

Therefore, this has to be an allusion to the Assyrian and Babylonian enemies who attacked Israel primarily from the north, with their capitals based at Nineveh and Babylon. The prophets spoke profusely about them. These enemies of Israel, as well as Syria and even Persia, were all referred to as being from the north. Those nations who were beyond the Euphrates River usually advanced into Israel from the north. Hence, it is no surprise that the Seleucid Empire of Antiochus is referred to in this manner.

It is possible that Gog is a veiled reference to a 7th century BC king of Lydia in ancient Anatolia called Gogis or Gyges, known by the Assyrians as Gugu. Again, this places this enemy of Israel to the north in Asia Minor.

The Greek Empire of the Seleucids dominated the area of Asia Minor, at times, even as far east as Persia and India. After the death of Alexander the Great, Seleucus I had originally been given Syria, eastern Asia Minor, Mesopotamia and Persia, but through wars with the Ptolemies in the south, other territories in the south, such as Egypt, were often gained and lost.

In the book of Daniel chapter 11, the **Seleucid Empire** is generally known as the King of the North, and the **Ptolemaic Empire** is called the King of the South. The largest of these kingdoms was the Seleucid Empire. At its greatest extent, it ruled a good part of the Middle East, including Mesopotamia (modern Iraq), Syria, Lebanon, Persia (modern Iran) and Afghanistan, as well as parts of Armenia and Asia Minor (modern Turkey), Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Western India, and they

living in the center of the land to be exact (the navel of the earth, which is a reference to Jerusalem). They would be dwelling peacefully in their villages with no outward sign of major protection (living without walls, gates and bars). This was describing the restoration of all Israel that all the prophets spoke about, and the golden age of peace and prosperity that would eventually follow. (This subject is dealt with in more detail in [The Restoration of Israel and the So-Called Ten Lost Tribes](#)).

The language here is not unlike that of the earlier prophets when they described the invasions of Assyria and Babylon. These nations were used by God to chastise Israel in accordance with the terms of the Old Covenant, while thereafter, He also judged those nations for their treatment of His people. In the same way, Yahweh was going to reveal His power and holiness to all the surrounding nations by defeating Gog and his army, for Gog was going to take advantage of peaceful Israel and take over their land like a cloud. He was to come from the far north, and yet he would be turned around and dragged. This is evidently describing a major war upon Israel, and not just one battle.

Let us now see how these things were fulfilled.

What follows are specific portions of the account of Josephus concerning Antiochus' attacks on Jerusalem and the Jews, which shows an amazing correlation with the prophecy. Take note of the fact that he originally came from the north and attacked Egypt, yet he was 'turned around' and then attacked Jerusalem. His main purpose was to steal the riches of Jerusalem and the temple, hence 'to plunder and loot' and to take advantage of an unsuspecting people. In fact, he already had a portion of apostate Hellenistic Jews on his side, who were viewed as traitors by the rest of the people. The war itself spread throughout the land of Israel, though its focus was primarily on Jerusalem and Judah in the south. (All **emphasis** is mine).

Now Antiochus, upon the agreeable situation of the affairs of his kingdom, resolved to make an expedition against Egypt, both because he had a desire to gain it, and because he contemned the son of Ptolemy, as now weak, and not yet of abilities to manage affairs of such consequence; so he came with great forces to Pelusium, and circumvented Ptolemy Philometor by treachery, and seized upon Egypt. He then came to the places about Memphis; and when he had taken them, he made haste to Alexandria, in hopes of taking it by siege, and of subduing Ptolemy, who reigned there. But he was driven not only from Alexandria, but out of all Egypt, by the declaration of the Romans, who charged him to let that country alone...

...King Antiochus returning out of Egypt for fear of the Romans, made an expedition against the city Jerusalem;... And when he had gotten possession of Jerusalem, he slew many of the opposite party; and when he had plundered it of a great deal of money, he returned to Antioch.

Now it came to pass, after two years, ... that the king came up to Jerusalem, and, pretending peace, he got possession of the city by treachery; at which time he spared not so much as those that admitted him into it, **on account of the riches that lay in the temple; but, led by his covetous inclination, (for he saw there was in it a great deal of gold, and many ornaments that had been dedicated to it of very great value,) and in order to plunder its wealth, he ventured to break the league he had made.** So he left the temple bare, and took away the golden candlesticks, and the golden altar [of

incense], and table [of shew-bread], and the altar [of burnt-offering]; and did not abstain from even the veils, which were made of fine linen and scarlet. He also emptied it of its secret treasures, and left nothing at all remaining; and by this means cast the Jews into great lamentation, for he forbade them to offer those daily sacrifices which they used to offer to God, according to the law. And when he had pillaged the whole city, some of the inhabitants he slew, and some he carried captive, together with their wives and children, so that the multitude of those captives that were taken alive amounted to about ten thousand.

(Josephus - *Antiquities* Book 12; chapter 5)

In this next portion, take note of the details of the army and the mention of merchants, for the Seleucid army was known for using Arabian camel riders. Take note also of Antiochus' position of travelling to Persia 'in the far north' while sending his generals to attack Judea.

When king Antiochus heard of these things, he was very angry at what had happened; so he got together all his own army, with many mercenaries, whom he had hired from the islands, and took them with him, and prepared to break into Judea about the beginning of the spring. But when, upon his mustering his soldiers, he perceived that his treasures were deficient, and there was a want of money in them, for all the taxes were not paid, by reason of the seditions there had been among the nations he having been so magnanimous and so liberal, that what he had was not sufficient for him, he therefore resolved first to go into Persia, and collect the taxes of that country. Hereupon he left one whose name was Lysias, who was in great repute with him governor of the kingdom, as far as the bounds of Egypt, and of the Lower Asia, and reaching from the river Euphrates, and committed to him a certain part of his forces, and of his elephants, and charged him to bring up his son Antiochus with all possible care, until he came back; **and that he should conquer Judea, and take its inhabitants for slaves, and utterly destroy Jerusalem, and abolish the whole nation.** And when king Antiochus had given these things in charge to Lysias, he went into Persia; and in the hundred and forty-seventh year he passed over Euphrates, and went to the superior provinces.

Upon this Lysias chose Ptolemy, the son of Dorymenes, and Nicanor, and Gorgias, very potent men among the king's friends, and delivered to them forty thousand foot soldiers, and seven thousand horsemen, and sent them against Judea, who came as far as the city Emmaus, and pitched their camp in the plain country. There came also to them auxiliaries out of Syria, and the country round about; as also many of the runagate Jews. **And besides these came some merchants to buy those that should be carried captives, (having bonds with them to bind those that should be made prisoners,) with that silver and gold which they were to pay for their price.** And when Judas saw their camp, and how numerous their enemies were, he persuaded his own soldiers to be of good courage, and exhorted them to place their hopes of victory in God, and to make supplication to him, according to the custom of their country, clothed in sackcloth; and to show what was their usual habit of supplication in the greatest dangers, and thereby to prevail with God to grant you the victory over your enemies.

(Josephus - *Antiquities* Book 12; chapter 7)

The first book of Maccabees adds the following testimony concerning the wars of Judas Maccabaeus against the Seleucids, revealing that God's power and glory was

made known to the nations during this era, ultimately giving victory to the Jews who remained faithful to the covenant.

Unto whom Judas answered, It is no hard matter for many to be shut up in the hands of a few; and with the God of heaven it is all one, to deliver with a great multitude, or a small company: For the victory of battle standeth not in the multitude of an host; but strength cometh from heaven. They come against us in much pride and iniquity to destroy us, and our wives and children, and to spoil us: But we fight for our lives and our laws. Wherefore the Lord himself will overthrow them before our face: and as for you, be ye not afraid of them.

Now as soon as he had left off speaking, he leapt suddenly upon them, and so Seron and his host was overthrown before him. And they pursued them from the going down of Bethhoron unto the plain, where were slain about eight hundred men of them; and the residue fled into the land of the Philistines. Then began the fear of Judas and his brethren, and an exceeding great dread, to fall upon the nations round about them: Insomuch as his fame came unto the king, and all nations talked of the battles of Judas.

(1 Maccabees 3:18-26)

Many more quotes could be added to these, but this will suffice for now. Before we continue, let us take a brief look at the subject of Israel's Restoration to the land, as this is an extremely important issue, seeing as numerous Bible teachers and commentators are using the 'restoration texts' to justify the existence (and support) of the modern State of Israel. Is the modern nation really fulfilling these ancient prophecies? Let us see. (A more detailed consideration of this subject can be found in [The Restoration of Israel and the So-Called Ten Lost Tribes](#)).

The Restoration of all Israel in Ezekiel 37

Ezekiel 37 is the chapter just before the text that we are presently considering. It contains one of the clearest prophecies that predicts the restoration of a faithful remnant of all the tribes of Israel *before* the coming of the Messiah. It is this Restoration that is being referred to in Ezekiel 38-39 above, where it says of Israel "...whose people were gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate. They had been brought out from the nations, and now all of them live in safety."

Modern Dispensational Premillennialists contend that these things have not yet been fulfilled or that they are in the process of being fulfilled in the modern nation of Israel. They put forward the argument that the restoration of Israel in the past was predominantly from Babylon and Mesopotamia (it was to begin with), and they allege that this was not a restoration of *all* the tribes from all nations. This is an inaccurate conclusion.

A simple reading of the New Testament will show that the Jewish nation in Palestine in the time of Jesus was representative of all the tribes of Israel. A remnant of all the tribes *had* returned to the land over many generations, dwelling under the banner of Judah and Jerusalem, as the prophecy foretold. And they *had* come from many nations of the world where they had been scattered during the previous captivities. The land had also been left desolate for a long time - i.e. the 70 years of

the Babylonian captivity (about two generations) being a long time for the land to be left virtually empty and in ruins.

Initially, Jesus sent His Twelve Apostles to the lost sheep of the house of Israel who were in the land (Matthew 10:5-6), and years later Paul stated that the 12 tribes of Israel were actively involved in serving God in the temple (Acts 26:7). Just these two instances alone reveal the truth that a remnant of all the tribes of Israel were restored to the land and were represented within the Jewish nation just as Ezekiel and others predicted. I do not believe that there is such a thing as the ten lost tribes of Israel, biblically speaking (even though I once held this belief for a while, many years ago). All of these prophecies concerning ancient Israel have been fulfilled.

Let us take a brief look at Ezekiel 37. The prophet sees a vision of a valley of dry bones. At the command of God, these bones come together to form a human multitude, and then spirit or breath is given to them so that they come to life. Verses 11-14 gives us the simple interpretation of the vision.

Then he said to me: "Son of man, **these bones are the whole house of Israel**. They say, 'Our bones are dried up and our hope is gone; we are cut off.' Therefore prophesy and say to them: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: **O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel**. Then you, my people, will know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves and bring you up from them. **I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land**. Then you will know that I the LORD have spoken, and I have done it, declares the LORD.' " (NIV)

Yahweh stated that these bones represented the whole house of Israel. We must bear in mind that the northern kingdom of Israel and its kings had been exiled from the land by the Assyrians in 721/722 BC, and they no longer existed as a political body or kingdom. The same thing had now happened to the southern kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians, and Ezekiel was ministering among the exiles in Babylon. Yet God was predicting that a remnant of all the tribes of the whole house of Israel were going to be restored to the land, and this would occur through a spiritual revival of repentance and faith that would restore them under the terms of the Old Covenant.

Some Dispensational teachers try to make a two fold division of this prophecy, whereby the physical restoration occurs first followed by the spiritual revival. This interpretation is forced upon the text to make it fit with the modern restoration of Israel. But the truth of the matter is that throughout the prophets, in accordance with the terms of the Old Covenant, **the physical restoration to the land was always based upon a spiritual restoration first, i.e. that of repentance and faith in the Law covenant**. Verse 14 of the above text confirms this order. The nation will be spiritually resurrected and physically restored at the same time.

This is what actually occurred in the stages of the restoration from Babylon and elsewhere. Contrary to this, the modern formation of the State of Israel via the return of the Jews to the land was not based on repentance and faith. In fact, the only Divine Covenant in force now is the New Covenant in Jesus the Messiah - and this has nothing to do with the physical land!

This prophecy is then elaborated further.

The word of the LORD came to me: "Son of man, take a stick of wood and write on it, '**Belonging to Judah and the Israelites associated with him.**' Then take another stick of wood, and write on it, '**Ephraim's stick, belonging to Joseph and all the house of Israel associated with him.**' Join them together into one stick so that they will become one in your hand.

"When your countrymen ask you, 'Won't you tell us what you mean by this?' say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am going to take the stick of Joseph—which is in Ephraim's hand—and of the Israelite tribes associated with him, **and join it to Judah's stick**, making them a single stick of wood, and they will become one in my hand.' Hold before their eyes the sticks you have written on and say to them, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will take the Israelites out of the nations where they have gone. I will gather them from all around and bring them back into their own land. I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel. There will be one king over all of them and they will never again be two nations or be divided into two kingdoms. They will no longer defile themselves with their idols and vile images or with any of their offenses, for I will save them from all their sinful backsliding, and I will cleanse them. They will be my people, and I will be their God."

(Ezekiel 37:15-23 NIV)

Notice first of all that the prophet had to write Judah's stick first, then Ephraim/Joseph's stick, and together they represented the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel respectively. Both would be joined together to become one in God's hand. In this case, the NIV faithfully renders the underlying thought of the Hebrew text by indicating that the stick of Joseph was to be joined to the stick of Judah and not the other way around. That is, Judah would be the head of all Israel with its centre in Jerusalem. Hence the Jews or Judahites would become synonymous with all Israel - which is how it is in the New Testament.

A remnant of all the Israelites would eventually return to the land from all the nations where they had gone, from all around, to live together under the banner of Judah as representative of ALL Israel. God clearly stated that they would no longer be two kingdoms or two nations, and He would cleanse them from all their backsliding that brought on the captivities, and would restore them to Himself. There is also the hint of a Messianic King, the greater descendant of David, ruling over them as one nation. This thought continues in verses 24-28.

" 'My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children's children will live there forever (*for the age*), and David my servant will be their prince forever. I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people. Then the nations will know that I the LORD make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them forever (*for the age*).' "

The subsequent governors of Judah, such as Zerubbabel and Nehemiah, were most probably the shepherds of Israel immediately referred to in the prophecy, yet these things are ultimately fulfilled in Christ and the spiritual remnant of Israel. There was also a hint of the New Covenant, promised through Jeremiah, in 'the covenant of peace' which would last indefinitely (verse 26), though in its immediate context, this was referring to the renewal of the Law Covenant due to the mercy of God. There was also the promise of a restored Temple and its services, which was fulfilled in the second Temple and the later renovation of Herod's Temple. Again, these things have their ultimate fulfillment in Christ, Who is the true Temple of God, as well as His people, who are the living stones in the temple (Ephesians 2:19-22; 1 Peter 2:4-10; Revelation 3:12).

The prophet Zechariah prophesied further about these things during the early stages of the return from Babylon, revealing that many such 'returns' would take place for centuries that would include all the tribes of Israel (e.g. Zechariah 8). There would then follow a golden age of peace and prosperity and blessing for the Jews for quite some time, until the arrival of the era of the Messiah in 'the last days.'

Yet just before the era of the Messiah and the arrival of His kingdom, the prophets revealed that the Jewish nation would become corrupt again, and therefore God would punish them again with an enemy out of the north. Jerusalem would be attacked and conquered and many Jews would be killed and sent away as captives. This is especially evident in Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah. All of these things were fulfilled during the eras of the Persian kings and the early years of the Greek Empire, with the peace and safety being shattered by Antiochus IV Epiphanes and the Seleucids, and the wars of the Maccabees, in the 2nd century BC. This war, I believe, is the subject of our main text.

Now let us continue in Ezekiel 38-39.

The Fiery Wrath of the Almighty

¹⁷ " 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Are you not the one I spoke of in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel? At that time they prophesied for years that I would bring you against them. ¹⁸ This is what will happen in that day: When Gog attacks the land of Israel, my hot anger will be aroused, declares the Sovereign LORD. ¹⁹ In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. ²⁰ The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth (*or land*) will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground. ²¹ I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign LORD. Every man's sword will be against his brother. ²² **I will execute judgment upon him with plague and bloodshed;** I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. ²³ And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD.'

(Ezekiel 38:17-23 NIV)

As mentioned earlier, verse 17 says that 'Gog' was formerly mentioned by the prophets of Israel, who prophesied for years that this northern enemy would come against them. Yet there isn't any mention of the name Gog elsewhere in the prophets. Therefore, in accordance with the scriptural principle of prophetic patterns, which lays a specific foundation for further fulfillments to occur based on certain types and shadows, this has to be an allusion to the Assyrian and Babylonian enemies who attacked Israel primarily from the north, with their capitals based at Nineveh and Babylon. God is saying that the fulfillment of these ancient prophecies were not exhausted in Assyria and Babylon, but that, in a similar sense, there would be another northern invader who would attack Israel before the era of the Messiah.

One such example is in Isaiah 10.

⁵ **"Woe to the Assyrian,** the rod of my anger,
in whose hand is the club of my wrath!

⁶ I send him against a godless nation,
I dispatch him against a people who anger me,
to seize loot and snatch plunder,
and to trample them down like mud in the streets.

⁷ But this is not what he intends,
this is not what he has in mind;
his purpose is to destroy,
to put an end to many nations"...

¹² ...When the Lord has finished all his work against Mount Zion and Jerusalem, he will say, "I will punish the king of Assyria for the willful pride of his heart and the haughty look in his eyes.

¹³ For he says:
" By the strength of my hand I have done this,
and by my wisdom, because I have understanding.
I removed the boundaries of nations,
I plundered their treasures;
like a mighty one I subdued their kings...

¹⁶ ...Therefore, the Lord, the LORD Almighty,
will send a wasting disease upon his sturdy warriors;
**under his pomp a fire will be kindled
like a blazing flame.**

¹⁷ **The Light of Israel will become a fire,
their Holy One a flame;**
in a single day it will burn and consume
his thorns and his briars...

²⁰ ...In that day the remnant of Israel,
the survivors of the house of Jacob,
will no longer rely on him
who struck them down
but will truly rely on the LORD,
the Holy One of Israel.

²¹ A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob
will return to the Mighty God.

(Isaiah 10:5-7, 12-13, 16-17, 20-21 NIV; See also Isaiah 30:27-33 & 31:4-9)

These prophecies can also be applied to Antiochus and the Seleucids, although they were initially fulfilled in the invasions of Assyria and Babylon. Take special note of some of the hyperbolic language used in these texts. Many details within the messages of the prophets were not to be taken literally in every point, but they were to be understood as exaggerated figures of speech (hyperbole) to emphasise a point concerning God's spiritual power and kingdom. Some of it is even poetic expression - though, of course, they were talking about very real events that were to occur in history.

The emphasis is often placed on the spiritual, heavenly Source of these events - God Himself - though the things described may not be literally manifested or seen by men on the earth. Most of the time, God's power is invisible and is manifested through natural phenomena, but at certain times He reveals His power through miraculous deeds and supernatural intervention. But this was (and is) the exception rather than the rule - even in ancient Israel. Such is the case with portions of our present text in Ezekiel. Verses 18-23, quoted above, describes the power of God being manifested through the destruction that would take place during this war due to the anger and fiery wrath of Yahweh.

Here are two other examples of hyperbole in the writings of the prophets - and these prophecies had to do with the judgments that came upon Israel and Judah via the empires of Assyria and Babylon.

³ Look! The LORD is coming from his dwelling place;
he comes down and treads the high places of the earth.

⁴ **The mountains melt beneath him
and the valleys split apart,**
like wax before the fire,
like water rushing down a slope.

(Micah 1:3-4 NIV)

² The LORD is a jealous and avenging God;
the LORD takes vengeance and is filled with wrath.
**The LORD takes vengeance on his foes
and maintains his wrath against his enemies.**

³ The LORD is slow to anger and great in power;
the LORD will not leave the guilty unpunished.
His way is in the whirlwind and the storm,
and clouds are the dust of his feet.

⁴ He rebukes the sea and dries it up;
he makes all the rivers run dry.

Bashan and Carmel wither
and the blossoms of Lebanon fade.

**⁵ The mountains quake before him
and the hills melt away.
The earth trembles at his presence,
the world and all who live in it.**

**⁶ Who can withstand his indignation?
Who can endure his fierce anger?
His wrath is poured out like fire;
the rocks are shattered before him.**

(Nahum 1:2-6 NIV)

These texts reveal that, whether miraculous deeds and signs are manifested and witnessed or not, ALL mankind and ALL of nature is under the mighty hand of the Sovereign God, who fights for His people. And ultimately, He does get the glory whenever the words of the prophets are fulfilled. As we have seen, this is exactly what happened when Antiochus Epiphanes and the Seleucids were defeated by the Jews.

Returning to our text in Ezekiel, the description of the earthquake and the mountains being overturned and all the walls falling down throughout the land of Israel are not to be taken literally. This is hyperbolic language to emphasise God's power in overthrowing kingdoms and nations in war through earthshaking events. Throughout scripture, mountains and hills can represent kingdoms and empires, and ultimately, the Mountain of the Lord, God's kingdom, will be raised above all the rest.

The mention of 'plague and bloodshed...torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulphur' are common words used in the prophets to describe God's power over mankind and nature, and these methods are often used as judgments of God. Some are reminiscent of the plagues that fell upon Egypt in the book of Exodus. Ultimately, this is declaring that God, in His zeal and fiery wrath, will use all means to judge these nations and they will ultimately lose the war with heavy losses.

There is also an indication that God would cause internal strife and treachery within the enemy's camp so that they would fight each other, 'every man's sword against his brother.' Josephus recounts how the son of Antiochus IV had to contend with internal opposition and was eventually killed by Demetrius, son of Seleucus (Ant. book 12 chapter 9-10). It is also possible that verse 21 is referring to the Jews themselves, indicating that the fight against Gog within Israel would also cause civil war amongst the Jews.

²¹ I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Sovereign LORD. Every man's sword will be against his brother.

In fact, many of the Jews did become traitors and sided with Antiochus for their own selfish ambitions, though ultimately their unfaithfulness became their undoing.

It is also worth mentioning here that the 'plague and bloodshed' mentioned in verse 22 coming upon Gog and his army had an horrific fulfilment in Antiochus. Not

only was there much slaughter of the armies under Antiochus leadership, the king himself died of an awful sickness (or plague), and he eventually recognised this as a judgment from the God of Israel for all his wicked and arrogant ways. He even tried reversing his attitude towards the Jews, but this was evidently a desperate attempt of a dying man to placate his enemies for the sake of his son who would rule after him. I don't think that this was genuine repentance on his part, though only God knows the truth in this matter.

Here is the account in 2 Maccabees 9:1-18. I will quote it in full because it can remind us how the power and judgment of God is often manifested against the wicked rulers of this world.

9:1 "About that time came Antiochus with dishonour out of the country of Persia 2 For he had entered the city called Persepolis, and went about to rob the temple, and to hold the city; whereupon the multitude running to defend themselves with their weapons put them to flight; and so it happened, that Antiochus being put to flight of the inhabitants returned with shame.

3 Now when he came to Ecbatane, news was brought him what had happened unto Nicanor and Timotheus. 4 Then swelling with anger. he thought to avenge upon the Jews the disgrace done unto him by those that made him flee. Therefore commanded he his chariotman to drive without ceasing, and to dispatch the journey, **the judgment of God now following him**. For he had spoken proudly in this sort, That he would come to Jerusalem and make it a common burying place of the Jews.

5 But the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, smote him with an incurable and invisible plague: or as soon as he had spoken these words, a pain of the bowels that was remediless came upon him, and sore torments of the inner parts; 6 And that most justly: for he had tormented other men's bowels with many and strange torments.

7 Howbeit he nothing at all ceased from his bragging, but still was filled with pride, breathing out fire in his rage against the Jews, and commanding to haste the journey: but it came to pass that he fell down from his chariot, carried violently; so that having a sore fall, all the members of his body were much pained.

8 And thus he that a little afore thought he might command the waves of the sea, (so proud was he beyond the condition of man) and weigh the high mountains in a balance, was now cast on the ground, and carried in an horselitter, **shewing forth unto all the manifest power of God.** 9 So that the worms rose up out of the body of this wicked man, and whiles he lived in sorrow and pain, his flesh fell away, and the filthiness of his smell was noisome to all his army. 10 And the man, that thought a little afore he could reach to the stars of heaven, no man could endure to carry for his intolerable stink.

11 Here therefore, **being plagued**, he began to leave off his great pride, and to come to the knowledge of himself by the scourge of God, his pain increasing every moment. 12 **And when he himself could not abide his own smell, he said these words, It is meet to be subject unto God, and that a man that is mortal should not proudly think of himself as if he were God.**

13 This wicked person vowed also unto the Lord, who now no more would have mercy upon him, saying thus, 14 That the holy city (to the which he was going

in haste to lay it even with the ground, and to make it a common buryingplace,) he would set at liberty: 15 And as touching the Jews, whom he had judged not worthy so much as to be buried, but to be cast out with their children to be devoured of the fowls and wild beasts, he would make them all equals to the citizens of Athens: 16 And the holy temple, which before he had spoiled, he would garnish with goodly gifts, and restore all the holy vessels with many more, and out of his own revenue defray the charges belonging to the sacrifices: 17 Yea, and that also he would become a Jew himself, and go through all the world that was inhabited, and declare the power of God.

18 But for all this his pains would not cease: **for the just judgment of God was come upon him:** therefore despairing of his health, he wrote unto the Jews the letter underwritten, containing the form of a supplication..."

That which Antiochus had determined upon the Jews had come upon him and his troops. The mention of worms reminds me of the later judgment of God upon Herod Agrippa I in Acts 12:21-23, which was also recorded by Josephus in Book 19 Chapter 8 of his *Antiquities*. God deals justly with all the arrogance and wickedness of humanity, particularly those in high places.

The Enemy is Totally Defeated

¹ "Son of man, prophesy against Gog and say: 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. ² I will turn you around and drag you along. I will bring you from the far north and send you against the mountains of Israel. ³ Then I will strike your bow from your left hand and make your arrows drop from your right hand. ⁴ On the mountains of Israel you will fall, you and all your troops and the nations with you. I will give you as food to all kinds of carrion birds and to the wild animals. ⁵ You will fall in the open field, for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD. ⁶ I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in safety in the coastlands, and they will know that I am the LORD.

⁷ " I will make known my holy name among my people Israel. I will no longer let my holy name be profaned, and the nations will know that I the LORD am the Holy One in Israel. ⁸ It is coming! It will surely take place, declares the Sovereign LORD. This is the day I have spoken of.

(Ezekiel 39:1-8 NIV)

Chapter 39 continues with the predictions of this northern enemy coming against Israel. Some details are repeated, while further information is given about the ultimate defeat of Gog and his forces. God would cause their weapons (bows and arrows) to become ineffective, and the armies of all the nations who are fighting Israel will fall upon the land of Israel to become food for all the birds of prey and the wild animals. They will be defeated while they are invading the land and attacking the Jews.

Some have thought that verses 4 & 11 are stating that Gog himself, as a single person, would be killed and buried in Israel, but this is not necessarily the case. As mentioned earlier, Gog is a symbolic title, and not only could it refer to a whole line of rulers, but it could also be referring to the delegated generals who represented the king. And the whole war must be taken into account, not just one battle. So although Antiochus Epiphanes himself was not killed or buried in Israel, nor was his

son Eupator, this part of the prophecy could be seen as being fulfilled in the fact that some of the Seleucid generals, as those fully representing the king in battle, were killed in Israel. The main issue is that this enemy would be ultimately defeated upon the mountains of Israel.

Even the land of Magog and the Gentile countries living in safety close to the sea, would ultimately receive the judgments of God for their treatment of His people. This was fulfilled when, years later, the emerging Roman Empire conquered all these nations, while initially protecting the Jews under the leadership of the Maccabees.

Through all of this, the name of Yahweh as the God of Israel would be honoured not only in Israel again, but the surrounding nations would also acknowledge the holiness and power of Yahweh due to the victory of the Jews. Even the Romans originally showed some respect for the Jews after hearing about the victories that their God had given them, so much so that they sought to protect them! The profanity of the acts of Antiochus concerning Jerusalem and the Temple would be reversed and God's Name would be profaned no longer.

Verse 8 implicitly refers to the great Day of the Lord - 'the day I have spoken of' - which speaks ultimately of the judgment associated with the Second Coming of Christ, hence the link to 'Gog and Magog' in Revelation 20 in relation to the end of this age. We shall look at this a little later.

⁹ " 'Then those who live in the towns of Israel will go out and use the weapons for fuel and burn them up—the small and large shields, the bows and arrows, the war clubs and spears. For seven years they will use them for fuel. ¹⁰ They will not need to gather wood from the fields or cut it from the forests, because they will use the weapons for fuel. And they will plunder those who plundered them and loot those who looted them, declares the Sovereign LORD.

(Ezekiel 39:9-10 NIV)

It is then implied that the victory will be so immense that the people of Israel in the land will use the weapons left by the fleeing armies as fire wood, and they would plunder those who had plundered them. The 'seven years' may be symbolic, but it may have been literal. (The mention of 'seven months' in verse 12 could be confirming this symbolism, as the number 7 in Hebrew is speaking of spiritual completion).

We have no record of this specific act to date to verify its actual fulfillment, but Adam Clarke in his Commentary refers to the wars of Spain in 1212 AD when the people used the discarded weapons as fire wood for four years, which included siege towers. So this is not unheard of in ancient warfare. The Seleucids used similar wooden towers, including those mounted upon the war elephants. Of course, it would be very difficult to imagine this being fulfilled in our modern era, for military weapons today are virtually all made of metal - which causes a major problem for futurist interpreters! This clearly had an ancient fulfillment.

Josephus also states a number of times in his account of the wars of the Maccabees during the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and those who succeeded him, that the Jewish armies took the spoils of those they had defeated. So they plundered and looted those who had plundered and looted them, as the prophecy stated.

Dead and Buried

¹¹ " 'On that day I will give Gog a burial place in Israel, in the valley of those who travel east toward the Sea (or "*the valley of the passengers on the east of the sea*" - KJV). It will block the way of travelers, because Gog and all his hordes will be buried there. So it will be called the Valley of Hamon Gog.

¹² " 'For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land.' ¹³ All the people of the land will bury them, and the day I am glorified will be a memorable day for them, declares the Sovereign LORD.

¹⁴ " 'Men will be regularly employed to cleanse the land. Some will go throughout the land and, in addition to them, others will bury those that remain on the ground. At the end of the seven months they will begin their search. ¹⁵ As they go through the land and one of them sees a human bone, he will set up a marker beside it until the gravediggers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon Gog. ¹⁶ (Also a town called Hamonah will be there.) **And so they will cleanse the land.'**

(Ezekiel 39:11-16 NIV)

Here 'Gog' is clearly representing the Seleucid army as a whole, the generals included, as well as all the hordes composed of other nations who were fighting Israel under Gog's leadership. So many of them were going to fall in battle throughout Israel that a burial place was going to be needed to get rid of all the dead bodies. The main point of this portion of the prophecy was to show that the renewed nation of Israel, in accordance with the Law of Moses, would thoroughly cleanse the land of the defilement caused by the dead bodies of their enemies (cf. Numbers 6:6-9).

The Valley of Hamon Gog of verse 11 and 15 is literally in Hebrew 'the valley of the hordes (or multitude) of Gog.' This is clearly a symbolic name because the word Gog is symbolic. Like so many other names in Scripture, it is a play on words. Although there is some debate over the translation of verse 11 and the location of this valley, I believe the valley in question was most probably one of the valleys along the northern portion of the Way of the Sea in the region of Galilee.

I accept the YLT and KJV of verse 11, which reads more accurately "*the valley of the passengers on the east of the sea.*" This appears to be referring to the ancient trade route of the Way of the Sea, which followed the coast to the east of the Mediterranean Sea, passing through Philistia and southern Israel before turning inwards south of the Carmel range, passing through the valley of Jezreel near Megiddo and on through the Galilee regions, passing the Sea of Galilee to the north and on up to Syria.

This is how verse 11 reads in Young's Literal Translation:

And it hath come to pass, in that day, I give to Gog a place there -- **a grave in Israel, the valley of those passing by, east of the sea, and it is stopping those passing by**, and they have buried there Gog, and all his multitude, and have cried, O valley of the multitude of Gog!

This interpretation would fit all the criteria of the prophecy. It would make sense that this 'Valley of the Passengers or Travellers' would become blocked due to the amount of bodies being buried in mass graves. There could even be a typological connection with the valley of Jezreel and the mount of Megiddo - namely Armageddon!

The mention of 'seven months' to bury the dead could be symbolic, but it is not fanciful to take it literally. Every aspect mentioned here could've happened literally, and it probably did, but as far as I'm aware, there isn't any external record that can verify how these things concerning the burial of Israel's enemies occurred. So far, there isn't any evidence of a town or city called Hamonah located near a mass burial site in a valley, but that doesn't mean it doesn't exist or that these things never happened.

Then again, the names could just be symbolic nicknames, for Hamonah in Hebrew means 'the multitude.' Whatever the case, these details fit the time and context of the wars of the Jews with the Seleucids. Ultimately, this text is saying that God's Name would be honoured by the destruction of His enemies, and that His people would cleanse the land of its defilement within a specified period. This cleansing due to their resultant victory would be greatly remembered. (One can't help but think of the Feast of Hanukkah in light of this!)

A Bloody Sacrifice

¹⁷ "Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Call out to every kind of bird and all the wild animals: 'Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood. ¹⁸ **You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls**—all of them fattened animals from Bashan. ¹⁹ At the sacrifice I am preparing for you, you will eat fat till you are glutted and drink blood till you are drunk. ²⁰ At my table you will eat your fill of horses and riders, mighty men and soldiers of every kind,' declares the Sovereign LORD.

(Ezekiel 39:17-20 NIV)

What a graphic depiction of the carnage of war! It is viewed as a great sacrificial dinner for the birds of prey and the carnivorous wild animals. God is describing the vengeance He would heap upon these nations in payment for the wickedness and murder they had wrought upon others, especially upon His people Israel. Take note of the mention of 'horses and their riders' and 'princes of the earth' - all of which were fulfilled in the wars against the Seleucids on the mountains of Israel.

There is also a similar New Testament prophecy in the vision of Revelation that is clearly alluding to this text.

¹¹I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. **With justice he judges and makes war.**

¹²His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. ¹³He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. ¹⁴The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and

clean. ¹⁵**Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.** ¹⁶On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:
KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

¹⁷And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, ¹⁸so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great."

¹⁹Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. ²⁰But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. ²¹**The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.**

(Revelation 19:11-21 NIV)

In typical apocalyptic symbolism, this is describing the ultimate victories of Jesus Christ over all the armies of the world who would take their stand against Him and His true Church, including the ancient Roman Empire (the Beast) and its Christianized image, the false prophet of Roman Catholicism. All will receive their just judgment, in this life and beyond. There is a scene in the film *Kingdom of Heaven* which shows the aftermath of a battle between the Crusaders and the Muslims, and above the carnage of men and horses lying scattered over the ground are flocks of vultures ready to feed upon the dead and rotting corpses. This is exactly what these prophecies are describing.

It is also depicting the tragic scene of God's ultimate judgment upon Jerusalem and all Israel, the days of vengeance - the bloodbath of the Roman/Jewish War of 66-70 AD. (For further details, see [The Prophecies of Jesus' Olivet Discourse](#)). Sadly, the judgment that came upon Israel's enemies in the past, such as those prophesied in our Ezekiel text, were eventually to come upon the Jews themselves for their disobedience to God's command - for by their rejection of the Messiah, and the New Covenant which He'd established, the majority of the nation, represented by their leaders, placed themselves in opposition to God. On top of this, they then began to persecute and kill His followers. As a consequence, they received the just punishment for their acts in accordance with the terms of the Old Covenant.

The Restoration of Israel and the Pouring Out of the Spirit

²¹ "I will display my glory among the nations, and all the nations will see the punishment I inflict and the hand I lay upon them. ²² From that day forward the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God. ²³ And the nations will know that the people of Israel went into exile for their sin, because they were unfaithful to me. So I hid my face from them and handed them over to their enemies, and they all fell by the sword. ²⁴ I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their offenses, and I hid my face from them.

²⁵ "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: **I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for my holy name.** ²⁶ They will forget their shame and all the unfaithfulness they showed toward me when they lived in safety in their land with no one to make them afraid. ²⁷ When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will show myself holy through them in the sight of many nations. ²⁸ Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind. ²⁹ I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD."

(Ezekiel 39:21-29 NIV)

The concluding portion of this prophecy is primarily a summary of God's dealings with Israel and the nations leading up to the coming of the Messianic kingdom blessing. The result of God's victory over Antiochus Epiphanes and the Seleucid armies, as well as the defeat of a number of other enemies surrounding Israel in the days of the Maccabees, was that the glory and power of the God of Israel was made known among the nations due to a faithful remnant of Jews who fought like David of old, just as verse 21 predicted.

In addition, this whole event would bring a spiritual revival in Israel that would cause them to honour Yahweh (v 22). The reason for the exile of all the tribes of Israel (which had occurred in two stages via the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities) would become well known to the surrounding nations (v 23-24). Yet after all of this judgment, God still promised to restore a remnant of all the tribes of Israel, to bring them back to the land and to establish them as a nation again before Him, not leaving any behind. This remnant would become a channel for God to make His holiness known to all nations (v 25-28).

Verse 29 speaks of a time when God would pour out His Spirit upon Israel to bless them. This ultimately looked forward to the era of the Messiah and the coming of the spiritual Kingdom of God. This was in line with a few other prophecies that spoke of a future era of spiritual blessing which would occur through the pouring out of the Spirit upon the people - texts such as Isaiah 32:15; 44:3; and particularly Joel 2:28-29. The New Testament reveals that these things were fulfilled in the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon the Jewish disciples of Jesus at Pentecost, and that this was proof that Jesus of Nazareth was indeed the promised Messiah and the Mediator of the New Covenant (Acts 2:1-36).

The divinely inspired New Testament writings also make it very clear that all Old Testament prophecy has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ and the New Covenant Church. Jesus Himself said that He came not to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). So every prophecy concerning ancient Israel and the nations, including our present text of Ezekiel 38-39, has been fulfilled in the history of Israel, either before Jesus came or as a result of His Coming in the 1st century AD. The New Testament prophetic writings have now superceded the Old, being the fulfillment of them.

The true Israel of God, the faithful spiritual remnant, still continues in those who belong to the spiritual kingdom of God in the Messiah Jesus - whether Jew or Gentile. These are the only chosen people who are in a covenant relationship with

God, because the Old Covenant has been surpassed and replaced by the New Covenant in Christ. The writer to the Hebrews made this abundantly clear, when, writing just a few years before the destruction of the Temple, he said,

¹³By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear.

(Hebrews 8:13 NIV)

The Old Covenant officially disappeared in 70 AD when Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by the vengeance of God and His enthroned Davidic King. Yet the spiritual restoration of the true Israel of God still continues to this day as many more continue to come into the bonds of the New Covenant in Christ Jesus. The Church has not replaced Israel - it IS the continuation of the true spiritual Israel of God, the believing remnant out of Israel and all the nations.

The Battle for Jerusalem

As we bring this study to a close, let us take a brief look at a few other important prophecies that relate to the events predicted in Ezekiel 38-39. They can be found in Zechariah 12 & 14.

¹ This is the word of the LORD concerning Israel. The LORD, who stretches out the heavens, who lays the foundation of the earth, and who forms the spirit of man within him, declares: ² **"I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling. Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem."** ³ On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves. ⁴ On that day I will strike every horse with panic and its rider with madness, declares the LORD. "I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah, but I will blind all the horses of the nations." ⁵ Then the leaders of Judah will say in their hearts, 'The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the LORD Almighty is their God.'

⁶ "On that day I will make the leaders of Judah like a firepot in a woodpile, like a flaming torch among sheaves. **They will consume right and left all the surrounding peoples, but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place.**

⁷ "The LORD will save the dwellings of Judah first, so that the honor of the house of David and of Jerusalem's inhabitants may not be greater than that of Judah. ⁸ On that day the LORD will shield those who live in Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the Angel of the LORD going before them. ⁹ On that day I will set out to destroy all the nations that attack Jerusalem."

(Zechariah 12:1-9 NIV)

Zechariah ministered in about 520-518 BC during the first wave of Jewish returnees to the land. He was the last of the Old Testament apocalyptic writers, and much of what God had to say through him concerned the various stages of the restoration of Israel up until the coming of the Messiah.

The above quote from Zechariah 12 is commonly applied by our futurist dispensational brothers to what they believe is the final war against Jerusalem at the

end of this age. I believe this is incorrect. This text clearly applies to the pre-Messianic era of the Old Covenant, for that was a time when Jerusalem and the Temple and the physical nation of Israel represented God's kingdom on earth. Take note also of the description of the armies of the nations all riding on horses, with the implication, in the hyperbole of verse 4, that God would divinely fight for Israel in helping them defeat the enemy. These nations are described as being drunk on the idea of taking Jerusalem by force, yet ultimately they would all be defeated, like those who injure themselves by trying to move a great rock that is immovable.

This is describing the attack upon Jerusalem and Judah begun by Antiochus IV Epiphanes in the 2nd century BC. Jerusalem and the temple were not totally destroyed at that time, though the place was greatly desolated and defiled, but ultimately the city did remain intact and was eventually regained from the Seleucids. During these wars, there is even record of divine angelic assistance and other signs from heaven (see 2 Maccabees 10:29-31; 11:6-12).

The Books of the Maccabees, as well as the writings of Josephus, record that many nations surrounding Israel joined in the war to defeat Israel and take over the land. Anyone who carefully reads the early chapters of 1 Maccabees alone should not fail to see how these prophecies were fulfilled in those events. Old enemies such as the Edomites (descendants of Esau known as Idumeans) and Samaritans and Syrians were included. In fact, virtually all the surrounding Gentile nations joined in the war to eliminate Israel. Here is a quote from 1 Maccabees.

1 Now when the nations round about heard that the altar was built and the sanctuary renewed as before, it displeased them very much. **2 Wherefore they thought to destroy the generation of Jacob that was among them, and thereupon they began to slay and destroy the people.**

3 Then Judas fought against the children of Esau in Idumea at Arabattine, because they besieged Gael: and he gave them a great overthrow, and abated their courage, and took their spoils. **4 Also he remembered the injury of the children of Benjam, who had been a snare and an offence unto the people, in that they lay in wait for them in the ways.** **5 He shut them up therefore in the towers, and encamped against them, and destroyed them utterly, and burned the towers of that place with fire, and all that were therein.**

6 Afterward he passed over to the children of Ammon, where he found a mighty power, and much people, with Timotheus their captain. 7 So he fought many battles with them, till at length they were discomfited before him; and he smote them. **8 And when he had taken Jazar, with the towns belonging thereto, he returned into Judea.**

(1 Maccabees 5:1-7)

The leaders of Judah spoken of in Zechariah 12 were Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers who fought bravely and won the victory. Interestingly enough, as Zechariah 12:7 states, the city of Jerusalem was not the first to be rescued, but the battle began for the cities of Judah first. It was a number of years before Jerusalem was regained and the temple rededicated. Ultimately, Yahweh gained the victory for His people over all these nations and the Jews were able to flourish again as a nation, with God getting all the glory - though this Jewish independence was short lived. It

was not too long after these events that the era of the Messiah arrived. The ultimate fulfillment of the blessings predicted in all these prophecies is found in the Messianic spiritual kingdom of Jesus Christ and His New Covenant people.

God's Feet On The Mount of Olives

Now let's briefly consider Zechariah 14, which is probably one of the most difficult prophetic texts in the OT to interpret correctly. We shall only consider verses 1-5 here, for this is not the time to do a study on the whole chapter.

¹ A day of the LORD is coming when your plunder will be divided among you.

² **I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it; the city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped. Half of the city will go into exile, but the rest of the people will not be taken from the city.**

³ Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations, as he fights in the day of battle. ⁴ **On that day his feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem,** and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half of the mountain moving north and half moving south. ⁵ You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him.

(Zechariah 14:1-5 NIV)

The phrase, Day of Yahweh or Day of the Lord refers to a time of Divine judgment upon Israel and the nations. There have been a number of these Day's in the history of ancient Israel. The one in question here was the attack of Antiochus and the Seleucid armies, which included all the other surrounding nations that joined in the attack in the 2nd century BC. This war would be devastating to Judah and Jerusalem, being virtually another captivity, for half of the city would go into exile. And bear in mind that this prophecy was given *after* the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities.

Even though God was going to fight for Israel and ultimately give them victory, nevertheless, Jerusalem would still be captured and defiled first, with many being killed or exiled. According to Daniel, the temple also would be defiled and left desolate for a while (Daniel 8:9-14, 22-25; 11:31-32). All of this occurred under Antiochus IV Epiphanes. And if anyone doubts that these things were fulfilled at that time, here is what it says in 2 Maccabees 5 concerning Antiochus and his attack on Jerusalem.

11 Now when this that was done came to the king's ear, he thought that Judea had revolted: whereupon removing out of Egypt in a furious mind, he took the city by force of arms, 12 And commanded his men of war not to spare such as they met, and to slay such as went up upon the houses. 13 **Thus there was killing of young and old, making away of men, women, and children, slaying of virgins and infants. 14 And there were destroyed within the space of three whole days fourscore thousand (80,000), whereof forty thousand were slain in the conflict; and no fewer sold than slain.**

15 Yet was he not content with this, but presumed to go into the most holy temple of all the world;

(2 Maccabees 5:11-15)

Verses 4-5 of Zechariah 14 is a hyperbolic description of Yahweh's presence outside Jerusalem upon the Mount of Olives where He would make a way of escape for His people through earth-shaking events, accompanied by 'the holy ones' - the heavenly armies. The language used is clearly figurative in relation to the mountain being cut in half, with one half moving north and the other half south. It's main point is to describe a way of escape for those in Jerusalem and Judah, much like the parting of the Red Sea.

The earthquake referred to is briefly mentioned in Amos 1:1, but no further details are given - biblically or historically. Even though an earthquake is mentioned, the focus is on the way of escape, to flee through a divinely-made valley. Ultimately, Yahweh and His angels would bring salvation to His people.

Of course, this text is saturated with Messianic expectations - and in its ultimate fulfillment, it was to be fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus the Messiah, as Yahweh Himself, *did* physically stand on the Mount of Olives, many times, and He also ascended from there. And I also believe, for good biblical reasons, that He was crucified there and He rose again there (though scripture doesn't explicitly say so. For further study, see [The Holy Hill: The Mount of Olives](#)).

On that great Day (literally both days, on His death *and* resurrection), there was an earthquake, both physically and spiritually, that moved the mountain and figuratively split it in two, forming a valley of judgment (or escape, depending on which way you view it) in which the people fled eastward, to the sunrise.

Anyhow, contrary to the common belief that this text is prophesying the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, nowhere in the entire New Testament does it state, or even imply, that Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives. According to Acts 1:9-11, Jesus ascended from this Mount, but it doesn't say that He will come back that way, only that He would return in the same manner as He left. In fact, elsewhere we are told that when He returns, He will be visible in the sky surrounded by glory clouds (Matthew 24:30-31; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17). When that ultimate Day of the Lord comes, the entire creation will be destroyed and made new in the restoration of all things (2 Peter 3:7, 10-13). Jesus is not coming back to a physical Jerusalem and a physical Temple via the Mount of Olives! He's already been there and done that - with earth-shattering and heaven-shaking consequences!

We must realise that not every word and sentence in the Old Testament prophecies are to be understood in an ultra-literal manner, especially from a New Testament perspective. There are many examples that could be given to show this to be the case. One classic example is Isaiah 40:3-5.

³ A voice of one calling:
"In the desert prepare
the way for the LORD;
make straight in the wilderness
a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all mankind together will see it.
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

(NIV)

The Gospels are unanimous in applying this prophecy to the ministry of John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1-3; Mark 1:1-4; Luke 3:1-6; John 1:23). Yet did John literally make a highway in the desert? Was every valley literally raised up? Was every mountain and hill in Palestine literally made low through some kind of natural cataclysm? Were all of the rough, rugged places literally made smooth like a plain? Was the Glory of the Lord revealed in such a way so that all mankind together literally saw His glory cloud?

Of course not! The majority of this prophecy is to be understood in a figurative manner. It is speaking primarily of spiritual things that occurred in John's ministry as the Forerunner of the Messiah. Jesus Himself is the Glory of Yahweh which has been revealed to all humanity together, that is, to all nations together, as Jew and Gentile within the Church.

I believe the same principle needs to be applied to the prophecy of Zechariah 14 concerning the dividing of the Mount of Olives and other portions of the chapter. Of course, this doesn't rule out the fact that a greater fulfillment of these things could be associated with the Second Coming of Christ and the New Creation, but it is the New Testament that reveals these things in detail, providing us with the true interpretation and understanding of these Old Testament prophecies.

Gog and Magog in Revelation

One of the primary reasons that led me to eventually reject Premillennialism was the Gog and Magog rebellion of Revelation 20. This is not the time to go into a lengthy study on the Millennium issue in Revelation 20, but here are my thoughts on the subject of the Gog and Magog gathering and how it fits in with the rest of the New Testament.

⁷When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison
⁸**and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle.** In number they are like the sand on the seashore. ⁹They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

(Revelation 20:7-9 NIV)

If this is to be taken literally, in relation to a literal 1000 year reign of Christ upon this earth after His Return (which is the premillennial position), then the glory of the age to come, so often spoken of throughout the New Testament in New Creation terms, will end in disaster! This is totally contrary to the general teaching of Jesus

and His Apostles. The NT teaches that at the end of this present age, Christ will return in power and glory to raise the dead and judge the world, and to fully establish a New Creation. Jesus' parables alone in Matthew 13 clearly teaches this scenario (particularly 'The Weeds' and 'The Net'). This doesn't leave any room for a literal millennium after Christ's return and another judgment day at the end of it!

Here's what Peter had to say about the ultimate Day of the Lord.

⁷By the same word **the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.**

⁸But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. ⁹The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

¹⁰**But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.**

¹¹Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives ¹²as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. **That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat.** ¹³**But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.**

(2 Peter 3:7-13 NIV)

As long as you don't read this text with a premillennial dispensational presupposition (which would cause you to put alleged time-divisions in there to allow for a future 1000 years after Christ's return before the final judgment), then this text, along with the rest of the New Testament, clearly reveals that the ultimate Day of the Lord, the Second Advent of Christ (which is also called the Day of God in verse 12), occurs at the end of this present age ushering in the day of judgment and the fiery renewing of the heavens and the earth, out of which will come a New Creation.

Therefore, in accordance with the teaching of the New Testament, Revelation 20:1-10 is better understood as being a symbolic vision, from a heavenly, spiritual perspective, of Christ's present reign in this age. And this age is said to end in apostasy and rebellion. Viewed in this light, it makes perfect sense that Peter, speaking about the length of this present age as we await Christ's Return, alludes to Psalm 90:4 that 'a thousand years are like a day' in God's eyes. For those with eyes to see, this hints at the 'Millennial reign' of Christ being in this present age when understood in the light of Revelation 20.

Therefore, the 'Gog and Magog' rebellion, caused by Satan deceiving the nations again en masse, indicates that, as this age draws to a close, there will be an era of great spiritual deception and darkness, with the enemies of God and His Christ grouping together as an army to surround the people of God, the true Church (represented as the New Jerusalem and the camp of God's people) for a final showdown. Yet they will be prevented from achieving their goal, for fire shall descend from heaven to destroy all the enemies of God. This is clearly a description

of the Day of the Lord Jesus, His Second Advent, His Return in flaming fire, such as that described in 2 Peter 3 quoted above, as well as 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.

The allusion to Ezekiel 38-39 is somewhat allegorical - it has to be understood and interpreted in the spiritual language of the New Testament. Therefore, the phrase 'Gog and Magog' is used to refer to the unbelieving nations of the world who are enemies of Jesus and His people. It is indicating that the New Covenant Israel of God will also come under attack by a foreign enemy in a spiritual 'battle of Armageddon' just as Israel of old became involved in an 'end-time war' before the coming of the Messiah. In the past, it was a fleshly, physical war, but in New Testament terms this is describing primarily a spiritual war.

Revelation 20:1-9 is essentially a visionary storyboard telling us something about the victory of Christ in this present age, as well as the course of this age between Christ's two Advents. Revelation 12 reveals very much the same story from a slightly different perspective, with the focus being on Satan's anger at being defeated by Christ, which then manifests itself in rage against the New Covenant people of God through fierce persecution and murder - beginning with the Jewish remnant (the Woman) and then the Gentile remnant (the rest of her seed).

At the First Coming of Christ, Satan was bound by the spiritual power of the kingdom of God, and due to the spread of the Gospel of the kingdom, he could no longer deceive the nations of the world en masse by keeping them in the total darkness of pagan idolatry and superstition as he had done before. The Bible was made available to the whole Roman world, and the Empire eventually became Christianised. Although Satan partially changed his tactics and caused an immense apostasy to occur within Christendom, nevertheless, the power of the Gospel and the Word of God has continued to spread worldwide.

Yet before the reign of Christ is complete in this present age, there will be a final rebellion against the kingdom of God, as Satan will be allowed to deceive the nations again en masse, causing the majority of the world to return to its 'paganised' idolatrous roots, causing a flood of all kinds of religions and sects and faiths and philosophies, etc, to arise and multiply - along with increased lawlessness and moral depravity.

When this text in Revelation 20:7-9 is understood this way, and then placed alongside other texts such as 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 and Revelation 16:12-21, a picture emerges of a final end-time battle which will engulf the true people of God through deception, apostasy, lawlessness and persecution. This is the ultimate 'War Gathering' known as 'Armageddon.' I believe we have already entered this final era.

Although I believe that these two latter texts (Revelation 16:12-21 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12) have had fulfilments in the past in relation to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD, and the subsequent rise of Christendom in the form of Papal Rome, nevertheless, it seems highly probable that there is to be an ultimate fulfilment of these things at the end of this age - or another manifestation of them, if you will. This is in accordance with the common use of prophetic patterns in Biblical prophecy whereby prophecies can have a short-term *and* long-term fulfilment, i.e. recurring cycles throughout this present age leading to an ultimate fulfilment. Only time will tell.

For further information on these things, see the following articles in this section:

The Last Days and Prophecy Fulfilled

Midrash and Prophetic Patterns

The Vision of the Four Beasts

Copyright © Gerry Watts 2009