

Understanding the Timing of the Battle of Gog and Magog

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The Prophet Ezekiel's Prophecy of "the Battle of Gog of Magog," is simply another retelling of the many Antichrist prophecies found throughout the Bible. As such, Ezekiel's Gog and his hordes will be destroyed at the end of this current age, when Jesus returns, just before the onset of His one thousand year millennial reign. The Gog and Magog of Revelation 20, however is a different event that takes place at the end of the thousand year reign of the Messiah.

Amillennialists most often argue that the Gog and Magog described in Revelation 20 and the Gog and Magog described in Ezekiel 38-39 are one and the same. This is the primary view which I will seek to address in this article. A small number of Premillennialists also believe that Ezekiel's Gog prophecy and Revelation's Gog prophecy are one and the same. I will also briefly touch on this view.

First, let's read the text in Revelation:

When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and 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 and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.
(Revelation 20:7-9)

So while it is clear that both Revelation and Ezekiel do indeed use the same terms to describe an event that shares some commonalities, (they both describe an attempted attack on God's people), there are also some very clear distinction between both prophecies.

The first distinction is that the attempted invasion of Revelation's account is described as an utter failure. Before the invaders even begin to accomplish their goals, they are consumed by fire outside of the camp of the saints. The invasion described in Ezekiel 38-39, on the other hand is described as anything but a failure. Consider this very important, but often overlooked detail in Ezekiel's account: By the time that Ezekiel's Gog Magog invasion is defeated, a majority of

the people of Israel are described as captives, essentially prisoners of war in the land of their enemies.

“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, and I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them. Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name. They will forget their disgrace and all their treachery which they perpetrated against Me, when they live securely on their own land with no one to make them afraid. When I bring them back from the peoples and gather them from the lands of their enemies, then I shall be sanctified through them in the sight of the many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God because I made them go into exile among the nations, and then gathered them again to their own land; and I will leave none of them there any longer. 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. (Ezekiel 39:22-29)

The second distinction between Ezekiel’s Gog account and Revelation’s is that Revelation’s invaders do not even enter, “the camp of the saints,” but are devoured by fire as they merely surround the camp. On the other hand, the invaders of Ezekiel are destroyed throughout the actual land of Israel. These distinctions are not insignificant.

Why then the similarity of names? In my opinion, by the time of the writing of the Book of Revelation in the 1st century, the term Gog and Magog had become a well-known motif, similar to the common use of “armageddon” or “apocalypse” today. We might say for example something like, “It was a financial armageddon on Wall Street today.” This has nothing to do however, with the valley of Meggiddo in Israel. Such an expression simply points to nearly any great catastrophe. Because Ezekiel 38 and 39 was essentially the greatest prophetic passage in the Old Testament concerning the final Satanic invasion of Israel, it was what we may very rightly call, “the Armageddon of the Old Testament.” The phrase “Gog and Magog” simply came to be understood as a massive Satanic-led invasion or attack of God’s people in Jerusalem. So the Gog and Magog motif simply points to any massive effort by Satan to gather his

hordes and attack to Israel. The Gog and Magog of Ezekiel 38—39 and the Gog and Magog of Revelation 20 however, cannot be one and the same. Not only are they clearly separated by a thousand years, but as we already highlighted, their respective attacks have drastically different results. One is utterly successful, the other is an abysmal failure. While Ezekiel is referring to the Antichrist and the events that take place just prior to the Millennium, Revelation 20:7-9 is exactly what it says it is; a very brief event that takes place at the conclusion of the Millennium, one final effort by Satan to do what he had already failed to do just before being chained and cast into the abyss for a thousand years.

Living Securely in the Land

As mentioned above, there are also some Premillennialists who argue that Ezekiel's Gog Magog event takes place at the end of the thousand year reign. The primary argument made is that Ezekiel describes Israel living with such a sense of security that it could only refer to Israel during the millennial reign of Jesus. To support this, the following passage is cited:

In that day, when my people Israel are living in safety, will you not take notice of it? You will come from your place in the far north, you and many nations with you; a mighty army. You will advance against my people Israel like a cloud that covers the land. I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. 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. (Ezekiel 38:14-16; 39:1-3)

This perspective is, in my opinion, untenable and cannot be reconciled with the testimony of Scripture. First, let's begin by observing that Israel is not truly secure. They are living in fact, in a false state of security. Notice that Gog plans on attacking a people who are described as "unsuspecting":

You will say, I will invade a land of unwalled villages; I will attack a peaceful and unsuspecting people all of them living without walls and without gates and bars. (Ezekiel 38:12, 13)

I believe the issue of Israel living "securely" is merely a perceived sense of security. Consider the fact that the Israelites are about to be invaded. So are they truly living securely or merely living with a relative sense of security? If a person is sleeping securely in their bed and seven murderous and well-armed thieves are only moments away from breaking into the house to rob and kill, can it truly

be said that the unsuspecting person sleeping is secure? Or it is merely a perceived security? Such is the precisely the case with Israel in Ezekiel's prophecy.

I would also argue that while the Israel of today fully recognizes that various threats surround them, they are not presently suspecting any massive military invasion from a foreign nation. The sense in Israel is one of relative security. It is difficult not to see Ezekiel's description of Israel as anything other than the Israel of today:

“After many days you will be summoned; 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; but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them.” (Ezekiel 38:8)

The Israel that Ezekiel describes is a people who have been gathered from many nations. They resettled the land which had formerly been a continual waste. And they are living securely. Now consider the fact that the Scriptures inform us that the Antichrist will lull Israel into a false state of security through deception, specifically for the purpose of invading the land:

He will cause deceit to prosper, and he will consider himself superior. When they feel secure, he will destroy many and take his stand against the Prince of princes. Yet he will be destroyed, but not by human power. (Daniel 8:25)

*He will invade the kingdom when its people **feel secure**, and he will seize it through intrigue. (Daniel 11:21)*

*When the richest provinces **feel secure**, he will invade them and will achieve what neither his fathers nor his forefathers did. He will distribute plunder, loot and wealth among his followers. He will plot the overthrow of fortresses—but only for a time. (Daniel 11:24)*

So we have seen that the method and scheme of the Antichrist is exactly that of Gog. When the people feel secure, then he will invade them. This is simply because they are simply one and the same individual.

Return of the Captives

Another critical matter is the fact that at the conclusion of Ezekiel's prophecy concerning Gog and Magog, Israel is being portrayed as returning from the nations of their enemies as prisoners of war. After this, they all come to faith. The Lord pours His spirit on them. Is it at that time that Israel is restored. For that small number of Premillennialists who seek to move Ezekiel's prophecy to the end of the Millennium, this creates an insurmountable problem. For if the Israelis are not delivered from out of the land of their enemies and do not come to faith until the end of the Millennium, then this would mean that after a thousand years on the earth, Jesus had accomplished essentially nothing in the way of providing security, salvation, or restoration. In such a scenario, Jesus could only be viewed as an impotent Messiah and King.

Further Arguments

Another issue is the fact that the Lord states that all of the other (pre-Ezekielian) prophets spoke about Gog:

You are 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. (Ezekiel 38:17)

If all of the other prophets before Ezekiel spoke of the Gog invasion at the end of the Millennium, then where are these many references within the Scriptures? One will be very hard pressed to produce a single such reference, though it is quite easy to find many prophecies about the Antichrist among these prophets.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Gog and Magog of Ezekiel 38—39 and the Gog and Magog of Revelation 20 are two different individuals and two different events, separated by a thousand years.