

Study 6 - The Aftermath

Ezekiel 39:4-22 MKJV You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your bands, and the people with you. I will give you for food to the birds of prey of every kind, and to the beasts of the field. (5) You shall fall on the face of the field, for I have spoken, says the Lord Jehovah. (6) And I will send a fire on Magog, and on the secure inhabitants of the coasts. And they shall know that I am Jehovah. (7) And I will make My holy name known in the midst of My people Israel. And I will not let them profane My holy name any more. And the nations shall know that I am Jehovah, the Holy One in Israel. (8) Behold, it is coming, and it will be done, says the Lord Jehovah. This is the day of which I have spoken. (9) And the inhabitants of the cities of Israel shall go out and shall set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the javelins, and the spears. And they shall burn them with fire seven years, (10) so that they shall take no wood out of the field, nor cut down any out of the forests for they shall burn the weapons for fire. And they shall plunder those who plundered them, and rob those who robbed them, says the Lord Jehovah. (11) And it will be in that day I will give to Gog a place there, a grave in Israel, the valley of those who pass by, east of the sea. And it shall stop those who pass by. And there they shall bury Gog and all his multitude. And they shall call it, The Valley of the Multitude of Gog. (21) And I will set My glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see My judgments which I have done, and My hand that I have laid on them. (22) So the house of Israel shall know that I am Jehovah their God from that day and forward.

Most of Ezekiel chapter 39 is a detailed description of the immense destruction that will come upon Gog and Magog and clean-up after the battle that goes on after seven months right down to graphic details such as birds feasting on the carcasses.

These verses contain some very puzzling details such as the weapons such as bows, arrows and spears being used for firewood. With modern weaponry this reference seems obsolete. This may be prophetic imagery, God's Spirit speaking using the words and images that existed in the prophets mind. Ezekiel would have had difficulty describing an AK-47. We simply have to modernize it. No one can write with words that do not yet exist for them! It is evident that the army is plundered and its materials are used as natural resources for the economy of Israel.

This principle of prophetic interpretation applies also to passages in Revelation such as “stars” falling to earth. “Stars” in Greek is *aster* or 'heavenly body' such as a comet, meteor, meteoroid, asteroid, planet, star and so forth. It is an extremely general word because of the lack of telescopes at the time of writing. Even today we refer to a meteor shower as “falling stars” and everyone knows what we mean. We have to understand the constraints on the writer and update the interpretation using today's more specific terms. I do not think that Revelation is teaching that stars such as Sirius B or Andromeda will crash into the Earth but is indicating a large number meteors, meteoroids, asteroids and perhaps even a few large comets “mountains burning with fire” will strike Earth.

I do not think that Gog and Magog will be riding horses or using bows and arrows. I do think it will be a highly mobile “cavalry” army of tanks and will be armed with the latest technology of that time. It will be large, fast, armored, mobile, well-equipped and terrifying – which is what Ezekiel is trying to convey to his readers at the time, and what they would have understood.

I believe that taking the Bible seriously and literally means making appropriate adjustments for time, language and culture so the modern reader receives the original meaning of the text. Over-literalism actually ends up detracting from the meaning. For instance some commentators have said that today's passage indicates an end to oil and modern transportation because “everyone has gone back to riding horses and using bows and arrows and burning firewood”. That I think is inserting something in the

passage that Ezekiel never intended and that his original readers would never have got from it. Ezekiel lived 2,500 years ago and used the words and images of his day to communicate to the Jewish exiles he was prophesying to. When we take the text, in its original linguistic and cultural context, then we can see that an army of horses, bows and arrows and armor would have been terrifying and well-equipped and an indication of imminent doom unless God intervened.

This requires the humility to realize that the Bible was not primarily written for us. We are simply its latest readers, during this small but very interesting window in the entire sweep of redemptive history.

The clean up is massive and takes seven months and teams scour the land for human remains and bury them in a mass grave that “stops” those who pass by. The procedure used is similar to that used for toxic waste such as biohazards or radioactive material.

Ezekiel 39:13-16 MKJV *And all the people of the land shall bury. And it shall be a name to them, the day when I am glorified, says the Lord Jehovah. (14) And men shall separate those who continually pass through the land, burying those who passed through, who remain on the face of the earth, to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they shall search. (15) And as they pass, those who pass through the land, and any man sees a bone, then he shall build a post beside it, until the buriers have buried it in The Valley of the Multitude of Gog. (16) And also the name of the city is The Multitude. And they shall cleanse the land.*

This may relate to the plague involved in the battle. Whatever the case, great care are taken in handling and burying the remains in a designated mass grave. This mass grave will “stop those who pass by” indicating it is “off-limits to tourists”. The references to being the corpses being eaten by wild beasts and birds of the air indicates that it is an undignified death and that no one cares for these bodies. They are not repatriated to the home countries. Instead they are left to rot. This may be indicative of there being “something wrong” - such as biological, chemical or nuclear hazards.

The purpose of Ezekiel giving all these details 2,500 years so was so that when it happens that people would see that the Gog and Magog prophecy was exactly fulfilled “down to the last detail”, thus indicating a sovereign divine hand at work. The outcome being that they would glorify God by accepting the explanations that Scripture gives for the event – Ezekiel 38:16,17,22-23; 39:21-23, 27-28