

THE INITIAL THREE NATION COALITION IDENTIFIED

As he beheld the final beast in his vision, Daniel wrote, "While I was contemplating the [ten] horns, behold, another horn, a little one, came up among them, and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold, this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth uttering great boasts" (Dan. 7:8). Later the prophet explains that "As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings" (Dan. 7:24). The "little horn" of verse 8 is the same as "another" king of verse 24 and is a depiction of Antichrist, who will come up from "among them," overthrowing the rulers of three nations.

Identifying these three nations is critical. Because Israel is presently firmly established back in her own land and is in possession of her holy city, Jerusalem, in this writer's opinion the unification of those three nations is the only prophetic event that must yet occur before the covenant is signed, initiating the seventieth week of Daniel.

Chapters 38-39 of Ezekiel speak directly to end-time events* and for that reason reveal significant information about the events in and surrounding the seventieth week of Daniel, including crucial clues as to the identity of those three nations.

The critical information concerning our discussion on the initial three-nation coalition is found in the first few verses of chapter 38. This passage definitely clearly identifies two of the three ancestral groups and allows for two options for the third, both of which should be thoroughly considered.

In this key passage, the Lord tells the prophet, "Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him, and say, 'Thus says the Lord God, "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal" (vv. 2, 3).

That wording suggests that Gog "of the land of Magog" (who, as we shall see, is Antichrist) is a Magogite and will rule over three nations, Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal-in perfect consistency with the critical prophetic passage in Daniel 7 that pictures the little horn overthrowing the three larger horns (v. 8).

But unlike Magog, Meshech, and Tubal, the name "Rosh" appears nowhere in the table of nations. Therefore, an immediate problem arises because, as has been clearly established, the final beast empire of Satan will be composed entirely of peoples whose lineage can be traced back to the table of nations. The solution to this seems to be found in a better rendering of the Hebrew given in the King James Version, which translates Ezekiel 38:2 as "Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the *chief prince* of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him" (emphasis added).

Some Jewish Talmudic scholars give similar translations of the Hebrew. These renderings do not take Rosh to be a country (which explains why it does not appear in the Genesis 10 table of nations), but rather a title of leadership. The Hebrew term behind Rosh is often translated "head" or "chief" (as in Num. 31:26 ["heads"]; 1 Chron. 5:7 ["chief"]; Neh. 7:70, 71 ["heads"]). The idea therefore seems to be that Gog is the national leader of Magog. But Gog is also the international leader of Meshech and Tubal, thereby making him the ruler of a three-nation coalition-Magog (not Rosh) being the other nation over which Gog rules. This understanding perfectly fits the prophetic passages concerning the initial three-nation coalition that will drive the final ten-nation empire of Satan.

We know with certainty from our key passage in Ezekiel that Gog (Antichrist) will definitely come from the line of Magog (one of the nomadic sons of Japheth) and that he will rule over three nations. Those three nations, then, will be Magog (or possibly Rosh, depending on how the Hebrew term *rosh* is understood ^(see technical notes)), Meshech, and Tubal.

The overthrow of the three nations by a man of Magogite lineage will doubtless be a well-known public event when it occurs. This event will immediately identify the three nations and is the only major event remaining before the events of Daniel's seventieth week can commence. Israel will then make a covenant with the leader of this newly formed three-nation coalition for the sake of national security. Understanding whom this Japhetic ancestry represents provides the best clue as to why Israel will be so anxious to become their ally rather than their enemy when the actual time comes.

[Technical Notes]

If Rosh is a nation rather than a title of leadership, the identity of this nation is almost impossible to ascertain because it is not found in the Genesis 10 table of nations. In all fairness, however, some maintain that there may be a reference to Rosh as a nation in Isaiah 66:19, where the survivors of the Battle of Armageddon are pictured coming to Jerusalem. But that interpretation is based on a very questionable translation and cannot be used to support the idea that the Old Testament refers to Rosh as a nation. The basic Hebrew word *rosh* is not a proper name but a title of leadership (cf. K. Keil and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 9 [Grand Rapids: repr. 1980], p. 160).

[Asterisk] (from third paragraph on page one)

* Because of the great significance of Ezekiel 38-39 in the understanding of all end-time events, it is essential to establish that this passage pertains to the events that occur in association with the seventieth week of Daniel, just prior to the millennial rule of Christ. It is this writer's opinion that the sequence of events outlined from Ezekiel 37 to the end of the book demand that this passage can only relate to the seventieth week timeframe of end-time events, as it parallels much of what Christ revealed to John in the Book of Revelation.

First, chapter 37 is a direct reference to Israel's return to the land, still in unbelief. The "dry bones" analogy can be seen in no other way.

Second, in chapter 38, the passage itself declares explicitly that the events described in the following chapters will take place "in the latter years" (v. 8) and "in the last days" (v. 16).

Third, chapters 38-39 describe in detail, the final half of the seventieth week of Daniel, including Antichrist's initial assault upon Jerusalem (38:8-16), God's Day of the Lord judgment upon the final beast empire of Satan (38:17-23), ending with the Battle of Armageddon (39:1-6).

- (1) The divine "wrath" in Ezekiel 38:19 translates the same Hebrew word (*ebrah*, see *Strong's*, #5678), used twice in Zephaniah 1:14-18, to describe the wrath that will characterize God's Day-of-the-Lord judgment of the nations. (See Reference note at bottom.)
- (2) The birds of Ezekiel 39:17-20 correspond to the birds in Revelation 19:17, 18, 21.
- (3) Ezekiel's prediction that the Lord's final judgment against the ungodly nations who have persecuted Israel "shall be done" (39:7, 8) corresponds to two passages in Revelation that speak of His final judgment of the nations, especially those of the eighth beast empire, as already having been accomplished, declaring proleptically but with absolute finality, "It is done" (16:17; 21:6).
- (4) The final destruction of Gog and his armies described in Ezekiel 39:1-4 corresponds remarkably to the final destruction of Antichrist and his armies described in Revelation 19:17-21 and Isaiah's prophecy concerning the armies of Antichrist in the last days (Isa. 34:1-3).

Fourth, the ultimate salvation of the entire nation of Israel, introduced earlier in both chapters 36 and 37, is portrayed in Ezekiel 39:21-29, an event that will follow the events previously outlined in chapters 38 and 39. This is in perfect harmony with Daniel 9:24, where we are told that "everlasting righteousness" will be brought into Israel after the seventieth week is complete (cf Rom. 11:25, 26). Nowhere in Scripture are we told that the nation of Israel, in its entirety, will be saved twice, only once, after the close of the seventieth week of Daniel. Therefore, by the very fact that Israel's national salvation occurs exactly at this place in Ezekiel 39, we know that the preceding events must be among the same end-time events described in the prophetic Books of Daniel and Revelation.

Finally, the ultimate salvation of Israel depicted in Ezekiel 38-39 is immediately followed by the detailed description of the millennial kingdom (chapters 40-48), when Christ will rule over a redeemed and obedient house of Israel.

Commenting on Ezekiel 40-48, Charles Ryrie says:

"These chapters are a complement to the many predictions of judgment announced by Ezekiel. He now foresees the rebuilding of the Temple, the establishment of a right relationship between the Lord (Yahweh for, Jehovah) and Israel, and the reorganization of her national life. Detailed instructions are recorded for the building of this future Temple and for the service attached to it. The description is not of Solomon's Temple, the specifications being different and larger. If the description was given to help the exiles on their return from Babylon to rebuild the Temple, it is inexplicable why Ezra, Nehemiah, or Haggai do not refer to it. If it is a description of God's relation to the Church, then it is so symbolic as to be meaningless. If understood plainly, the Temple and worship here referred to must relate to Israel when she is reestablished in her land (chapters 47-48) during Christ's millennial kingdom." (*The Ryrie Study Bible* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1978])

In addition, Gog was considered by many Jewish rabbis (Rashi in particular, who lived in the eleventh century A.D.) and by ancient Hebrew writings (*Targum Jonathan*, an Aramaic paraphrase of the Hebrew Scriptures, written around the time of Christ) as the ungodly king who with arrogant futility will pit himself against Messiah in the end times. That concept perfectly fits the description of Antichrist given in the New Testament.

In summary, then, interpreting Ezekiel 38-39 as relating specifically and exclusively to events that occur during and just after the end of the seventieth week seems to be demanded by its own context, paralleling passages in other parts of Scripture (especially in the Book of Revelation), and by simple logic when all related texts and their sequences are carefully studied together.

REFERENCE NOTE [from Asterisk (page 3)]

The entire seventieth week of Daniel is considered by some scholars to depict God's Day-of-the-Lord wrath-largely because some of the events associated with the second, third, and possibly the fourth seals superficially correspond to His "four severe judgments" mentioned in Ezekiel 14:21 and to the earlier mention of the Lord's wrath (v. 19). Many other Old Testament passages that depict God's wrath as being expressed through war, famine, wild animals, or plague are also marshaled to support this view (e.g., Lev. 26:21-28; Num. 11:33; 16:46; 25:8-11; Deut. 11:17; 32:22-25; 2 Chron. 29:8, 9; 36:16, 17; Isa. 9:12; Jer 14:12; 15:1-9; 16:4, 10, 11; 19:7-9, 15; 21:5-7; 24:10; 44:8, 11-13; Ezek. 4:16, 17; 5:11-17; 6:3, 11, 12; 7:3, 8, 14-19; 8:18; 21:19; 33:19-22; 38:19-22; 39:4).

There is no doubt that war, famine, wild animals, and plague can pertain directly or indirectly to the expression of God's anger or wrath. But the texts given above translate four different Hebrew words as "wrath" or "anger." *Chemah* (Strong's #2534) connotes hot displeasure or indignation. *Charon* (#2740) means heat or burning anger, and *qetseph* (#7110) simply carries the idea of wrath or indignation. 'Ebrah (#5678), on the other hand, is by far the strongest of these terms and refers to the overflowing fury of God. It is only this term that is specifically used of God's Day-of-the-Lord wrath, and its Old Testament context is always against Gentile nations, never the nation of Israel.

Zephaniah 1:14, 15, 18 uses 'ebrah of God's judgmental wrath, the target of that wrath being the inhabitants of earth at large. And again, as it was used in Zephaniah 1:14-18, the use of 'ebrah in the Ezekiel 38 context refers to the wrath of God against the Gentile nations who have come against Israel in the last days (v. 16).

Ezekiel 14:19-21, perhaps the most often used passage to support the idea that the first four seals represent God's wrath during the Day of the Lord does not use the strongest term for wrath, 'ebrah, but rather a milder term *Chemah*. God's wrath in this particular passage is focused on Israel (in particular the City of Jerusalem whereas Rev. 6:8, the fourth seal, is specifically limited to a quarter of the world) but as noted above, this Hebrew term carries the idea of severe discipline but not condemning wrath. On the other hand, the 'ebrah wrath of God during the Day of the Lord focuses on the entire world. (For similar uses of *chemah*, see Lev. 26:21-28; Num. 25:8-11; 2 Chron. 36:16, 17; Jer 21:5-7; 44:6-8, 11-13; Ezek. 5:11-17; 6:3, 11, 12; 8:18; 21:17-19.) Another milder form (*qetseph*) is used in Numbers 16:46 and 2 Chronicles 29:8, 9. The third mild form (*charon*) is used only in Ezekiel 7:14. Here again this milder form of wrath is associated with God's discipline of Israel by Babylon, by use of sword, plague, and famine.