

# **The Historical-Eschatological/Apocalyptic Fulfillment of the Prophecy Concerning Gog and Magog of Ezekiel 38–39<sup>1</sup>**

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Ezekiel, the prophet of the sixth century B.C., after the tragic fall of Jerusalem in 587/586 presents in his book a unique prophecy concerning Gog from the land of Magog (Ezek 38–39)<sup>2</sup> which has stirred a bewildering amount of different interpretations. Ezekiel's pertinent prediction is certainly one of the most challenging texts of Scripture. Alexander in his article aptly writes: "The plethora of interpretations for this passage caution the student concerning dogmatism in his

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<sup>1</sup>This article is dedicated to Dr. LaRondelle who was my best teacher of biblical eschatology. His plea for a Christ-centered understanding of biblical prophecies was a constant guidance in my ministry. His enthusiasm for honest and faithful work with the biblical material was an intellectual stimulus and encouragement for my teaching and preaching ministry. To bring people to a close, intimate, personal, and salvific relationship with God on the basis of solid exegesis (and not eisegesis) was the ultimate goal of all his endeavors. I share his deep conviction that a trustworthy theology has to be always built on a responsible exegesis.

<sup>2</sup>The prophecy about Gog and Magog is mentioned only once in the Old Testament—Ezek 38–39; and this terminology is also directly employed once in the New Testament, namely, in Rev 20:8–9.

Numbers 24:7 according to the Samaritan Pentateuch and LXX reads "from Gog" instead of "from Agag." The same wording is in Aquila, Theodotion, and Symmachus. However, it does not mean that we can identify the Gog of Ezek 38–39 with Agag, because King Agag is in the book of Numbers chronologically situated to the time of Moses, and therefore he did not live sometime after the Babylonian exile. Chronologically, therefore, this identification does not fit into the time framework of the prophecy and needs to be ruled out. See also Amos 7:1 in the LXX. for another occurrence of Gog.

The word Gog occurs in 1 Chr 5:4 as a proper name. The word Magog appears as a proper name in Gen 10:2 and 1 Chr 1:5 (besides Ezek 39:6 where it designates a people).

conclusion."<sup>3</sup> The New Scofield Bible as well as Hal Lindsey, for examples, claim that Gog refers to Russia.<sup>4</sup> In this article, I do not discuss in depth the different popular or scholarly propositions about the identity of Gog and their opinions on the fulfillment/application of this prophecy,<sup>5</sup> but explore primarily a biblical historical-eschatological interpretation: namely, how

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<sup>3</sup>Ralph H. Alexander: "A Fresh Look at Ezekiel 38 and 39," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 17, no. 3 (Summer 1974): 157. For an insightful analysis of Hal Lindsey's book *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1972), see T. Boersma, *Is the Bible a Jigsaw Puzzle . . . An Evaluation of Hal Lindsey's Writings* (St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada: Paideia Press, 1978), especially the eighth chapter entitled "Ezekiel's Prophecy about Gog" (106–125). Boersma raises some pertinent questions about Lindsey's hermeneutics and exegesis of the Bible.

In our study we do not deal with the possibility, that the biblical text of Gog and Magog has its origin in the Babylonian didactic poem known as the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin. See M. C. Astour, "Ezekiel's Prophecy of Gog and the Cuthean Legend of Naram-Sin," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95, no. 4 (1976): 567–579. For a critique of Astour, see Tremper Longman, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography: a Generic and Comparative Study* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 125–126.

Neither do we deal with the literary or textual problems of Ezek 38–39, which are usually well explained in commentaries.

<sup>4</sup>The New Scofield Bible ([New York: Oxford University Press, 1967], 881) comments on Ezek 38:2: "The reference is to the powers in the north of Europe, headed by Russia." Hal Lindsey states: "Russia is Gog" (48). However, *rosh* does not designate a country; it is rather a title.

<sup>5</sup>For a review of various theories about the identification of Gog and Magog, see Alexander, 161–163; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 432–436; J. Boehmer, "Wer ist Gog und Magog? Ein Beitrag zur Auslegung des Buches Ezechiel," in *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Theologie* 40 (1897), 347–355; Boersma, 116–125; Ronald E. Clemens, *Ezekiel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 170–172; Simon Cohen, "Gog," in *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, 1941), 5:10; A. J. Greig, "Gog and Magog," *Ministry*, February 1978, 14–15; R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament; With a Comprehensive Review of Old Testament Studies and a Special Supplement on the Apocrypha* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 842–843; B. Otzen, "Gog; Magog," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1975), 2:421–422; H. H. Rowley, *Relevance of Apocalyptic* (London, 1963), 35–37; D. S. Russell, *The Method and Message of Jewish Apocalyptic: 200 BC–AD 100* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1964), 191–193; *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington,

Ezek 38–39 is deciphered by later biblical writers, especially in the book of Revelation. This research paper does not attempt to be the last word in the discussion on Ezekiel's prophecy about Gog and Magog, but rather it primarily seeks to demonstrate the christological-ecclesiological fulfillment.

### **The Literary Structure**

The literary structure of the book of Ezekiel is well developed and quite symmetrical, and helps to put in proper perspective the prophecy regarding Gog and his allies against Israel. The whole document with its 48 chapters can be divided into seven parts:<sup>6</sup>

- I. Judgment concerning Israel: the Glory of God departs from the Temple (1–11).
- II. Judgment against Israel explained (12–23).
- III. Siege of Jerusalem and Prediction of the Destruction of the Temple (24).
- IV. Judgment concerning Foreign Nations (25–32).
- V. Fall of Jerusalem reported (33).

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DC: Review and Herald, 1955), 4:704–707; Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Foes from the Northern Frontier* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 1982); Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 25–48* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983), 299–302.

<sup>6</sup>See especially, Richard M. Davidson, "The Chiastic Literary Structure of the Book of Ezekiel" in *To Understand the Scriptures: Essays in Honor of William H. Shea*, ed. David Merling (Berrien Springs, MI: The Institute of Archaeology/Siegfried Horn Archaeological Museum, 1997), 71–93. For different structures, see Alexander, 158; Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), vii–x; idem, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48*, vii–ix; Clemens, v–vii; Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 40–41; H. Van Dyke Parunak, "Structural Studies in Ezekiel" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1978); idem, "The Literary Architecture of Ezekiel's mar'ôt 'elohîm," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980): 61–74; Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Message of Ezekiel: A New Heart and a New Spirit*, The Bible Speaks Today, ed. J. A. Motyer, John R. W. Stott, and Derek Tidball (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 7–8, 39–42.

VI. Hope and Restoration of Israel (34–39).

VII. Vision for the Restored Community—the New Temple and City: the Glory of God returns to the Temple (40–48).

The book contains messages to the Jews being in the Babylonian exile. Ezekiel's active prophetic ministry, dated from 593 till at least 571,<sup>7</sup> fell into two major periods and is divided by the shocking event with the most devastating consequences—the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple. The first 33 chapters fall within the years 593/92 to 587/86 B.C., during which the prophet's message, directed to Jerusalem, consists of warnings, judgments, and symbolic actions designed to bring Judah to repentance and back to her faith in God. The second period consists of the last 15 chapters, and encompasses the years from after the fall of Jerusalem (587/86) to 571/70 B.C. In the course of these years, Ezekiel is a pastor to the exiles and a messenger of comfort and hope.<sup>8</sup> Immediately before the prophecy concerning Gog and Magog, there is a

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<sup>7</sup>See especially Ezek 1:1–3; 29:17; and 40:1. In the fifth year of the Babylonian captivity, he was called to the prophetic office and served in this capacity for some 22 years. He was the son of Buzi, a priest of the family of Zadok (Ezek 1:3), and so like Zechariah (Zech 1:1; Neh 12:12, 16) and Jeremiah (Jer 1:1), combined both the offices of prophet and priest. The fact that Ezekiel was included among "all the princes, and all the mighty men of valor" (2 Kgs 24:14) who were taken away with Jehoiakin in 597 B.C. (Ezek 1:1–3), suggests that he could have been a member of Jerusalem's aristocracy. He was at that time most probably 25 years old (Ezek 1:2). Ezekiel was married, but his wife died about nine years after the captivity began (24:1, 16).

It is noteworthy that the book is written from a chronological perspectives and accurate dating is an interesting feature of this book. Each major section in Ezekiel is initiated by a chronological notice (1:1, 2; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 26:1; 29:1, 17; 30:20; 31:1; 32:1, 17; 33:21, 22; 40:1).

<sup>8</sup>Even in the Babylonian captivity, divine justice was mixed with mercy. God came to His people as a teacher to impress upon them the folly of disobedience and the desirability of cooperating with Him. He did not want to be for them a stern judge to condemn them. The bitter experiences of their captivity were not so much retributive as they were remedial and pedagogical

series of prophecies regarding the restoration of Israel (chaps. 34–37), and directly after it there is a vision about the rebuilding of the new temple and the city (chaps. 40–48). In between these two parts, there is a picture of God's intervention in favor of His people when enemies attack (Ezek 38–39).<sup>9</sup>

The statement, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says,"<sup>10</sup> divides the two chapters of Ezek 38–39 into seven parts, because this phrase is employed seven times: 38:3, 10, 14, 17; 39:1, 17, 25. After the introduction (Ezek 38:1–2), come the following sections: 1) presentation of Gog and his allies (38:3–9); 2) Gog's pride and plot (38:10–13); 3) Gog coming against Israel (38:14–16); 4) Destruction of Gog's forces by God's judgement (38:17–23); 5) destruction and burial of Gog and his allies (39:1–16); 6a) Gog's confederation at Yahweh's sacrificial feast (39:17–22); b) Israel in the exile for their sins (39:23–24); 7) restoration of the fortunes of Israel after captivity (39:25–29). Thus, the prophecy ends with the event which is to happen first—the exodus from the Babylonian captivity, because this prophecy will be fulfilled only when Israel will return to their land and their yoke of captivity will end.

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in nature (see Dan 9:4–19).

<sup>9</sup>Contextual studies are crucial for the understanding of Ezek 38–39. The sixth part of the whole book (chaps. 34–39) can be subdivided into five units with its culmination in chaps. 38 and 39: 1) reproof of the shepherds of Israel (34:1–31); 2) prophecy against Edom because of her support of the Babylonians in their attack upon Judah (35:1–15); 3) the restoration of the people of Israel (36:1–38); 4) the vision of the dry bones (37:1–28); 5) prophecies against Gog and Magog (38:1–39:29).

Ezekiel 33:21 begins one section, which chaps. 38 and 39 close. This section contains a series of six messages delivered by Ezekiel after the reception of the news that Jerusalem had fallen. Each of the six messages commences with Ezekiel's distinctive introductory speech formula: "Then the word of the Lord came to me saying" (33:23; 34:1; 35:1; 36:16; 37:14; 38:1).

<sup>10</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, the NIV translation of the Bible is used.

### Spoken About in the Past

Ezekiel 38:17 is the crucial text of the prophecy: "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: 'Are you [Gog] 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.'" This statement affirms that God through his prophets spoke about Gog in former days.<sup>11</sup> It means that God spoke in the past about him in a general sense, because nowhere else in the Old Testament is a direct prophecy about Gog mentioned. The name Gog appears only one other time (1 Chr 5:4), but it is in a genealogy and not in a prophecy.

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<sup>11</sup>Daniel Block argues that this text needs to be understood in a different way. God's question needs to be answered negatively which means that Gog is not the one about whom God spoke through prophets in the past. Gog is a new unknown enemy about whom no one so far has prophesied. See his commentary on *The Book of Ezekiel 25–48*, 453–456.

I do not agree with Block, because the purpose of Ezekiel's prophetic imagery is to put his message into harmony with the earlier known prophecies about the invasion of God's enemies against Israel as indicated by the immediate context (38:17b). Ezekiel puts Gog and his allies into the stream of antigodly forces prophets were talking about in the past. His affirmative question about former prophets that they "prophesied for years that I [the Sovereign Lord] would bring you against them" links clearly Ezekiel prophecy with other prophecies, and attests the connection between them. Furthermore, it is crucial to note that the two other questions asked in Ezek 38 always presuppose a positive answer (see verses 13 and 14). Why not, then, to expect the same in verse 17? In both cases (38:13,14) as well as in verse 17 the interrogative particle *ha* is used (unless particle *ha* in Ezek 38:17 is interpreted as a definite article, however in that case it would mean even stronger connection between this prophecy concerning Gog and the messages of other prophets). See also another allusion to the same concept in Ezek 39:8b.

The following translations supports this understanding of the biblical text: KJV, NIV, NKJ, RSV, NSV, etc. because this is the natural reading of the text. This view is supported by many exegetes, like Walter Eichrodt, *Ezekiel* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), 525; Otzen, 422–424; Russell, 191–193; *SDA Bible Commentary*, 4:708–709; Wright, 319; Zimmerli, 297, 312. For further discussion, see M. S. Odell, "'Are You He of Whom I Spoke by My Servants the Prophets?' Ezekiel 38–39 and the Problem of History in the Neobabylonian Context" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1988).

It is similar to the notion of the Antichrist. The term is used only five times in four verses in the epistles of John (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7), yet the concept of Antichrist is used by biblical authors in many places in the Bible but under different names—like the "little horn," the "king of the North," "false teachers," "false Messiahs," the "man of lawlessness," "Babylon," etc.

We need therefore to look for the main concepts or thoughts of Ezekiel's prophecy which can be detected also in previous biblical prophecies, and thus the connections can be established among them. The most common concepts of many prophets and biblical writers are the concept of war and that of enemies from the North. Ezekiel emphasizes that the enemy will come from the North (38:6, 15; 39:2). "North" is the symbol of the antigodly power, because God reigns from the North (see Ps 48:2; Isa 14:13; Job 37:22). Eichrodt explains that "a declaration made by Yahweh himself to Gog" provides an evidence that God "has long since forewarned the people of his coming. This shows that the enemy from the north, who plays so large a part in Jeremiah's first prophecies, but whom Jeremiah himself in chap.19 interprets as meaning Babylon, is regarded as a force which has not as yet entered history and is to materialize for the first time in the shape of Gog. Such a transference was possible only because behind the anonymous northern foe through whom Yahweh is to settle his final reckoning with his people is seen first one historical adversary and then another, first Assyria, in the time of Isaiah (Isa. 5:26 ff.; 14:31), then Babylon, in the time of Jeremiah, in whom the terrors of the end seemed to be approaching. To the author of this chapter, the conditions prevailing in his times seemed capable of being explained only if he assumed that those prophecies had not as yet really been fulfilled, and were still waiting their consummation."<sup>12</sup>

G. C. Berkouwer claims that "the northern powers—the north frequently having been the origin of Israel's woes (cf. Joel 2:20)—is an image that anticipates the eclipse of the antigodly powers of the world."<sup>13</sup> B. Otzen describes five principle motifs in Ezek 38–39: "The Day of

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<sup>12</sup>Eichrodt, 525.

<sup>13</sup>G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972), 276.

Yahweh," "War with Chaos and War with the Nations," "The Foe from the North," "Attack of the Nations upon Jerusalem," and "The Sacrificial Meal."<sup>14</sup> When he speaks about the foe from the north, he maintains that "in the OT tradition, this idea has undergone a historico-geographic twist, but it is certainly mythological-legendary in its origin: the evil powers of chaos that are hostile to God reside in the north, whence they are set loose."<sup>15</sup> This position is upheld also by Russell who states that "already in the Old Testament and in tradition beyond the Old Testament the north was regarded as a place of menace and mystery. This hostile army is individualized and given the name: Gog of the land of Magog (38.2)."<sup>16</sup>

The principal and strongest motifs are the concepts of the "sacrificial meal" and of the "war," because they connect at the best with other biblical passages. For example, the idea that the slain will become a sacrificial meal is also found in Jer 46:10; Zeph 1:7–8; Isa 34:5–8, and Lam 2:21–22.<sup>17</sup>

From the larger biblical perspective, it is quite obvious that "the battle here described is but the culmination of the agelong struggle between the powers of evil and the people of God. Concerning this there is frequent mention in earlier prophecies. The earliest intimation comes from the Garden of Eden in the curse pronounced upon the serpent. God predicted that there would be constant warfare between the seed of the woman, the church, and Satan. The ultimate

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<sup>14</sup>Otzen, 423–424.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 423.

<sup>16</sup>Russell, 190. He also mentions that in the Ras Shamra tablets, the north is the mythological home of the gods.

<sup>17</sup>See Otzen, 424.

triumph over evil was forecast in the clause, 'it [the seed of the woman] shall bruise thy head' (Gen 3:15). Other references to the controversy and the eventual triumph of right are found in the Psalms and later prophetic books (see Ps. 2; 110; Isa. 26:20, 21; etc.)."<sup>18</sup>

It is apparent that one cannot isolate Ezek 38 and 39 from other Old Testament prophecies; one needs to discern the organic unity of all prophecies. Otzen correctly summarizes: "Thus Ezk. 38–39 has the character of a mosaic of well-known OT motifs."<sup>19</sup>

### **The Main Thoughts**

The leading message of the biblical prophecy is transparent: in the future (38:8, 16), Gog will launch from the far north (38:6, 15; 39:2) his antagonistic campaign<sup>20</sup> with his allies

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<sup>18</sup>*SDA Bible Commentary*, 4:708. For interpretation of Gen 3:15, see Afolarin Olutunde Ojewole, "The Seed in Genesis 3:15: An Exegetical and Intertextual Study" (Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 2002).

<sup>19</sup>Otzen, 424.

<sup>20</sup>What is first mentioned as Yahweh's action (38:4.16; 39:2) turns into a description of Gog's own evil devise (38:10). He deliberately planned to destroy Israel (Ezek 38:10–12) and his pride led to his own destruction (see the stress on "I" in Ezek 38:11–12). Gog's pride and destruction closely reflects Lucifer's pride and fall as described in Isa 14:12–15 (compare with Ezek 28:17–19).

Similar language is used in the book of Exodus in regard to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (Exod 3:19–20). Nine times this hardening is ascribed to God (Exod 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8; compare with Rom 9:17–18), and another nine times Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart (Exod 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7, 34, 35). In the actual account of the ten plagues (Exodus 7–12) against the Egyptian gods (Exod 12:12), when the predictions are put aside, Pharaoh alone is the agent who hardened his heart in each of the first five plagues! Not until the sixth plague did God harden Pharaoh's heart (9:12) which means that his heart turned to "a mud" after his own deliberate and stubborn refusal to listen and obey God. His attitude of life was wrong. Once he made a final decision against God, God's dealings with him hardened his heart even more (like sunshine hardens clay). In this way the prediction was fulfilled that God would harden Pharaoh's heart (Exod 4:21; 7:3).

(38:2–8) against Israel<sup>21</sup> after they have returned from Assyrian-Babylonian captivity (38:8, 12; 39:23, 25, 27, 28) and are living securely in their land (38:8, 14; 39:26). Then the divine judgement (38:18–22; 39:2–6, 17–20) will destroy Gog and his confederacy upon the mountains of Israel (39:4, 15); thus Israel (39:7, 22, 28) and all nations will know that Yahweh is God (38:16, 23; 39:6b, 7, 13b, 21, 28) and His holiness will be vindicated (38:16b, 23; 39:7, 27).

### **The Time of the Prophecy's Fulfillment**

The prophecy about Gog's invasion against God's people is to be fulfilled in the future (as seen from the perspective of the prophet Ezekiel) after Israel returns from the Babylonian captivity (Ezek 39:23, 25, 27). "Gog and Magog" are future enemies, and they will attack only after Israel is living securely in their land which means that they will be living in peace with their neighbors and under no threat (Ezek 38:11–12).

Ezekiel uses three time expressions—*miyyāmim rabbīm*, "after many days" (38:8); *b<sup>e</sup>'ach<sup>a</sup>rit hashshānīm*, "in the latter years" (38:8); and *b<sup>e</sup>'ach<sup>a</sup>rit hayyāmīm*, "in the latter days"/"in days to come" (38:16)—which gives a general future time framework to this prophecy. Boersma<sup>22</sup> and Willis<sup>23</sup> discuss in their respective studies the expression "in the latter days"; and they both come to the same conclusion that wherever one finds the expression "in the latter days"

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<sup>21</sup>Gog and his allies attack a land (Ezek 38:8, 11, 16), the mountains of Israel (38:8; 39:2), my people Israel (38:16), the land of Israel (38:18).

<sup>22</sup>Boersma, 32–43.

<sup>23</sup>See John T. Willis, "The Expression *b<sup>e</sup>'ach<sup>a</sup>rit hayyāmīm* in the Old Testament," *Restoration Quarterly* 22, nos. 1–2 (1979): 54–71.

(used 13 times in the Hebrew portion of the Old Testament)<sup>24</sup> it basically means "in the after(wards) of the days," "in the following time," "in the future," "in days to come," "in those future days," "in the latter days" and is without any specific time reference to the time of the end (for example, after the Messiah comes or at the end of the world's history). In other words, these expressions have no *specific* time reference per se. It is important to note that the biblical concept of time is always closely tied or even identified with its content, and its meaning depends on the application of the context.<sup>25</sup> The same position is also held by H. Seebass; however, he adds that six passages should be interpreted differently due to the literary context: as a technical term with eschatological content.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>Gen 49:1; Num 24:14; Deut 4:40; 31:29; Isa 2:2; Jer 23:20; 30:24; 48:47; 49:39; Ezek 38:16; Dan 10:14; Hos 3:5; Mic 4:1. It is also used once in the Aramaic portion of the book of Daniel, namely in 2:28 as *b<sup>e</sup>'ach<sup>a</sup>rit yomayyā'*.

<sup>25</sup>For further study, see H. Douglas Buckwalter, "Time" in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. by Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1996), 774–775; James Barr, *Biblical Words for Time* (Naperville, IL: A. R. Allenson, 1962); Ernst Jenni, "Time," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1962), 4:646: "The abstraction 'time' belongs among the accomplishments of Greek culture. If, however, time (as a dimension) is not abstracted from the abundance of individual events, then, naturally, the events and their time constitute, to a large extent, a unit in OT thinking. It has been observed again and again how closely the Hebrew conception of time is bound up with its content, or even identified with it." See also a chapter about the Hebrew concept of time in Jacques B. Doukhan, *Hebrew for Theologians: A Textbook for the Study of Biblical Hebrew in Relation to Hebrew Thinking* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1993), 200–207. A more cautious approach to the issue of time is presented by C. N. Pinnock, "Time," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 4:852–853. For the latest discussion see William Lane Craig, *Time and Eternity: Exploring God's Relationship to Time* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001); Gregory E. Ganssle, ed., *God and Time: Four Views* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

<sup>26</sup>H. Seebass, "'ach<sup>a</sup>rit" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 1:210–212. These six passages are: Isa 2:2, Mic 4:1, Hos 3:5, Ezek 38:16, Dan 2:28, and Dan 10:14.

Thus, the three temporary phrases mentioned above, do not refer directly or automatically to the end time. In Ezek 38–39 there is no specific indicator which would necessitate putting this prophecy into the apocalyptic end-time scenario just prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ.<sup>27</sup> The plausible position is that Ezekiel's prophecy refers to the events which should occur sometimes after the return from the Babylonian exile.<sup>28</sup> Additional time framework is given in phrases like "when they live in safety" (38:8, 14; 39:26), "attack on peaceful and unsuspecting people" (Ezek 38:11),<sup>29</sup> but even these expressions are very broad in meaning. Historically speaking, the Gog prophecy could be fulfilled only in the future after the return of Israel from the Assyrian-Babylonian captivity which occurred in 537/536 B.C. (see 2 Chr 36:22–23; Ezra 1–3).

However, the ultimate fulfillment of safety for Israel can only be eschatological, because it will only be under God's real rulership in His kingdom that the people of God will live in security for ever and under no threat from their enemies (Ezek 37:24–28; compare with Isa 32:18).<sup>30</sup> Craigie rightly comments on the Gog's battle: "Be that as it may, he [Ezekiel]

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<sup>27</sup>It is undoubtedly true that Ezekiel prophesies point to the physical restoration (36:18) as well as the spiritual rebirth and revival of Israel (e.g., Ezek 36:25–28). However, Ezek 38–39 does not foretell the spiritual revival or the repentance of Israel just before the end of the world.

<sup>28</sup>See Boersma, 110, and other Bible scholars.

<sup>29</sup>Phrases like "unwalled villages" and "living without walls and without gates and bars" in Ezek 38:11 are parallel expressions to "living in safety" or "peaceful and unsuspecting people," i.e., people who live in peace and without fear. Therefore, these phrases should not be interpreted literally, but as figures of speech.

<sup>30</sup>To live "securely" means ultimately under the rulership of the Messiah, because when the Messiah comes, Israel will live in security (Ezek 34:25, 28; 37:24–28). In that regard, there is a very important *Targum Neofiti* on Num 14:26. The *Neofiti* targumist put Ezekiel's prophecy in a Messianic context: "At the very end of days Gog and Magog will go out to Jerusalem, and they will fall into the hands of the king Messiah."

nevertheless has a vision of a distant world in which in spite of evil God's good would be established. The battle which he describes is thus in essence a final 'cosmic' battle in which evil would eventually be eliminated and righteousness be victorious."<sup>31</sup>

### **Gog and His Allies**

There are five nations listed as Gog's allies in Ezek 38:5–6: Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, and Beth-Togormah, besides Meshech and Tubal already mentioned in 38:2. Thus, there are altogether seven nations in confederation whose names are derived from Gen 10:2, 3, 6, and Ezek 27:10, 13, 14.<sup>32</sup> The number seven plays a significant role in Ezekiel, symbolizing completeness or totality and pointing to a universal conspiracy, a world plot against Israel.<sup>33</sup> The number of enemies is described in figurative language: "You and all your troops and the many nations with you will go up, advancing like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land"

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<sup>31</sup>Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel*, The Daily Study Bible Series (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983), 269.

<sup>32</sup>Alger F. Johns, "The Presentation of Ezekiel 38 in Evangelism," *Ministry*, August/September 1962, 28: "The eleven nations mentioned in [Ezekiel] chap. 38, and with only the exception of Persia, they are all sons, grandsons, or great-grandsons of Ham and Japhet, according to Genesis 10 and none of them are descendants of Shem, the patriarch." As for the identification of these nations, see discussion in T. Lust, "A Linguistic and Geographical Study of the Names of Ezekiel 38 and 39" (M.A. thesis, Andrews University, 1949); Boersma, 114–116; Otzen, 421; Block, *The Book of Ezekiel 25–48*, 432–436, 439–442.

<sup>33</sup>Block, *The Book of Ezekiel 25–48*, 441: "Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, and Beth-Togorma represent the northern extreme of the world known to Israel; Paras, Cush, and Put the southern extreme, again suggesting that the whole world is involved in this attack."

The phrase "This is what the Sovereign Lord says" is used seven times in Ezek 38–39; "for seven years" (39:9) the weapons of defeated Gog's army will be used for fuel; the seven months are needed for burying the bodies (39:12, 14). Previously in the book of Ezekiel (25–32), there are prophecies against the seven foreign nations (Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, and Egypt), and the prophet utters seven oracles against Egypt (29:1–16, 17–21; 30:1–19, 20–26; 31:1–18; 32:1–16, 17–32).

(Ezek 38:9) and again: "You will advance against my people Israel like a cloud that covers the land" (Ezek 38:16).

Even though many solutions to the enigma of Gog's figure have been offered, there is no consensus among scholars who Gog is. Different theories have been proposed for the names of Gog and Magog with diverse historical<sup>34</sup> and symbolic/mythological<sup>35</sup> interpretations.

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<sup>34</sup>A brief survey of different historical interpretations is more than sufficient: Gog represents the Scythians (advocated by Josephus, J. Wellhausen, W. Gesenius); Gog is the Lydian king Gyges (ca. 670 B.C.), and consequently the land of Magog is Lydia (popularized by F. Delitzsch, J. Herrmann, W. Zimmerli); Gog refers to the dynasty of Gagi (personal name of Persian origin) in the territory north of Assyria, which is mentioned in a text of Ashurbanipal (L. Durr); Gog relates to a territory called Gaga mentioned in an Amarna letter (I, 38), which according to the context was located north of Syria perhaps around Carchemish (O. Weber); Gog is Gasga, a name occurring in Hittite tablets and described a location on the borders of Armenia and Cappadonia (W. F. Albright); Gog is an officer in the army of the younger Cyrus ca. 400 B.C. (N. Messel); Gog (derived from Gaga in the Amarna letter) was used as a pseudonym for Alexander the Great (H. Winckler); Gog represents an official title, a prophetic role, based upon the Septuagint rendering of several kingly names in the OT and employed as a general name for any enemy of God's people at the time of the composition of the Septuagint (Num 24:7; Amos 7:1); Magog is interpreted either as an artificial form (Assyrian *mat gugi*, land of Gog), or as a "hebraizing" of an Akkadian *matGog* (= *matGaga* in an Amarna letter) (H. Winkler, R. Kraetzschmar, A. R. Millard); the name of the land comes first and that the name Gog was derived from it (J. G. Aalders, J. W. Wevers); Magog is a cipher or code for Babylon—reversing the letters of Magog and reading it as the following letter of the alphabet (J. Boehmer, L. Finkelstein, more recently A. J. Greig); Gog is identified with Antiochus IV Epiphanes (L. Seinecke, T. Boersma); Gog is a pseudonym for Antiochus V Eupator reigning from 163 to 162 B.C. (G. R. Berry); Gog is Mithridates VI, king of Pontus from 120 to 64 B.C. (N. Schmidt). For sources of different theories, see footnote no. 5.

<sup>35</sup>In contrast to various historical explanations of the terms Gog and Magog, there is an attempt to understand these names symbolically or mythologically: 1) A. van Hoonacker suggested that the word Gog was actually derived from the Sumerian term *gug*, meaning "darkness"; therefore Gog was the personification of darkness and evil, because of the apocalyptic elements involved, and par consequence, Magog is the land of darkness; 2) Gog is the Akkadian god Gaga, which appears in *Enuma Elish* (see M. Streck); 3) Gog is as a leader and representative of the powers hostile toward God, and thus the historical names are only masks and disguises for a mythical/symbolic power that has nothing to do with history (W. Staerk); 4) H. Gressmann accepts the Gyges hypotheses as far as the origin of the name is concerned, but he holds that mythological ideas concerning a giant of primitive times (Og = Gog?) and of gigantic

Unfortunately, none of these hypotheses has enough support to warrant its acceptance as the answer to Gog's identity. It seems, therefore, that the safe way of interpreting the fulfillment of Gog's prophecy is to stay within the parameters of explanation given by later biblical authors. Such an approach helps to avoid a speculative exposition of this prophecy and focuses on the canonical intertextual understanding of it.

Thus in our study we do not support any historical fulfillment which falls prior to the exodus from the Babylonian exile or during it, because Ezekiel predicts a future event from his perspective. We reject political modern applications related to the second coming of Christ which overlook the New Testament interpretation of this prophecy. We also oppose the mythological explanation, because the literary genre of Ezek 38–39 presupposes its historical fulfillment. On the other hand, we stand for the symbolic-historic interpretation rooted in the New Testament interpretation of this prophecy where especially the book of Revelation provides material for the eschatological-apocalyptic understanding of Ezekiel's prophetic scenario (see below).

### **No Literal Historical Fulfillment**

On the basis of known historical documents, one can safely conclude that there is no event in the history of Israel which would match with the Ezekiel's description of God's intervention against the antagonistic forces of their enemies. No such past happening is ever

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locusts lie beyond this figure; 5) Gog is interpreted as the "leader and representative of the powers hostile to God" (A. Lauha); 6) Ezek 38–39 is presenting real prophecy and future historical events, but in Rev 20 the whole picture is mythological (K. G. Kuhn); 7) Gog is a symbol for the eschatological final war in the context of Messianic expectations according to rabbinic sources (*b. Sanh.* 97b). For the last point, see the article in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 7:692–695, s.v. "Gog and Magog." For sources of different theories, see footnote no. 5;

recorded. Thus, this prophecy has not been fulfilled in biblical times (from the Babylonian captivity exodus to the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A.D. 70), or even until today.

### **Partial Historical Fulfillment**

The closest but partial historical fulfillment of this prophecy in Old Testament times and the intertestamental period occurred during the Maccabean wars (second century B.C.) when a few numbered Jews, the Maccabees under the leadership of Judah Maccabee, revolted against the Seleucid king Antiochus Epiphanes IV (175–164 B.C.) and unexpectedly defeated an enormous and well trained Hellenistic army.<sup>36</sup> The Maccabees waged war against this oppressive Hellenistic ruler who not only wanted to subjugate them, but also change their culture and even religion.<sup>37</sup> The commemoration of their surprising victory gave birth to the Hanukkah festival.

From the many different proposals for the historical fulfillment of Gog's prophecy, the interpretation which identifies Gog with Antiochus Epiphanes IV seems most plausible.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>See especially, 1 Macc 2–4; and 2 Macc 8–9. The knowledge about Maccabean wars and Antiochus Epiphanes IV is derived from these primary sources: First and Second Maccabees, and Polybius, *The Histories*, trans. W. R. Paton, The Loeb Classical Library, vols. 5 and 6, (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1922–1927).

<sup>37</sup>Boersma, 122: "The Seleucid dynasty managed to acquire a position of considerable power in northern Syria, extending its influence into Armenia and Asia Minor in the direction of the Black Sea. The center of Seleucid power was in northern Syria; the court capital was Antioch, located on the river Orontes. This corresponds exactly to the area that Ezekiel's prophecy refers."

<sup>38</sup>See Boersma, 125.

One of the reasons why I support this interpretation is that it is reflected by parallelism in Dan 11 where the figure of the King of the North plays a dominant role. The King from the North represents Antiochus Epiphanes IV in the beginning/middle of this chapter (11:13ff., and it is a matter of scholarly debate how many verses should be taken for describing him), and the same figure is used to point to the end-time Antichrist at the end of the chapter (and again it is a

However, it needs to be stressed that it does not mean that this explanation provides the full historical fulfillment, because all details predicted in the prophecy were not literally fulfilled: as for example, Antiochus Epiphanes IV did not die in Israel; his army was not defeated in the manner asserted in Ezekiel; Israel did not live at that time altogether in security, etc. In this way, Gog as a leader of the confederacy against Israel can be only partially identified with this antagonistic figure. Nevertheless, when one has a partial historical fulfillment, one encounters a type.

It does not mean that this prophecy concerning Gog could not occur exactly as predicted; one can envision the historical, literal fulfillment of Gog's prophecy in the context of Messianic expectations and Israel's faithfulness to God's leadership and His word. Nevertheless, we need to recognize that many Old Testament classical prophecies were conditional, and because "the conditions were never met, the predictions were not fulfilled in literal Israel. Nor can all the details be projected into the future so as to have a fulfillment then. Only those features reiterated later by sacred writers can be taken positively to have future application"<sup>39</sup>

### **Fulfillment in Principle**

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matter of discussion which texts should be taken as fitting to portraying him). Both powers are depicted as "Kings from the North." However, a detailed study of Dan 11 in regard to this topic is needed, but it is a subject for another research paper.

<sup>39</sup>*SDA Bible Commentary*, 4:709. For the detailed ideal scenario of what would happen to Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple if they would have been faithful to God, see Richard M. Davidson, "Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy," in *Understanding Scripture: An Adventist Approach*, Biblical Research Institute Studies, vol. 1, ed. George W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2006), 193–200.

Because the divine conditions and described background were not met in fulness so also the prophecy was not literally fulfilled. If the people of God, for example, had rebuild without any delay the city and the temple after their return from the Babylonian exile (see Ezra 4, Hag 1–2, Dan 10), Gog's prophecy could have been literally fulfilled in time and space.

If there is no clear-cut and full historical fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, one must carefully study the "if" and "how" the New Testament interprets them, whether explicitly or implicitly. Jesus Christ's teaching must be taken as the key interpretative factor, and the New Testament inspired writers as the best expositors of different Old Testament predictions. Our basic hermeneutical principle in studying them is that the New Testament removes the geographical and ethnic restrictions of Old Testament prophecies while maintaining the Middle East imagery.<sup>40</sup> One needs to scrutinize the possibility of the prophecies having any christological (Christ-centered), ecclesiological (church-centered), and/or eschatological (end-time-centered) fulfillment. It means that in our study, we need to principle the prophecy concerning Gog and Magog and then relate it to Christ, His people, and eschatological/apocalyptic time.<sup>41</sup>

The principle thoughts of Ezek 38–39 can be summarized into two points: A) the confederacy of enemies attacks God's people; and B) God intervenes on behalf of His people. This is a pattern which can be seen fulfilled in the life of Jesus Christ, and also in many situations during the church's history. Moreover, one need also to investigate how Ezekiel's predictions are fulfilled in the eschatological-apocalyptic time according to the book of Revelation.

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<sup>40</sup>Hans LaRondelle, "A Plea for a Christ-centered Eschatology," *Ministry*, January 1976, 18–20; idem., *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1983).

<sup>41</sup>About this hermeneutical (typological) principle, see Davidson, "Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy," 183–204; and idem., *In the Footsteps of Joshua* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1995), 24–35. For general rules of interpreting the Bible, see idem., "Biblical Interpretation," in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, Commentary Reference Series, vol. 12 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing, 2000), 58–104.

### 1. Fulfillment in Principle in the Personified Israel<sup>42</sup>— Jesus Christ (Light from the Cross)

The first coming of Jesus Christ inaugurated in His person the eschatological aeon which broke down into our history. From this perspective, the last-day events started with the incarnation and the cross (see Heb 1:1, 2; 9:29; 1 Pet 1:20; 4:7; Acts 2:17; 1 Cor 10:11; 2 Pet 3:3; 1 Tim 4:1; 1 Thess 4:16–17).

The pattern of Gog's prophecy can be seen fulfilled in principle in the life of Jesus Christ who is the Personified Israel or Representative of Israel (see especially Exod 4:22; Hosea 6:1–3; 11:1; Isaiah 41:8–10; 42:1–9; 49:1–7; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12; 61:1–3; compare with Matt 2:15; Acts 8:30–35). "The armies of Gog and Magog" were united to crush Him. Herod and Pilate, although enemies were united in a confederacy in order to put Jesus to death. That conspiracy included the Gentiles and the people of Israel, and thus Jesus Christ went through an universal plot against His person. Acts 4:27 attests the situation in large: "Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed." However, God intervened on behalf of Christ and raised

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<sup>42</sup>On the corporate personality, see studies of Philip Kaufman, "The One and the Many: Corporate Personality," *Worship* 42 (1968): 546–558; C. Lattey, "Vicarious Solidarity in the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 1 (1951): 267–274; J. R. Porter, "Legal Aspects of Corporate Personality," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 361–380; Stanley E. Porter, "Two Myths: Corporate Personality and Language Mentality Determinism," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990): 289–307; H. Wheeler Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); J. W. Rogerson, "Corporate Personality," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 1:1156–1157. For the pitfalls of the concept of corporate personality, see the pertinent study of Richard M. Davidson, "Corporate Solidarity in the Old Testament" (unpublished paper, Andrews University, 1997). Davidson coins the term "Representative Israelite" in his chapter "Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy," 194.

Him up from the dead (Acts 2:24, 32; 3:15, 26; 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30, 34, 37, etc.). His enemies were defeated, and Christ became the Victor.

## **2. Multiple Ecclesiological Fulfillment in Principle**

The Gog's prophecy is also in principle fulfilled in many analogical situations during the church's history. What happened to Jesus Christ is experienced by His people, because what occurred in His life will be tasted by those who faithfully follow Him (Matt 5:10–12; John 15:18–16:2; 1 Pet 1:12–14; 2 Cor 1:5). As He was persecuted, so will be His people; but as He was finally rescued, so will be God's children (Isa 25:9). Moreover, in the light of the New Testament teaching, the church is a Christian Israel, a renewed Israel (Matt 21:43–44; Rom 2:28–29; 9:6–8; 10:12–13; 11:25–27; Gal 3:7–9, 26–29; Eph 3:6–10; 1 Cor 10:32; 1 Pet 2:9), not in the sense of replacement of the historical Israel (a view called supercessionism), but her enlargement (Eph 3:6–10; Rom 11:25–26; 1 Cor 12:12–13).<sup>43</sup> It means that a faithful remnant of historical Israel is enlarged by believing Gentiles who "together with Israel" (Eph 3:6) form one body, the church (1 Cor 12:12–13, 27; Eph 1:22–23; 3:4–12). The church consists of Jews and Gentiles alike who believe in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and have entered into a covenant relationship with the Lord. Consequently, any attack on the church of God, His covenant people, is an attack against God Himself, because Jesus intimately identifies with His followers who share Abraham's faith (Matt 25:40, 45; Luke 10:16; Acts 9:1, 4–6; Zech 2:8). The persecution of the people of God and His intervention on their behalf points to the fulfillment of

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<sup>43</sup>For the enlargement of true Israel by the joining of believing Gentiles, see an excellent study of Jacques B. Doukhan, *Mystery of Israel* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004); idem, *Israel and the Church: Two Voices for the Same God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002). Doukhan profoundly explains the devastating consequences of supercessionist or replacement theory.

Ezekiel's prophecy in principle.<sup>44</sup> In other words, when enemies of God persecute God's faithful followers, the church with whom He closely associates as the Head of that body (Eph 1:22–23; Col 1:18), one encounters the christological-ecclesiological fulfillment of Ezek 38–39, because Gog and Magog take the face of the enemies of Christ and His church.<sup>45</sup>

The spirit of rebellion against God's people can be seen in situations of crisis throughout history. It is sufficient to illustrate the point with a few examples: 1) Nero's persecution of the early church; 2) the dominant medieval church's fighting against the Valdenses, Hussits, or the Reformation; 3) communism's attempts to crush religion and God's followers in many countries. In all of these crucial moments of history, the survival and victory of God's people was unexpected. The conspiracy failed against the faithful followers of God who responded in obedience to Him and His law. During those many perilous situations, one can ultimately recognize God's protective hand on behalf of His people.

Thus, there are multiple pre-fulfillments of Ezek 38–39 during the church's history. When the situation is analogical in principle, one can discern preliminary fulfillment of the prophecy about Gog and Magog. These fulfillments are only partial or typological. In other words, the multiple fulfillments in principle are an anticipation of the complete, or full-fulfillment of the prophecy in the eschatological time when God intervenes in fulness to

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<sup>44</sup>Boersma correctly says that "the one flock, gathered from Israel, from the Jews and from the Gentiles, will be a further fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy" (112).

<sup>45</sup>This activity is a reminder of the antigodly behavior of the little horn of Dan 7–8 who persecutes God's people and fights against the law of God (Dan 7:21, 25; 8:24–25).

It is significant to notice that the New Testament authors apply Ezekiel's prediction of the cleansing of the land of Israel to the church of Christ (Titus 2:14; Eph 5:26; Heb 9:14). See also Boersma, 108–109.

definitely defeat and annihilates all God's enemies under the leadership of Satan. This observation leads us to the eschatological/apocalyptic final or complete fulfillment described in the book of Revelation.<sup>46</sup>

### **The Specific Prophetic-Eschatological/Apocalyptic Fulfillment at the End of Time in two Phases**

The prophecy of Ezek 38–39 has two eschatological-apocalyptic fulfillments—one connected with the second coming of Christ, and another associated with the end of the millennium. We need to ask how the prophecy of Ezekiel is interpreted in Revelation, and where the connections or allusions are mentioned to Gog's prophecy in this apocalyptic book.

#### **A. The Pre-millennial Fulfillment**

The events described in Ezek 38:19–22a find their echo in Rev 6:18–21 where terms like “hailstones,” “fiery wrath,” “plague,” “mountains,” etc., are directly used.<sup>47</sup> Significantly, the new term "Babylon" is employed in this passage for the first time for "Gog and Magog" (Rev 16:19). The great hailstones mentioned in Ezek 38:22a are also referred to in the seventh plague,

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<sup>46</sup>It is highly significant to note that the vocabulary, imagery, concepts, themes, and allusions of the book of Ezekiel are used very often in the book of Revelation even though verses from the book of Ezekiel are not directly quoted in Revelation. Consult Nestle-Aland, *Novum Testamentum Graece* ([Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1979], 764–765); Albert Vanhoye, "L'utilisation du livre d'Ezechiel dans l'Apocalypse," *Biblica* 43, no. 3 (1962): 436–476; C. Mackay, "Ezekiel in the New Testament," *Church Quarterly Review* 162 (January–March 1961): 4–16; and Dieter Säger, ed., *Das Ezechielbuch in der Johannesoffenbarung*, *Biblich-theologische Studien* 76 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2006).

Ellen G. White writes that "in the Revelation all the books of the Bible meet and end" (*The Acts of Apostles* [Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911], 585).

<sup>47</sup>See George Wesley Buchanan, *The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy*, *The Mellen Biblical Commentary: Intertextual* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen Biblical Press, 1993), 440.

when hail weighing about a talent will add to the destruction already wrought (Rev 16:21). The fire may find its counterpart in the "lightening" of Rev 16:18.<sup>48</sup> In Rev 16 the description culminates with the second coming of Christ (the seventh plague). It is important to note that also other New Testament writers portray fearful cataclysmic events with dramatic convulsions of nature that will precede the coming of the Son of Man (Luke 21:25, 26; 2 Thess 1:5–11; 2 Pet 3:10–14).

In Ezekiel God's intervention totally devastates Gog and his allies, however in Rev 16 the seven plagues gradually strike all the wicked. The horizon is broadened so that the final destruction of the wicked will be universal in the seventh plague which depicts the second coming of Jesus Christ during which all the wicked will die (2 Thess 1:7–9; 2:8–10; 2 Pet 3:11–12; Rev 19:20). One can observe that the battle is presented apocalyptically: a major earthquake takes place, the mountains are thrown down (Rev 16:17–21). The people of God do not need to enter into the battle, because panic breaks loose in Gog's army, and they strike each other down. The Lord sends pestilence, hailstones, fire and brimstone. The end of the world's history has arrived.

The battle of Armageddon describes the same situation of the opposition of the wicked to the people of God who behave like Gog and Magog in Ezekiel's prophecy. This analogical situation relates clearly Rev 16 with its seven last plagues to Ezek 38–39. Revelation 16:12 speaks about the great river Euphrates and that its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. The Euphrates was a river in Babylon which flowed from the north.

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<sup>48</sup>See also the description of this situation in a developed imagery described by Ellen G. White in *Great Controversy* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1950), 638.

According to Rev 17:15, water means nations. In the book of Ezekiel, these nations from the north are Gog's allies and the drying up of the water is the occasion of Gog losing his support. They fight against one another according to Ezek 38:21b, and a similar description is provided about the inner fights of the followers of the beast in Rev 17:16. This is a picture of the division and a foreshadowing of Gog's ultimate judgment of destruction and annihilation. A historical type of this occurred when Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 B.C. The judgement is clearly described in the seventh plague, where Babylon is Gog, and chap. 17 depicts the punishment of this great Antichrist's power.

In Rev 19 the prophecy of Ezek 38–39 is applied to the events closely related to the second coming of Christ. In Rev 19:17–18 the imagery and phraseology of Ezek 39:17, 20 about the animal banquet are implemented.<sup>49</sup> The battle is applied to the conflict between the followers of Jesus Christ and their enemies "the beast," "the false prophet," and "the kings of the earth" which are new names for Gog and Magog. The birds are invited to the great supper of God. In Ezek 39 birds eat the defeated forces of Gog and his allies and in Rev 19 birds prey on the beast and the false prophet, who are then thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Rev 19:20). Revelation 19:19 describes the conspiracy of the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies gathered together to make war against Christ and His army, and Revelation 19:20-21 depicts God's intervention and judgment. Imagery of the banquet is crucial to understand and to see the interconnection of this prophecy with other biblical authors.

These new names for Gog and Magog lead into the whole corpus of prophecy about the beast and the false prophet and their interconnection, especially in Rev 13 where the plot to put

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<sup>49</sup>Buchanan, 511.

God's people to death is pictured (Rev 13:15–17). Revelation 14:9 describes the opposing power of the three angels' messages as "the beast and the image of the beast," and Rev 17 presents God's judgment upon Babylon, because Gog here represents those who are engaged in a false system of worship. Thus, John clearly uses the imagery of the prophecy of Ezek 38–39, but exercises different terminology in order not to confuse its reader with the Antichrist powers. Only in Rev 20, in the climactic depiction of the antigodly powers, does he actually employ the terms "Gog and Magog." Since John's readers would have been familiar with this apocalyptic prophecy, he thus reinterprets the account of Ezek 38–39 without distorting the original intent of the prophecy by pointing to an ultimate eschatological/apocalyptic fulfillment.<sup>50</sup>

### **B. The Post-millennial Fulfillment**

In Rev 20:8–10 there is a description of a final, complete, and definitive fulfillment of Ezekiel's prophecy on Gog and his antagonistic forces. The names of Gog and Magog are finally directly employed as a summary description of all the foes of God and His faithful people of all generations of humankind. The consummation depicts the last judgement of God when Satan, the archenemy of God, and all his allies are destroyed, because the devil was the leader of all opposition and stood behind all rebellions against God and His people in all its forms from the very beginning. Gog and Magog in Rev 20 is no longer only a confederacy of one country or a

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<sup>50</sup>For further discussion, see commentaries of David E. Aune, *Revelation 17–22*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 52c (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 1046–1050, 1093–1108; Buchanan, 440, 536–554; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1977), 348–350, 360–367; Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 549–572.

group of several nations, but a symbol for all nations and people of all generations who oppose God. It is a description of a universal picture of God's enemies.

In Rev 20 Gog and Magog fight against the New Jerusalem, whereas in Ezek 38–39 they fight against the "mountains of Israel."<sup>51</sup> But the most important thing is not the city or the mountains, but the people who live there. The emphasis is on the people, the true remnant of God, and the city or the mountains are only the setting or frame of the real content. Gog attacks God's people who are the center of attraction, because they belong to Him.<sup>52</sup> In Ezek 38:12 there is a hint to the city of Jerusalem by the phrase that the enemies are going to attack people "living at the center of the land." Thus the result is that the earthly Jerusalem in Ezek 38–39 is the New Jerusalem in Rev 20.

In Revelation there is a constant play with the symbolism of numbers. The number seven is dominant (seven churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven plagues, etc.). It is interesting that when the numerical value of the Hebrew letters is given to the phrase "Gog and Magog" the result is the number seventy (7 x 10).<sup>53</sup> Seventy is the number of nations in the table of nations of Genesis 10 (the Japhethites are 14 nations; the Hamites form 30 nations, and the Semites 26 nations). Thus, seventy nations is a description of the totality of nations, and in Rev 20 all the wicked people and nations are in final rebellion against God.

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<sup>51</sup>In Ezekiel the term "mountains of Israel" plays an important role. He uses this phrase in a double sense: 1) literal—real mountains; 2) metaphorical—the people of Israel (36:1, 8, 9; 6:2, 8; etc.) Therefore the expression "against the mountains of Israel" and "against Israel" are parallel. This expression is a synecdoche.

<sup>52</sup>Otzen thinks that Ezek 38 and 39 are based on a tradition in which the nations attack Jerusalem (424).

<sup>53</sup>"Gog" (3 + 6 + 3 = 12); "and" (6); "Magog" (40 + 3 + 6 + 3 = 52): 12 + 6 + 52 = 70.

Boersma is right when he states: "Throughout history God will destroy the power of the Antichrist and he will definitely do so during the consummation. Ezekiel's prophecy will not be completely fulfilled until fire descends from heaven to consume the nations from the four corners of the earth, that is, Gog and Magog, Rev. 20:7–10."<sup>54</sup>

Revelation 20 explains Gog and Magog more fully. In Ezekiel Gog and Magog come from the north along with other nations. In Revelation they come from the four corners of the earth. L. Were rightly argues that "the number four is employed in the Scripture for the whole world."<sup>55</sup> It means that the local in Ezekiel is made universal in Revelation. As the second coming of Christ and the final judgment is a cosmic event, so similarly the destruction of Gog's forces at the second coming of Christ and at the end of millennium is universal. In this sense, "the prophecy of Ezek 38–39 does not concern merely the Middle East, but is a prophecy comprehending the *whole* world. All the Hebrew prophets present the *world-wide* scenes of the last days in a Palestinian setting and, . . . the Revelation employs the local scenes of the Old Testament in predicting the world-wide events of the last days."<sup>56</sup> The local stands as a type for the global. After the millennium is the final and complete antitypical fulfillment of the events in Ezek 38–39. Thus, according to Rev. 20:8, Gog and Magog are symbolic names for the hosts of the wicked from the four quarters of the earth who oppose the people of God and God Himself.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Boersma, 124.

<sup>55</sup>Louis F. Were, *The Certainty of the Third Angel's Message* (Berrien Springs, MI: First Impressions, 1979), 207.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup>What is described in Ezekiel and Revelation after Gog's defeat? Ezekiel 40–48 focuses on the temple, whose Holy of Holies is most probably in the form of a cube (Ezek 41:3–4;

## Conclusion

The definition of Gog and Magog becomes clear: Gog and Magog are not historical names, but a cipher or a code for opposing powers against God, His people, and His law; they are symbolic names for the antagonistic forces of evil. It is a disguise of the Antichrist in a large sense, an archenemy of God and His faithful followers.

It is evident that John is deliberately interpreting Ezekiel's prophecy. He uses the phrase "Gog and Magog" at the culmination point of his book as the cryptic description of all the wicked, unbelieving people of all generations from Adam to the second coming of Christ who stubbornly rebel against God and His values.

After the cross, the central point in salvation history, the prophecy about Gog and Magog is not a literal war in Palestine against historical Israel as a nation, but it is an attitude of opposition against God and His people, the church at the end time. In light of the New Testament: 1) Yahweh is Christ (a christological fulfillment); 2) Israel is the church of God, i.e., the believers, the people of God which consist of believing Jews and Gentiles in Jesus Christ

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compare with 1 Kgs 6:20), and in Rev 21–22 the emphasis is on the New Jerusalem, which may be also in the form of a cube (Rev 20:16). John does not see the temple in the New Jerusalem (Rev 20:22), because the whole city is the temple. The local temple of Ezekiel's vision is made universal in the book of Revelation (see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004], 23–26). In both cases, it is underlined that God dwells among his people! The last sentence of Ezekiel's prophecy ends: "The Lord is there" (48:35) and Rev 21:3 affirms: "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." Thus, it is significant that both biblical books end with the Gog's battle, the vision about the New Jerusalem/Temple and the Presence of God.

See also George R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation*, New Century Bible New Series (London: Oliphants, 1974), 297; and George B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* Harper's New Testament Commentaries (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), 256.

(Rom 9:6–8; Gal 3:28–29; 1 Pet 2:9) and the enemies of Israel become the enemies of the church (the ecclesiological fulfillment); 3) the Holy Spirit filled the believers in Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Ezek 39:29 (see Acts 2-4 - this fuller acceptance of the Holy Spirit was possible only after the cross [John 7:39] - the pneumatological fulfillment); and finally, 4) the eschatological/apocalyptic fulfillment in two phases will be fulfilled in relationship to God's faithful remnant.<sup>58</sup>

Gog's prophecy is rooted in earlier prophecies in the Old Testament and goes throughout the major themes in Revelation. It is one evil power in principle but manifested historically on many occasions, in various characters, figures, and symbols. Antiochus Epiphanes IV is only a type of a further and larger fulfillment in history in an antitype. From the time of Jesus, who tasted the full attack of Gog and Magog forces in principle as the Representative of Israel, this antigodly power was growing in intensity and also in magnitude. Throughout history by analogy of situation one can discern the Antichrist's power at work (from Nero's persecution, through different attacks on the faithful followers of God by the inquisition, to the atheistic and communist persecution, Christian and Islamic extremism, and religious terrorism).<sup>59</sup> It expands more and more until it ripens, so that this ever-growing power is seen all over the world at the

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<sup>58</sup>See also Boersma, 112: "This prophecy is not completely fulfilled with the return from exile." It includes also our deliverance from sin, the great redemptive work of Christ. "This is evident both from Titus 2:14, which applies Ezekiel's prophecy to the New Testament church, and from Ezekiel 37:24–8: 'My servant David shall be king over them; and they shall all have one shepherd.' Here we have a picture of Jesus Christ, the great David, who gathers the sheep. As He Himself said, 'I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd' (John 10:16)."

<sup>59</sup>Greig correctly says that "atheistic communism could well find a place among this depiction of the enemies of God, but it is the referent of a symbol much more encompassing than communism itself" (14–15).

end of the world's history. There are institutions, nations, communities, denominations, societies, regimes, atheism, capitalism, materialism, spiritualism, and other kinds of isms which may stand in opposition against God and His people; and in this case, it is a situation where the principles of Gog's prophecy apply. This application in principle does not preclude a particular apocalyptic fulfillment at the end of time; on the contrary, it leads to it. Thus Gog and Magog is a Babylon, who opposes God's people; it is the Antichrist in principle whose activities and spirit appear throughout history, but will be finally defeated during the final consummation of time (see figure 1).<sup>60</sup>

The names "Gog and Magog" are not names of an individual, group of people, or a single nation but symbols under which God's hostile forces are masking. It seems that the prophecy of Ezek 38-39 was meant to be primarily typological in nature: Gog being a type of the enemy of God and His faithful. Symbols here are ingrained in history, because symbols point to a historical reality of a higher level. With the passage of time Gog becomes a symbol for the whole rebellious world. This is done in progression and involves a long growing development. Thus our hermeneutical principle is of multiple fulfillment in principle by way of type and antitype. It is a complex typological structure (see figure 2).

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<sup>60</sup>In the book of Revelation, Gog and Magog is a false apostate religious system in all forms which persecutes those who believe or think differently. It is a system which fights against God's law, is proud, and uses state power to enforce a wrong religion. This system is described in the book of Revelation under different symbolic names, prominently under Babylon. Babylon is everywhere where people try to be saved and reach heaven by their own works, achievements, obedience, or performance (Gen 11:4; Dan 1:1-2; 7:25; 8:11-12; Rev 17:1-6; 18:7).

Figure 1

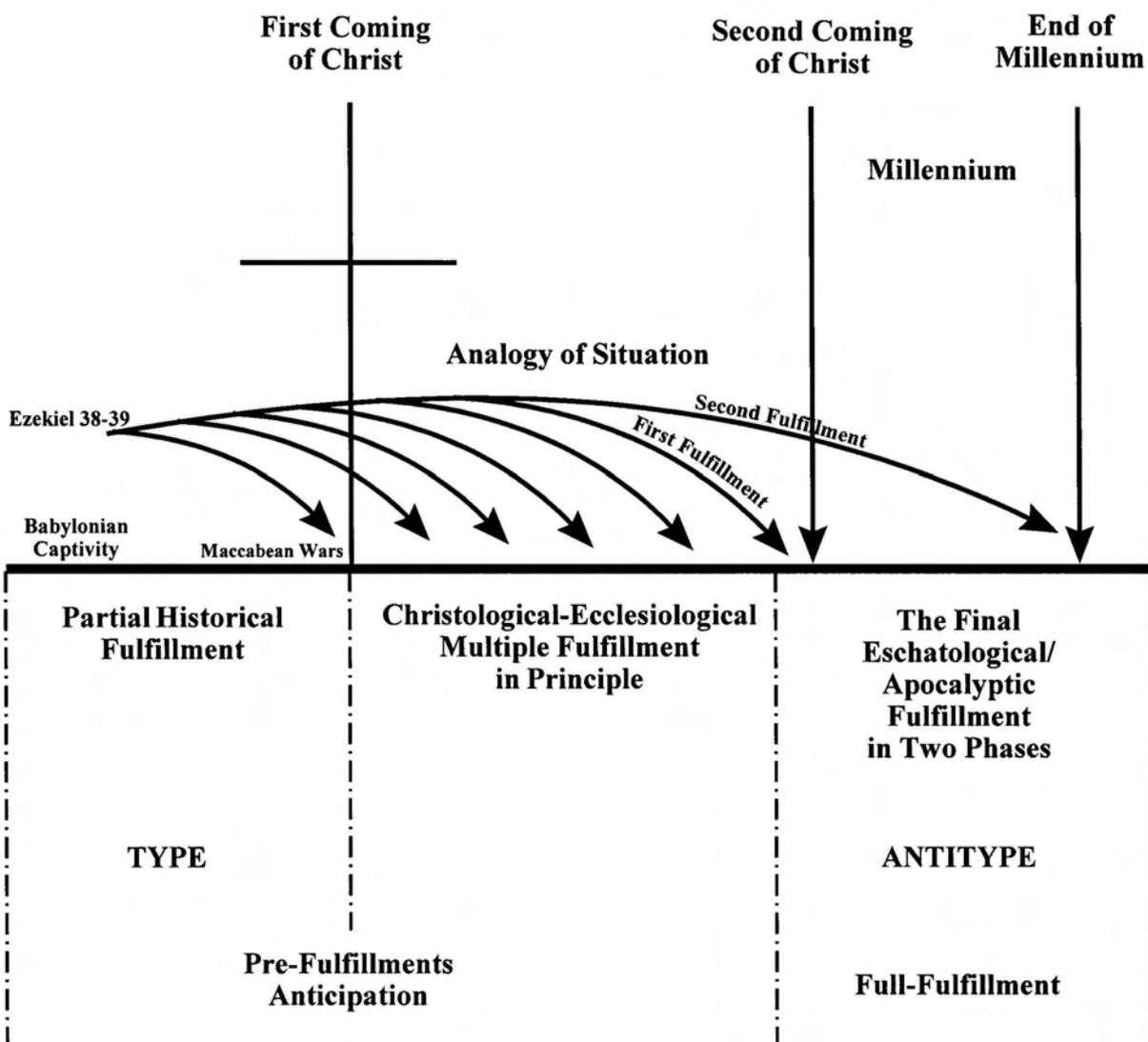




Figure 2 depicts the enlargement and growth of the Antichrist power which was manifested in the opposition of Antiochus Epiphanes IV who was with its historical pre-fulfilment of Ezek 38-39 a type for an antitype: the little horn of Dan 7–8, the beast of Rev 13, and Babylon. The apostasy and enmity grows and culminates in the whole last generation at the second coming of Christ, and finally climax after the millennium with the rebellion of all the wicked generations of all ages against God and His followers securely living in the New Jerusalem. Thus in the light of Rev 20, “Gog and Magog” in the time of the last judgment is a symbol of all generations of the wicked, the unrepentant.

Evil in the world grows and matures, so finally the whole last generation with the various kinds of isms will represent Gog and Magog (= spiritual Babylon), and will attack God's people before the second coming of Jesus Christ (the battle of Harmageddon). This situation will be repeated in its fullest sense at the end of the millennium, but this time with the wicked from all generations. Revelation 20 describes under Gog and Magog the unsaved of all generations who attack God's faithful followers.

Ezekiel prophecy with its fulfillment described in the book of Revelation fits perfectly within the context of the great controversy between Christ and Satan. There is one war with many battles. This one universal war is represented by many symbols, and one of them is Gog and Magog. All these different symbols form together an eloquent mosaic of the wholistic picture.

Those who totally unite with Christ, the Victor of the ultimate war, will be also victorious (Rev 17:14). God's love, truth and justice will finally triumph, and also everyone who is transformed by God's love; they will overcome evil in all its forms. This war between Christ

and Satan is a matter of life and death. Jesus will win the whole war, because He has already won the central battle of that war at the cross. We can be on the winning side if we choose Him (Rev 3:20–21; 12:10–12; 16:15).<sup>61</sup>

Ezekiel 38–39 is a message of hope; it is the Gospel in the midst of judgment about God who will finally destroy all who destroy qualities of life. He is the Sovereign Ruler and in control of history. This prophecy is a good news about God's victory and the victory of His people with Him. Victory is unshakable which does depend on Him, not on us humans! He will accomplish His purposes. He will intervene in human history on behalf of His people at the apocalyptic time of the end. When God's victory will be complete then every knee will go down before God and acknowledge that His judgments are just (Phil 2:10–11; Rev 15:3–4).

Thus, the main tone of Ezekiel's prophecy is comforting. "It reveals clearly to us Christians how strong are the principalities and powers that would overthrow us. Yet this fact should not cause us discouragement, since the greatness of our foes only serves to reveal to us

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<sup>61</sup>See George E. Vandeman, *Showdown in the Middle East* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1980), 16.

Today Satan makes an effort to mislead believers regarding the true nature of prophecy. In our days, his plans are the same as they were when Jesus came into the world for the first time. At that time, Satan presented Jesus as a political Messiah, and thus he misled the people from essential spiritual truth into political events, selfish ambitions, and their own interests. This kind of seduction is also present in our time with Satan making an effort to mislead people to interpret Ezekiel's prophecy about Gog and Magog as political events in Palestine: as the war between West and East, as God's judgment upon Russia and its allies. Such a view is very common and popular among today's Christians (especially among the dispensationalists) and politicians, but it leads to a cheap religious sensationalism and not to Christ.

again how much greater our God is."<sup>62</sup> This prophecy demonstrates God's wonderful love and care for His people as well as His sovereignty, victory, greatness, and power.

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<sup>62</sup>Edward J. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977), 247.