

How to Interpret the Bible Correctly: Ezekiel 36-39 & Understanding the Fight for Jerusalem

When Jesus told His disciples and us about the future he built every word of it around one city on earth named Jerusalem (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). Jesus framed His words about the rest of the history of this planet by the sight of Jerusalem in all its earthly glory spread out in front of Him. Jerusalem is the trigger that will set off the grand finale for planet earth.

Jerusalem is the Trigger

Twenty-six hundred years ago God foretold that the fate of the entire planet earth would hinge upon one city.

The Fight for Jerusalem, and all the events leading up to that fight, is the spot in the news that you should keep your eyes riveted—if you want to know what God has planned for this world.

“No city has been coveted and fought over as much as Jerusalem, the City of Peace. Babylonians, Macedonians, Ptolemies, Selucids, Romans, Byzantines, Persians, Arabs, Seljuks, Crusaders, Mongols, Mamelukes, Turks, British and Jordanians are only some of the conquerors whose names have fluttered across the pages of its bloody and anguished past. Jerusalem is a sacred city - a city that has played a role in history out of all proportion to its economic importance or size!”¹

Here, briefly, are the periods² In Jerusalem's fascinating history so far. Then we will look at what may soon be in the world's headline news reports.

PERIOD-1: FIRST TEMPLE PERIOD FROM 1000 B.C.-586 B.C.

PERIOD-2: THE SECOND TEMPLE FROM 538 B.C. TO A.D. 70

¹ This is Jerusalem, Bishko.

² Parts of the following adapted from Lutzer, God and the City, p. 27-31.

PERIOD-3: GENTILE PERIOD FROM A.D. 70 TO 1948

Remember what Jesus said about these times in which we live, that He called the “times of the Gentiles”?

Luke 21:24 (NKJV) And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until **the times of the Gentiles** are fulfilled.

What have these “times of the Gentiles” looked like? Let's take a tour of this Gentile period noting the different eras that span nineteen centuries.

1. The **ROMAN PERIOD** (AD 70 - 33) The Romans brought their own people to repopulate the city.
2. The **BYZANTINE PERIOD** (330 - 638) This is the period after Constantine.
3. The **FIRST MUSLIM PERIOD** (638 - 1099) Mohammed began the religion of Islam and conquered the city of Jerusalem with the sword.
4. The **CRUSADER PERIOD** (1099 - 1187) Pope Urban 2 issued a decree saying that anyone who was willing to go to the holy land to liberate it from the Muslims would be forgiven all sins, and if unable to go, the same benefits would extend to those who contributed financially to send a substitute
5. The **LATER MUSLIM PERIOD** (1187 - 1517) Once again, the Muslims dominated the land of Israel for four long centuries.
6. The **TURKISH PERIOD** (1517 - 1917) The Ottoman Turks defeated the Muslims, and Suleiman ruled from Constantinople over the Eastern wing of the Roman Empire. Under his reign, the present walls of the city of Jerusalem were built nearly four hundred years ago.
7. The **BRITISH PERIOD** (1917 - 1948) The British asked the United Nations to resolve the conflict surrounding the city and the land was given to the Jews in 1948. Jerusalem was divided up into four sectors - Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Armenian.
8. **Current period from A.D. 1948 to the Tribulation.** But in the war of 1967, the city fell to Israeli hands and the territory all the way to the Jordan River (known

as the West Bank) became a part of the Israeli state. Many people believe that this ended the domination of the Gentiles which Christ spoke about. 'Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled (Luke 21:24). This explains why some people think that Christ's return may be near.

PERIOD-4: TRIBULATION PERIOD JERUSALEM.

The fourth period is still future. The battle of Armageddon will spill over to Jerusalem.

Zechariah writes, 'For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished, and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city' (Zechariah 14:2).

This then marks the great sorrow that will yet come to the city of Jerusalem as all the nations of the earth turn against the Jews.

"Then the Lord will go forth and fight against those nations as when He fights on the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem..." (14:3,4).

Christ will come and defend His people; the Jews living at that time will look upon their Redeemer and recognize Him to be the Christ, the Son of the living God.

But before the Tribulation, something else must happen during the "times of the Gentiles". That is what we are seeing happening all around us in the world events touching upon the Nation of Israel. Please turn back to Ezekiel 36 with me to see:

2600 Years of Dry Bones

Ezekiel Chapter 36-37 describes the scattered Israelites as a pile of bones—dry and dead.

To start with—for all the centuries since Ezekiel penned God's Word (623-560 BC) there was no regathered nation called Israel as is seen coming back in Ezekiel 36-37.

And so, there was no Israel to be the target of the coalition of Islamic nations and Russia, from the time Ezekiel wrote (about 600 B.C.) until 1948. So simply stated, for 2,600 years—there was no nation of Israel for any nation to militarily attack!

That is the basic history of Israel from the Babylonian siege and destruction 605-586 BC to the rebirth of Israel in 1948 AD. No national sovereignty, always an occupied land under domination of one world power after another.

Then God Begins to Regather Israel

Then the Lord describes how He sends forth a call, stirring the hearts of scattered Jewish people all over the world; then He describes their slow return back to the geographic area now called Israel; then He pictures their rebirth as a sovereign nation called Israel, and finally He says that they will form an exceedingly great army.

Century after century of Bible teachers looked at these two chapters as so remote, so vague, and thus so impossible to be talking about a literal event. This is especially true if you have been taught that God is through with Israel, and replaced them with the Church.

But then starting in the late 1800's people started talking about making a place for Jews to again live. The Scriptures slumbered along as God watched over His Word to perform it. Slowly it seems that Ezekiel 36-37 began to appear. And point by point, each of the details that Ezekiel saw in the distant past over 2,600 years ago fell into reality. We have actually witness in the last century what no one can deny as being the rebirth of the nation of Israel.

This series of events is then followed by Ezekiel's chapters 38-39 describing a war where a coalition of Islamic Nations led by Iran (all precisely described) join with Russia (also clearly defined) in a huge conflict that some Bible scholars have called the war of Gog and Magog.

The Miracle of the Rebirth of Israel

After Ezekiel's bones grew into a living breathing nation, God continued to watch over His Word and because Hitler struck with such savagery and incomprehensible carnage that the world was moved to do something. In 1948 the nations of the world united in the form of the UN, and voted to establish a homeland, a nation that was named Israel.

In a short period of time-there was a nation called Israel that could be attacked militarily.

But then 50-plus years passed and Iran never seemed to join Russia in any way to march against Israel--until the last few years. Again the God who watches over His Word was waiting and directing the rulers of this world to do His bidding. Now there is hardly any day of a month that doesn't have some news item about Iran threatening Israel's

annihilation. Either through proxies like Syria, Hizbolah, the Muslim Brotherhood, or directly with missiles, drones, or the hurried rush to nuclear weapons.

God has already described in detail what will happen in the future. Every time what He has declared will happen—happens, it is literally just what He said. But when examined closely, those involved make their own decisions and have no intention or awareness of following God's plan!

We live in the most written about period of time, from God's perspective. Fully 20% of the Bible is consumed with describing the events that God calls the end of days. These end of days events are more described and detailed for us—than even the days when Christ walked the shores of Galilee.

The end times Biblical prophecies that are powerful pictures of God's Rule over the Nations are many, here are just a few:

Trust The God Who Promised Israel Would Return

In Ezekiel 36-37 the God who rules tells us that Israel will one day be reborn as a modern country, that Jews will pour back into the Holy Land after centuries of exile, that Jews will rebuild the "ancient ruins" and make the deserts bloom, that Israel will develop a vast and powerful military, and that Israel will become remarkably wealthy (Ezekiel 38:12-13).

These prophecies have all come true in our lifetime. They began to be fulfilled in the early 1900s, accelerated in 1948 and 1967, and continue to come true to this day.³

Did the British politicians and early Zionists that fought for the establishment of the nation of Israel do all that because they wanted to or because God ruled over them?

Both are true, of course. That is how God works. God was watching over His Word to fulfill it! To benefit from the power of the God who rules, we are asked to see what He has done.

Note with me the predictions found in Ezekiel 36-37 that have already come true. These are the famous prophetic chapters that foretell the future of Israel as a nation, that were written almost 600 years before Christ's birth!

Promise-1: The Return Of The Jews After Centuries In Exile.

Ezekiel 36:10-11 (NKJV) "I will multiply men upon you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and

³ Paraphrased from Joel Rosenburg blog 5.5.05 <http://joelrosenberg.blogspot.com/>

*the cities shall be inhabited and **the ruins rebuilt**. 11 “I will multiply upon you man and beast; and they shall increase and bear young; I will make you inhabited as in former times, and do better for you than at your beginnings. Then you shall know that I am the Lord.*

*Ezekiel 37:12, 21-22 (NKJV) “Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Behold, O My people, **I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves**, and bring you into the land of Israel. 21 “Then say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: “Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will **gather them from every side** and bring them into their own land; 22 and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again.*

*Ezekiel 38:8 After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, **which had long been desolate**; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely.*

*Jeremiah 31:7-10 For thus says the Lord: “Sing with gladness for Jacob, And shout among the chief of the nations; Proclaim, give praise, and say, ‘O Lord, save Your people, The remnant of Israel!’ 8 Behold, I will **bring them from the north country**, And gather them **from the ends of the earth**, Among them the blind and the lame, The woman with child And the one who labors with child, together; A great throng shall return there. 9 They shall come with weeping, And with supplications I will lead them. I will cause them to walk by the rivers of waters, In a straight way in which they shall not stumble; For I am a Father to Israel, And Ephraim is My firstborn. 10 “Hear the word of the Lord, O nations, And declare it in the isles afar off, and say, ‘**He who scattered Israel will gather him, And keep him as a shepherd does his flock.**’*

Jesus Promised the Times of the Gentiles

The bottom line is that Jesus told us that when He returns, there will already have been a return of the wanderings Jews, back to their homeland. This jumps out clearly when we notice the “orientation” of Christ's words in Matthew 24:15-16:

“Therefore when you see the ‘abomination of desolation,’ spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place” (whoever reads, let him understand), 16 “then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.

Since 1948 the world has witnessed the call of God deep within the hearts of 6.4 million Jews who have done everything they could to get to the Promised Land. And more arrive each day!

What is one of the greatest signs of God's Word being true? God predicted over and over again the preservation of His people the Jews. And He especially tells us about their return to their land. We hear that but have you thought about how amazing it really is?

Did the countless thousands of Jews all over the world (100 nations and counting) get up one morning and each decide to obey God's Word that said they would return? No they just had a longing to be safe, to be free, to have a land of their own—and in all that they obeyed the God who rules over the nations by watching over His Word to fulfill it!

Promise-2: The Rebuilding Of The Ancient Ruins In Israel.

Ezekiel 36:36 (NKJV) Then the nations which are left all around you shall know that I, the Lord, **have rebuilt the ruined places** and planted what was desolate. I, the Lord, have spoken it, and I will do it.”

Did God make the early settlers name their cities after the Biblical sites they were building upon? No, they wanted to tie themselves to the past, their heritage and God's Word!

God was watching over His Word to fulfill it!

Promise-3: The Re-Blossoming Of Desolate, Desert Lands To Produce Abundant Food, Fruit And Foliage

Ezekiel 36:8-9, 30 (NKJV) But you, O mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel, for they are about to come. 9 For indeed I am for you, and I will turn to you, and you shall be tilled and sown. 30 And I will multiply the fruit of your trees and the increase of your fields, so that you need never again bear the reproach of famine among the nations.

Israel supplies billions of dollars of fresh fruit and flowers to Europe and the Arab world from land that was once absolutely desolate.

Did those agricultural engineers, irrigation pioneers, and desert scientists devote their lives to Israel in its wasteland condition just to make Ezekiel come true? No.

God was watching over His Word to fulfill it!

Promise-4: The Creation Of An "Exceedingly Great Army".

Ezekiel 37:10 So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.

Did the atomic scientists, the military weapons engineers that have devised nuclear weapons, the neutron bomb, and finest and only 99% accurate anti-missile defense system in the world called Iron Dome do all that to obey Ezekiel?

No, they were trying to protect themselves, defend themselves and make a living. But in the process became the third or fourth most powerful military in the world when the atomic weaponry is factored in.

God was watching over His Word to fulfill it!

Trust The God Who Describes Russia As The Leader Of The Anti-Israeli Coalition Described In Ezekiel 38-39

Twenty six hundred years ago, the prophet Ezekiel predicted clues to identify when this would happen,

Ezekiel 38:8 (NKJV) After many days you will be visited. In the latter years you will come into the land of those brought back from the sword and gathered from many people on the mountains of Israel, which had long been desolate; they were brought out of the nations, and now all of them dwell safely.

Note this would happen in “the latter years” after the Israelites were scattered throughout the world and the land of Israel became a desolation for a long time. History is witness to all of this. But who does God predict will come against Israel?

Who Is Coming Against Israel?

In Ezekiel 38:1-6, the Hebrew prophet gives a list of obscure names that will form a united coalition. After I read these six verses listen to the historic records, geographic locations, and modern day countries that reside in those exact places described—and how they are all slowly aligning themselves against Israel.

Ezekiel 38:1-6 Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, 2 “Son of man, set your

face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him,³ "and say, "Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.⁴ "I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and lead you out, with all your army, horses, and horsemen, all splendidly clothed, a great company with bucklers and shields, all of them handling swords.⁵ "Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet;⁶ "Gomer and all its troops; the house of Togarmah from the far north and all its troops—many people are with you.

Now listen⁴ to how the historic records, geographic locations, and modern day countries that reside in those exact places described—and how they are all slowly aligning themselves against Israel.

1. Gog is described as being "of the land of Magog" and as the "prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal." Most Bible scholars believe Gog is not a name but a title, like Pharaoh or Czar. He is a dictator who will hatch an "evil plan" (38:10).
2. Magog according to the first century historian Josephus wrote in his classic work, *Antiquities of the Jews*, that the "Magogites" are the people that the Greeks refer to as "Scythians." Study the history of the ancient Scythians⁵ and you will quickly discover that these were a brutal and bloodthirsty people that settled north of the Black Sea in the area we now call Russia and the former Soviet republics.

In Moscow the State Historical Museum on Red Square has numerous Scythian artifacts prominently displayed. Russia is proud of its Scythian tradition, and this helps us pinpoint Russia as the modern country to which Ezekiel was referring.

3. Rosh = Russia. True, Ezekiel never uses the word Russia. Instead, he says a dictator referred to as "Gog" will arise in the land of "Magog," and will be the "prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal."

Other Bible scholars note that when Ezekiel mentions "Rosh" he is using the root word for Russia. Others believe "Meshech" refers to Moscow and "Tubal" refers to the Tubal River in Siberia and the Siberian city of Tobolsk.

Numerous leading Bible scholars agree that Russia will certainly be the leader of the anti-Israel coalition in what Ezekiel describes as "the last days."

4. Meshech = Some Bible scholars say this is Moscow, others believe it refers to

⁴ Special Report: Russia, Iran and Bible Prophecy Friday, April 25, 2008 By Joel C. Rosenberg

⁵ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scythian>

Turkey

5. Tubal = Some Bible scholars say this refers to the city/region of Tobolsk in Russia along the Tobol River; others say it refers to a section of modern-day Turkey. (Interestingly, in 1964, massive reserves of oil and gas were discovered in the Tobolsk region of Siberia and people now refer to the region as the "[energy center of Russia.](#)")
6. Persia = This was the [official name of Iran](#) until 1935
7. Cush = Sudan and Ethiopia
8. Put = Libya, and possibly Algeria and Tunisia
9. Gomer = Turkey, but also possibly Germany and Austria
10. Beth-togarmah = Armenia and the Turkic-speaking peoples of Central Asia
11. "Many peoples with you" who will attack along "the mountains of Israel" = Other countries will be involved in the coalition as well, notably countries that border the mountains of Israel. This includes Lebanon, Syria and possibly Jordan.

Trust The God Who Declares The Destruction Of The Entire Russian, Iranian, Syria, Lebanese And Other Islamic Military Forces Will Come "Like A Storm" Against Israel

Ezekiel 38:5,9, 18-22 "Persia, Ethiopia, and Libya are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; 9 "You will ascend, coming like a storm, covering the land like a cloud, you and all your troops and many peoples with you." 18 "And it will come to pass at the same time, when Gog comes against the land of Israel," says the Lord God, "that My fury will show in My face. 19 "For in My jealousy and in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: 'Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel,20 'so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that creep on the earth, and all men who are on the face of the earth shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground.'21 "I will call for a sword against Gog throughout all My mountains," says the Lord God. "Every man's sword will be against his brother.22 "And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.

God was watching over His Word to fulfill it!

There is an event coming on the horizon that could make a way for the Jews to build their temple in Jerusalem. If a coalition of Moslems and Arabs joined the Russians in attacking Israel. And if that attack was repulsed in such a devastating way that 80% of the armies were destroyed, Israel would be confident enough to start to rebuild. This morning we need to examine Ezekiel's report of a future battle on the hills of Israel. Some say it is at the end of the Millennium, others at the end of the Tribulation. But, what if it happened sooner? There is really no reason that Russia couldn't invade as soon as today!

There have been few times God has directly intervened in human history. This morning we are going to study one of the more dramatic moments in human history. The great northern confederacy is poised to strike. The tiny and totally surrounded target is Israel. The entire world (UN General Assembly) is united against this little nation. The armies of the Moslem and Russian lands are united and the goal is annihilation!

First, whom are we really talking about in modern terms? If you took some time to read the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, there would be a name that would catch your attention. It is a name we hear about in Revelation and Ezekiel, it is Magog. As long ago as the 7th Century BC there were writers who called Magog after identifiable names. In the writings of a Greek named Hesiod Magog is called by the tribal name of Scythians who lived in what is now southern Russia. Hesiod actually lived at the same time as our prophet in God's Word called Ezekiel.

By the 5th Century another Greek historian by the name of Herodotus (now known as the Father of History) wrote of the Magog dwellers as Scythians, which was their name in Greek. This is even what a Jewish historian we remember as Flavius Josephus also called them. So in the 1st Century, the times of the New Testament, people identified Magog with the southern part of modern Russia.

These tribes known as Scythians were fierce warriors who lived the life of nomadic raiders. They are remembered as incredible horsemen who could ride at a gallop, shooting their bows at enemies pursuing them, with hairbreadth accuracy. As hunters their reputation was that they could shoot a bird in flight from their horses at a full gallop, either right or left handed. By the 8th Century their conquests extended to China where the Great Wall was referred to as the "Rampart of Gog and Magog".

Well, who does God say will come against His chosen people? Listen to the list in Ezekiel 38:5-6. It is actually quite amazing, almost like this mornings newspaper. Here are the players in one of the greatest conflicts of all time:

- PERSIA or Iran as we call it today. In the Bible this is the family of Elam, the first born of Shem. Remember that Abraham comes through the third born son (Genesis 10:22) Arphaxad, not Elam.
- CUSH this is modern black Africa which originated in the ancient world between the 2nd and 3rd cataracts of the Nile.
- PUT or what we call today North Africa comes through this third son of Ham. Modern Libya used to be called the Putites. This would include the Algerians, Tunisians, Moroccans and Mauritians.
- GOMER or the Cimmerians are easily identified by looking at the Babylonians Talmud (written during the exile of the Jews to Babylon and then Persia in Daniel's time and after) where they are called Germania, or Germany. These tribes settled and flourished between the Rhine and Danube River Valleys.
- TOGARMAH is the next group and these are the tribes of Turkey namely modern Armenia and Turkey.
- MESHECH is the 6th son of Japheth (Genesis 10:2). Assyrian inscriptions locate this group as dwelling in Phrygia and Anatolia (which is modern Turkey). Herodotus the Greek historian calls these same tribes the Mushki, and says they came down from the Black Sea mountains which is NE of Turkey. Josephus in the 1st Century says that Meshech dwells in Eastern Turkey.
- TUBAL is the 5th son of Japheth whose descendents migrated to the same general area. In the war records of the Assyrians these tribes are called Tibareni and Moschi and locate them on the SE shores of the Black Sea. Again all in southern modern day Russia.
- SHEBA and DEDAN are the grandsons of Abraham in Genesis 25:2 by his 3rd wife Keturah. These are not from Ishmael but a separate line. These may be the classic Arabic desert dwellers. They are seen in Ezekiel 38:13 as watching from the sidelines.
- TARSHISH was the grandson of Japhath, the 2nd son of Javan Genesis 10:2 the father of Greece.

What happens?

Note the details of Ezekiel 39

The weapons burn for 7 years? (39:9-10) that is the usable life of atomic weapons. There are atomic sites all over Israel that could use this material!

The burial takes 7 months (39:11-16) and is down wind east of the Dead Sea? Sounds like quarantine, hazardous cleanup and radioactive contamination procedures!

There are three lines of interpretation for when this battle takes place:

1. After the Millennium (this is the Revelation 20 battle).
2. Part of Armageddon (this is the Daniel 11 battle).
3. Or before the 70th week of Daniel 9:27.

The condition is 'dwelling securely' which is used 160 times in the Old Testament (Heb. Word betach) and means peace of mind 130 times.