

THE INVASION AND DEFEAT OF GOG AND MAGOG

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There are at least eight views as to the time of the future invasion described in [Ezekiel] chapters 38 and 39.

1. The invasion is only symbolic of the attempts of evil forces to overcome God's people. It does not describe a real battle, but, in the language of warfare, pictures the triumph of good over evil, the forces of God over those of Satan. The amount of detail and specific references to places and times in this prophecy argue against this view.
2. It will occur before the future seven-year Tribulation, either before the Rapture, or at the time of the Rapture, or just after the Rapture. But the prophecy sets the time of this invasion after God has restored Israel to her land (cf. 38:8, 16). This cannot refer to the present return of many Jews to the modern State of Israel, because Ezekiel 36:26-28 and 39:26-29 indicate that Israel's restoration will involve widespread spiritual regeneration as well as physical return.
3. It will happen during the Tribulation (cf. Dan. 11:40-41; Rev. 14:14-20). For three and a half years Antichrist will encourage the Jews to return to Palestine, but then he will break his covenant with them and begin to attack them (Matt. 24:15-22; Dan. 9:27; 11:40-41). Thus Israel will enjoy a period of peace in the Tribulation. It is during the first half of the Tribulation, toward its end, that advocates of this view place the fulfillment of this prophecy.

Ezekiel 39:7 says that following this battle the Lord's name will be profaned no longer, but during the second half of the Tribulation it will be profaned (cf. Rev. 13; 16:9, 11, 21). It also seems unlikely, in view of the timeframe, that the Jews could bury corpses for seven months, and burn weapons as fuel for seven years, following an invasion in the middle of the seven-year Tribulation. The last half of the Tribulation will involve unparalleled persecution for the Jews (Dan. 9:27).

4. It will take place at the end of the seven-year Tribulation (the battle of Armageddon; cf. Zech. 12; 14:1-4; Rev. 19:11-21).² Some advocates equate Gog with the king of the North (Dan. 11:40).³ Some of Ezekiel's descriptions of Gog's invasion recur in Revelation 19:17-21, which describes the end of the Tribulation. However other aspects appear in Revelation 20:7-10, which describes the end of the Millennium. Israel is dwelling securely in the land when Gog invades, but at the end of the Tribulation Israel will have been under intense attack for three and a half years (Dan. 9:27).
5. It will happen between the end of the Tribulation and the beginning of the Millennium. Since Jesus Christ's return to the earth will end the Tribulation and begin the Millennium, it does not seem that there will be enough time for the invasion of Gog and its consequences then (cf. 39:1-16; Matt. 13:41). Furthermore some of the allusions to this invasion in Revelation suggest a time at the end of the Millennium (Rev. 20:7-10).
6. It will happen at the beginning of the Millennium. This seems highly unlikely since all who enter the Millennium will be believers who have assisted the Jews during the Tribulation (Matt. 25:31-46). Moreover all weapons of war will be destroyed at the beginning of the Millennium (Mic. 4:1-4).
7. It will occur at the end of the Millennium. Revelation 20:8



refers specifically to Gog and Magog in a context describing the end of the Millennium. Israel dwelling in safety in her land, the situation described repeatedly in Ezekiel 33—39, fits conditions at the end of the Millennium. Rabbinic writers identified Gog and Magog as the final enemy that will attack Israel in the messianic age.

Critics of this view say: Why bury the dead for seven months following the battle when the resurrection of the unsaved will follow immediately (cf. Rev. 20:11-13)? This objection assumes that these events will follow one another immediately, but the text does not say so explicitly.

Why would the Israelites burn the weapons for seven years, since it appears that God will create a new earth immediately after He quells the rebellion described in Revelation 20:7-10 (cf. Rev. 21:1-4)? Again, there may be time between these events that the Bible does not reveal anywhere but here. Another problem with this view is the description of the Lord calling the birds to a great feast in Revelation 19:17-21, which occurs at the end of the Tribulation.

8. The best solution seems to me to be a combination of views 4 and 7. Apparently the fulfillment will take place in two phases: first at the end of the Tribulation, and then at the end of the Millennium, when Israel is dwelling securely (cf. Rev. 19:17-21; 20:7-8).³ Ezekiel evidently described the invasion of Israel's enemies into the Promised Land as a single event, but later revelation clarifies that it will happen on two separate occasions.

Part of Ezekiel's prophecy describes one of these invasions, part of it the other, and some of it describes both incidents. Gog, then, does not describe a single individual, but two people, both of whom share similar plans. In the first fulfillment, Gog is the king of the North. In the second, he is the human leader who will lead the rebellion at the end of the Millennium.

It seems unnatural for God to describe as one battle one that will have two parts separated by 1,000 years. And there is certainly no indication in Ezekiel that Gog's invasion will have two phases. However, in view of later clarification in the Book of Revelation, we apparently have another instance of two events widely separated in time viewed by a prophet as one. The prophets' descriptions of the near and far destructions of Babylon (Isa. 21; Jer. 51), the two advents of Messiah (Isa. 61:1-2), and the coming of two persecutors of the Jews (Antiochus Epiphanes and Antichrist; Dan. 11:21-35, 36-44) are other examples of this two stage view of the future.