

Gog and Magog and the camp of the saints

by Douglas E. Cox

Dispensational attempts to interpret Ezekiel's prophecy of the Gog & Magog invasion are a huge embarrassment; for example, the weapons of the invaders, bows and arrows, clubs, spears, javelins, swords, shields, bucklers, etc., are *archaic*. They are made of wood, that is later burned by Israel for fuel, so they no longer need to collect any firewood for 7 years.

The invaders all ride horses, which are very vulnerable to modern weapons such as firearms, bombs, machine guns, etc. There are also logistical problems feeding large herds of horses in regions where fresh water and grass is scarce. And horse populations are quite limited in modern times.

Dispensationalists are stuck with their mantra of literalism, so they have to insist that the weapons and horses in the prophecy are literal, although some like Hal Lindsey have interpreted horses in prophecy as "attack helicopters." What a comedy!

The identity of the nations and lands from where the invaders come, is another embarrassment for the literal interpretation. The countries are located in various directions from the land of Canaan, and at considerable distances. Ezekiel mentioned some nations that existed in ancient times, which have since become extinct. It is ridiculous to claim that Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, Sheba, Dedan, and Tarshish will reappear in modern times. Nations such as Libya and Ethiopia exist today, but with different boundaries than in ancient times. Some dispensationalists (e.g. Bill Salus) have made rash, untenable claims trying to connect the peoples listed with modern countries.

Dispensationalists disagree on the timing of the Gog & Magog invasion. Some say it is at the close of the Millennium (e.g. Fausset), others say it is prior to Christ's second coming (e.g. Gaebelein, Scofield, Walvoord, Showers) Others say there are two different invasions, one described

by Ezekiel, and another by John in Revelation 20!

If the invasion occurs at the end of the Millennium, it turns the alleged thousand years of Christ's kingdom into a disaster, and a *debacle*, as it ends in *rebellion*, and war, and destruction, all of which contradicts Isaiah 2:4 and numerous other prophecies about Christ's kingdom.

If during the alleged Millennium the people have beaten their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks, how do the rebel hordes of Gog and Magog acquire their swords and spears?

The literalist approach to the Gog and Magog prophecy leads to contradictions. In Isa. 2:4, the nations cease to learn war: "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." If, at the end of the alleged thousand years, the nations deceived by Satan join with Gog and Magog in their assault upon the camp of the saints and the beloved city, how can that be reconciled with Isaiah's prophecy?

In Ezek. 38:20 God threatens to shake the whole earth with his presence, and throw down all mountains, pathways, and city walls. This would make little sense, if Christ had already been reigning on the earth for 1,000 years!

If "all the people of the land" were occupied in burying the dead bodies of their foes for seven months, how would they tolerate the stench of the decaying corpses? How could they avoid the spread of disease, or plague?

Ezekiel wrote:

Ezekiel 39:12-16 And seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may cleanse the land. Yea, all the people of the land shall bury them; and it shall be to them a renown the day that I shall be glorified, saith the Lord God. And they shall sever out men of continual employment, passing through the land to bury with the passengers those that remain upon the face of the earth, to cleanse it: after the end of seven months shall they search. And the passengers that pass through the land, when any seeth a man's bone, then shall he set up a sign by it, till the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamongog. And also the name of the city shall be Hamonah. Thus shall they cleanse the land.

Why would the place of burial of the corpses of Gog and Magog be called a city? Why drag corpses from all over the land *into the city* for burial? And the next thing Ezekiel says is:

Ezekiel 39:17 And, thou son of man, thus saith the Lord God; Speak unto every feathered fowl, and to every beast of the field, Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to my sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh, and drink blood.

Evidently the corpses of the invaders are first buried in the valley of Hamongog, and in a city called Hamonah, and then, they are presumably *exhumed*, and carried up upon the mountains of Israel, where the birds are invited to feast on them! Hmm... now that's very strange!

Ezekiel 39:18-20 Ye shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan.

And ye shall eat fat till ye be full, and drink blood till ye be drunken, of my sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you. Thus ye shall be filled at my table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, saith the Lord God.

Chariots too? Really!

Isn't it a bit *late*, to offer the victims as a feast for the birds, *after* the people of the land have collected their corpses for seven months, and buried them? And are they now, after 7 months, going to be exhumed?

The literal reading of Ezekiel's prophecy is *comical* .

Ezekiel wrote, "and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground" [Ezek. 38:20]

In prophecy, mountains are often symbolic of God's promises, and prophecies, and blessings. Jacob referred to mountains when he blessed his son Joseph. He said, "The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren. [Gen. 49:26] Jacob refers to blessings that are both long-lasting, and high, like mountains. That is, they were eternal, spiritual blessings, and promises. A similar blessing was pronounced upon the tribe of Joseph by Moses. [Deut. 33:13-16]

Interpreting Ezekiel spiritually, the invading hordes of God and Magog correspond to the *false teachers* that Peter said would invade the Church, in 2 Peter 2. The literalism mantra is one of their weapons. In Psalm 64:3, the tongue is a sword, and arrows are "bitter words." "Who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words."

The apostle Peter compared the false teachers to animals. He wrote of them:

2 Peter 2:12

But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption.

In Ezekiel 38, the armies of God and Magog all ride upon horses. [vs. 15] The horses are symbolic; in Psa. 32:9, people with no understanding are compared to horses and mules, and in Jeremiah 5:8, carnally minded people are compared to horses: "They were as fed horses in the morning: every one neighed after his neighbour's wife."

These scriptures suggest that the invading hordes of Gog and Magog are *false teachers*, and the horses they ride upon represent *people with no understanding*, who populate many of the churches, and colleges, and other organisations, who wrongly interpret Scripture, and who seek to "take a great spoil," leading others astray from the truth. Interpreted in this manner, the prophecy applies to the history of the Church since the days of the apostles.

The seven months during which the corpses are buried, and the seven years when their weapons are burned as fuel, are each "seven times." They allude, I think, to the fourth and final "seven times" in Lev. 26, when God is reconciled to his people and remembers his covenant, and also the final week in Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy, which spans all the time from the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, to the end of the present age.

The weapons which are burned as fuel are the "bitter words" of false teachers, who invade the Church, and promote their flawed interpretations. Some of these are recorded in the New Testament. The literal approach to Ezekiel's prophecy leads to many absurd, contradictory conclusions. This is a huge embarrassment for all those who are captives and slaves the literal, dispensational approach to prophecy.

Gog and Magog in Revelation 20

Some premillennialists say that the Gog and Magog invasion comes at the end of a thousand year reign of Christ upon the earth. However in Revelation 20, John does not say that *Jesus* reigns for a thousand years; that time period only applies to the saints who have been *beheaded*, who reign with him. "Beheaded" is a spiritual symbol for repentance and submission to Christ and his Word, similar to circumcision. For these saints, Satan is bound in a bottomless pit. The reign of individual believers in this present age is limited; the thousand years of their reign is symbolic; it represents "a foretaste of eternity," and "a day with the Lord," but Jesus reigns in the throne of David, in the heavenly Jerusalem, forever.

The thousand years for which the saints reign with Christ may end prematurely if a believer turns away from the truth, and releases Satan from his prison; such people may be seduced by false doctrines.

People from the four quarters of the earth who are deceived by Satan compass the camp of the saints, and the beloved city. John wrote:

Revelation 20:7-9

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog, and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

The reign of the saints with Christ ends prematurely, when they allow Satan to ascend from his prison and cease to follow Jesus Christ and his word.

The lack of understanding of Millennialists who teach that the Gog Magog event occurs after Christ has reigned upon the earth for a thousand years is evident, as the expression "the camp of the saints" applies to the Church in *the present age*. The term "camp" no longer applies, after the resurrection. The word "camp" depicts the saints in a state of transition, separate from the world, and from the great city, mystical Babylon, which represents the world. They are depicted as living in tents, or temporary dwellings, like the Israelites in the wilderness, who were a *type* of the Church in the present age. So John's reference to "the camp of the saints" depicts the saints in the present age. Just as ancient Israel no longer dwelt in tents after they entered the promised land, the Church can no longer called a "camp" after the resurrection, which is when the saints receive their promised inheritance of immortality, of which the land of Canaan is a type and a shadow.

Puritan leader Richard Baxter (1615-1691) declared that the idea of a future earthly millennium is "a fiction full of contradictions" and is "dishonourable to Christ and his Kingdom." He wrote: [1]

Christ's glorious appearance and judgment will be both the triumphant concluding parts of the kingdom of redemption and grace which he will deliver up when his recovering work is done: and the beginning of the kingdom of glory: in which, as his reward, he will ever in human nature be glorified, as the mediator of fruition, as he was of acquisition, and that in the heavens. His coming in the air is not there to reign a thousand years, but presently to judge the world, as in Matth. 25. he describeth it: and to confine his kingdom in human nature, and ours with him to a thousand years, and confine it to the air, and the survivors on earth, is a fiction full of contradictions, dishonourable to Christ and his Kingdom, uncomfortable to the Church.

He commented on a strange effect that Millennial belief has upon men: [2]

We find it so easy to possess men with a fervent Zeal for the Millenary opinion, and so hard to make them zealous in holy love for God and man, and in a heavenly conversation, as make us suspicious that both sorts of zeal have not the same original: I am not willing to name some tremendous instances of men nearly known to me, hereabout.

Paul said the experience of the Israelites in the wilderness happened "for our examples."

1 Corinthians 10:1-8

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

Paul gave several more examples of God's judgments in the wilderness, and then wrote: "Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." [vs.11-12]

John described the Church in the present age as a woman who flees to the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, and where she is nourished, in Rev. 12:6, and 14. The nourishment alludes to the manna that nourished the Israelites, and to Jesus, who is the true bread from heaven. Jesus said,

John 6:49-51

Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.

In Rev. 12:6, 14 the duration of the Church's sojourn in the wilderness is a symbolic three years and a half, in one case represented by 1,260 days, and in the other by the expression "a time, times and a half."

These both represent "the remaining time of the Church," and the period from Christ's resurrection to the end of the age. They are not a literal three years and a half, but symbolic. The ministry of Jesus was three and a half natural years, and this period together with the symbolic "time, times and a half" makes a "week" in which he confirms the covenant with many. [Dan. 9:27]

References

1. Richard Baxter, *The glorious kingdom of Christ, described and clearly vindicated*. 1691. p. 8.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.