

An Intertextual Analysis of Ezekiel 38 (Part 1)

For several reasons Ezekiel 38 is a difficult prophecy to understand. It presents difficulties in identifying the protagonists, the ancient geographical regions, the chronology and the initial fulfilment (is there a contemporary fulfilment or is it all placed in the future?). The inherent ambiguity in this prophecy lends itself to various interpretations that are often forced onto current geo-political circumstances. One can speak of eisegesis rather than exegesis. In other words, the interpreter makes the prophecy “fit” the interpreters worldview rather than letting the prophecy “speak”. The intention of this article is to offer a new intertextual approach after which a separate article will discuss some of the more traditional approaches.¹

Earlier Prophecies

A cursory reading of the chapter brought to attention the following enigmatic passages: “Thus saith the Lord GOD; *Art* thou he of whom I have spoken in old time by my servants the prophets of Israel, which prophesied in those days *many* years that I would bring thee against them?”(Ezekiel 38:17) The reference to earlier prophecies is affirmatively confirmed in the next chapter: “Behold, it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord GOD; this *is* the day whereof I have spoken”. (Ezekiel 39:8)

The Greek **LXX** version of 38.17 actually addresses the protagonist with an article as **the Gog**, leaving no doubt that the subject “he whom I have spoken” is Gog. But which “earlier” prophecy is here being referenced? Sverre Bøe lists three options (1) Unknown prophecies lost to posterity (2) A reference to Num 24.7 (3) A reference to similar enemies that do not specifically mention Gog.² There is little we can do with option (1) and option (3) is too generic but option (2) requires further examination:

“He shall pour the water out of his buckets, and his seed [Jacob’s] *shall be* in many waters, and his king shall be **higher than Agag**, and his kingdom shall be exalted”. (Numbers 24:7)

This is the Balaam oracle when the King of Moab sought to hire the prophet to curse the nation of Israel when they were about to *enter the land*. The prophecy is concerned with the “latter days”

¹ See Russia in Ezekiel 38-39 (Part 2)

² Sverre Bøe, Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38-39 as Pre-text for Revelation 19,17-21 and 20,7-10(Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Company KG:Germany,2001),113-114

(24.14) and the “star out of Jacob” (24.17) is interpreted as a messianic reference. Note the words in v.19: “God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall he not do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?” (Num 23:19) This is very similar to Ezekiel 39:8; “this *is* the day whereof I have spoken”.

It might be objected that Num 24:7 mentions **Agag** and not **Gog**, however, both the Septuagint (LXX) and the Samaritan Pentateuch (SP) have **Gog** in this prophecy;

“There shall come a man out of his seed, and he shall rule over many nations; and the kingdom of Gog shall be exalted, and his kingdom shall be increased”. (LXE Numbers 24:7)

Commenting on the work done by Bøe, Myrto Theocharous summarises as follows: “Bøe notes the early shift from Agag to Gog in the **LXX**, and possibly in other Greek versions such as Theodotion, in the Vetus Latina and in the Samaritan Pentateuch (**SP**). As Bøe says of the last-named, “This is surprising since Gog elsewhere is not witnessed in the Pentateuch, but rather in the latter prophets. These writings did not come to hold any canonical position for the Samaritan society.”³ Nevertheless, in agreement with Gerleman, Bøe recognizes the weight of this tradition in pre-Christian times, meaning that Gog, not Agag, was the common reading. Normally it is a strong indication of a different *Vorlage* when the **LXX** and the Samaritan Pentateuch agree against the **MT**.⁴ Bøe’s thorough work on Gog and Magog covers a very broad range of extra-biblical tradition...”⁵

Bøe concludes, “Several of the texts studied read Gog where other versions or manuscripts have names which are quite similar to Gog either phonetically or in written form, such as “Agag” (Num 24,7), “the Agagite” (Esth 3.1 and 9.24), and “Og” (Deut 3.1,13; 4,47). There is no indication that “Goug” in 1 Chr 5.4 ever was a part of the Gog and Magog traditions. Other texts referring to Gog may have had a *Vorlage* with Hebrew words that easily could be confused with “Gog”, such as in Amos 7.1 and Sir 48.17”.⁶

³ Bøe, Gog and Magog, 52.

⁴ *Ibid*, 52, 55, 58. For various explanations of the Gog reading, see pp.54-57

⁵ Myrto Theocharous, *Lexical Dependence and Intertextual Allusion in the Septuagint of the Twelve Prophets Studies in Hosea, Amos and Micah*(Bloomsbury Publishing PLC:UK,2012),249

⁶ Bøe, Gog and Magog, 75. For Amos 7.1(LXX) See William A. Tooman: *Excursus C: Gog the Locust King in LXX-Amos 7.1* (143-144); “The difficulty of the MT when contrasted with the clarity and fluidity of LXX, suggests that the LXX represents a clarification of this difficult text. But in light of the retroversion, it is impossible to characterize it as a “free” translation”. William A. Tooman, *Gog of Magog: Reuse of Scripture and Compositional Technique in Ezekiel 38-39*, (Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Company KG :Germany, 2011)

Of particular interest to us is Esther (3:1 and 9:24) where Haman is described as an “Agagite” thus linking Esther with Agag in the Baalam oracle of Num 24.7(Gog LXX), which as Bøe remarks is quite similar to Gog either phonetically or in written form. This is interesting as Alan Fowler has suggested that a **partial fulfilment** of Ezekiel 38 can be found in the genocide planned by Haman;

“The events recorded in Esther probably occurred in the reign of Xerxes during the 60-year ‘silent period’ between the completion of the temple in B.C. 516 and the return under Ezra in B.C. 458). During this period, Jerusalem was without walls and the Israelites were dwelling safely because the Samaritans had been suppressed by the decree of Darius (Ezra 6:7-13)”.⁷

This suggestion holds merit for several reasons. (1) The restoration “prince” was the legitimate Davidic descendant Zerubbabel (2) The villages and Jerusalem were without walls⁸ (3) The Jews were extremely wealthy (4) The surrounding nations were hostile (5) This was a planned genocide.(6) The temple was rebuilt.

Of course there are anomalies as this was but a **partial fulfilment (curtailed because of disobedience)** – the Davidic prince *was not* the Messiah and the rebuilt temple *was not* Ezekiel’s visionary temple and the genocide organised by Haman (the Agagite or Gogite) *was not* the latter day invasion of Gog. However, the incident prefigured the final confrontation and 75,000 of Israel’s enemies perished (Esther 9:16). As Fowler notes...“there [is no] mention of any loss of life amongst the Jews. It was, therefore, no ordinary war”. Some form of divine intervention (besides Esther’s mediation) must have occurred and the “Gog invasion” was thwarted on the “mountains of Israel” but (obviously) also in the dispersed provinces and satrapies of Persia. It seems that a coordinated pogrom was organised to target diaspora Jews as well as those in the land, who would all be extinguished on the same day (the planning of this event took twelve months). Haman can be equated with Hitler. It was motivated by greed and jealousy and involved merchant nations (Tarshish) prepared to “fence” the stolen wealth. As Fowler observes the Jews were the “bankers” of the Persian Empire, they held important positions and

⁷ Alan Fowler, SUGGESTION – Ezekiel 38-39 Explored, (The Christadelphian Tidings of the Kingdom, Bridgend, England: March 2005). <http://www.tidings.org/2005/03/suggestion-ezekiel-38-39-explored/> [retrieved Aug 2016]

Other interpreters also understand the events in Ezek 38-39 as occurring after the completion of the restoration described in chs. 33-37. Ewald (“Hēzeqiél.” 348) is the first interpreter to take this position, followed by Hengstenberg (*Ezekiel*. 329-30). Ahroni (“Gog Prophecy”, 9), Brevard S. Childs *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress. 1979], 366-67) and Cook (*Prophecy and Apocalypticism*, 100). This judgment is based upon the order of chapters in the MT and the assumption that the events in 33-39 are presented chronologically.

⁸ Therefore the Jews of the villages, that dwelt in the unwallied towns, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, and a good day, and of sending portions one to another.(**Esther 9:19**)

accumulated great wealth.⁹ In support of this reading we note the similarity between Esther 3:1 and Ezekiel 39:11: “They bury Gog and all his multitude: and they shall call *it* The valley of Hamongog”

BHT Esther 3:1 ʔeṭ-hāmān beṇ-hamməḏāṭāʔ hāʔāgāgī

Haman the son of Hammedatha the **Agagite**

BHT Ezekiel 39:11 gēʔ hāmôn gôg

Valley of **Hamongog**

Although the Lexicon’s point to different roots, the deconstructed phrases are almost homophones and the word play between **Haman** (the descendant of) **Agag** and **Hamon -Gog** would appeal to the Semitic mind and we can possibly speak of a neologism. However, there is more as Kline¹⁰ recognises a word play on Abraham’s new name in Gen.17.14-15; “thou shalt be a father of many nations” or Father of a great multitude (ʔab hāmôn gôyīm) - - Abraham’s descendants would be like the sand on the sea shore (Gen 22.17) and the hordes of the latter day Gog would number like the sand of the sea (Rev 20.8). Once again this contrasts with Num 24.7 where Jacob’s descendants are described; “And his seed [Jacob’s] *shall be* in many waters. His king shall be higher than Agag¹¹, and his kingdom shall be exalted”. Note that (Num.24.20) - - “Amalek *was* the first of the nations; but his latter end *shall be* that he perish for ever”. Amalek was the first nation to war against Israel (in the wilderness) and will be the last nation to war against Israel (at the end of the eschaton) for, “the LORD hath sworn *that* the LORD *will have* war with Amalek from generation to generation”.

Agag is either the name of an Amalekite dynasty based on a prominent founder or perhaps a title. There was an Amalekite king called Agag (Gog LXX/SP) in the time of Balaam and one slain by Samuel (1 Sam 15.9-33). Haman is given the appellation of Agagite. According to

⁹ *Ibid* Fowler, “Haman also had a financial motive for his genocide. He had calculated that the spoils would enable him to offer the king 10,000 talents of silver. Herodotus tells us that the annual revenue of the whole Persian Empire was about two thirds of this sum. This would not have included spoils for Haman and his army”..... Fifth century B.C. cuneiform tablets from southern Mesopotamia record that one large banking firm employed many Jews (The Bible and the Ancient Near East. C.H. Gordon, G.A. Rendsburg, 1997 4th edn. P. 303). Of course we must make a distinction between poor Jews (some who remained in the land during the exile) and rich diaspora Jews in the satrapies who held properties and wealth throughout the Persian Empire and some wealthy returnees to the land.

¹⁰ Kline. M.G., ‘Har Magedon: The End of the Millennium’, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 39:2 (1996): 207-222, 215

¹¹ Gog also means “high” (mountain?)

Josephus it is a reference to his Amalekite descent (Jos. *Antiq.* xi. 6, 5). The LXX and SP have Gog for Agag in Num 24.7. However, under the entry for Haman in the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia: “Agag was a territory adjacent to that of Media. In an inscription found at Khorsabad, Sargon, the father of Sennacherib, says: “Thirty-four districts of Media I conquered and I added them to the domain of Assyria: I imposed upon them an annual tribute of horses. The country of Agazi (Agag) I ravaged, I wasted, I burned.” It may be added that the name of Haman is not Hebrew, neither is that of Hammedatha his father. “The name of Haman,” writes M. Oppert, the distinguished Assyriologist, “as well as that of his father, belongs to the Medo-Persian.”¹²

Of course, we know little of the dispersal and absorption of the Amalekites), and therefore likely subjects of Assyria and subsequently of Persia. Nevertheless, Agag the Amalekite becomes an *archetype* in Jewish traditional writings, a sort of “bogeyman” bent on the destruction of Jews. Esau the brother of Jacob married two Hittite wives (Gen 26.34-35; 36.1-2) as well as the daughter of Ishmael (Gen 28.9; 36.3) his descendants formed the Edomites and the Amalekites (and other Semitic peoples through Ishmael’s daughter). All these people became implacable enemies of the Jews.

Seventy nations

Jewish commentary on Esther¹³ describes the exile as follows: “One sheep attempting to survive among **seventy wolves.**” Note that Israel in exile is not subjected to one kingdom but to seventy nations. Where does this figure of seventy nations come from? It comes from the table of nations in Genesis 10, the same nations from which the coalition of Ezekiel 38 is drawn.¹⁴

The reference to Magog, Japheth’s son in the table of nations in Gen 10.2 (and in Chr 1.5) is crucial to establishing the connection, as well as references to the other nations of Genesis 10 mentioned in Ezekiel 38. The motif of “seventy” is a recurring motif in the ANE (not just in Israel) based on the council of the “high god” and his pantheon (seventy sons). This was *demythologised and deconstructed* by the prophets and depicts Yahweh and his divine council which is

¹² Orr, James, M.A., D.D. (ed.) Entry under **HAMAN** in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (1915). Gleason Archer also understands Agagite to mean Haman was from this province instead of a distant relation to the Amalekite king (Survey OT, 421). Annuals of Sargon: 25. The countries of Agag and Ambanda, in Media, opposite the Arabs of the East, had refused their tributes, I destroyed them, laid them waste, and burnt them by fire.

¹³ Esther Rabba (10:11)

¹⁴ See WikiNoah, Seventy Nations, http://wikinoah.org/index.php?title=Seventy_Nations&oldid=14010 (retrieved Aug 2016) for the derivation of the Seventy Nations from Genesis 10.

subsequently reflected throughout Israelite history. Seventy souls entered Egypt, Moses appointed seventy judges (Sanhedrin), Jesus sends out seventy disciples etc. The idea behind this is that the seventy angels (in heaven) and their proxies (the seventy rulers/judges on earth) would administer the seventy nations in the eschaton. Moses Song in **Deuteronomy 32** informs us that the boundaries of Israel were determined (delimited) by the seventy nations: “Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father, and he will shew thee; thy elders, and they will tell thee. When the most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD'S portion *is* his people; Jacob *is* the lot of his inheritance”. (Deuteronomy 32:7-9) The following is the Greek LXX version:

“Remember the days of old, consider the years for past ages: ask thy father, and he shall relate to thee, thine elders, and they shall tell thee. When the Most High divided the nations, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the nations according to the number of the angels of God. And his people Jacob became the portion of the Lord, Israel was the line of his inheritance”. (LXE Deuteronomy 32:7-9)

In the MT the boundaries are delimited by the children of Israel (the 70 souls entering into Egypt) and in the LXX the boundaries are defined by the angels (70 archangels controlling the nations). In essence there is little difference as both versions are informing the reader that Israel is God's portion (inheritance) and his sons (whether angelic or Adamic) function as arbitrators defining and delimiting the boundaries of the Gentile nations. Similarly, Israel (*eretṣ* = the earth) is metaphorically depicted as “dry land” emerging from waters (surrounded by the gentile sea) when God establishes the boundaries of land and sea as in Gen 1:9.

The scenario in Ezekiel 38 depicts the seventy nations breaching the divinely established boundaries and flooding the dry land and uses the same word (cover) that describes the flood in Gen 7:19. “Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to cover the land, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee”. (Ezekiel 38:9) The character of Gog is described as evil in similar terms as the pre-flood generation: “And GOD saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually” (Genesis 6:5). “Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, *that* at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an evil thought” (Ezekiel 38:10).

Only one man was righteous – Noah whose name means “rest” alluding to those who “rest” (different Hebrew word) securely and peacefully in the land in Ezekiel’s oracle. The lifespan of the rebellious pre-flood generation was reduced to one hundred and twenty years (6.3) the same age as Moses when he died because he rebelled against God. In Deuteronomy 32 Moses is refused entry into the land “...because ye **sanctified me not** in the midst of the children of Israel” (32.51) contrast Ezekiel 38.16, “...and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, **when I shall be sanctified** in thee, O Gog, before their eyes”.

We have then a number of contrasts established with Deuteronomy 32. The context of the Song of Moses is that the people are about to enter the land whose boundaries are delimited by the arbiters of the seventy nations. They are warned that a number of calamities would follow apostasy. Moses is not allowed to enter because he did not sanctify God. The Song of Moses had both a prophetic purpose (it predicted the nation’s falling away) and a didactic purpose (it taught the faithfulness of God and the consequences of sin). It warned against God’s wrath and advised them to consider their “latter end” (32.29) after all it was God who “makes alive” and God who “kills” (32.39).

The Ezekiel Oracle **reverses the Song of Moses**; the saints are now in the land **living peacefully** the nation has been **resurrected (made alive)** by God (Ezek. 37) and they have a “Davidic Shepherd” and dwell peacefully (Ezek. 34) there is no more apostasy. The wealth of the nations flows to them as they are the blessed of God and sanctified by him. However, Gog has an evil thought and heads up the nations of Genesis 10 (Ezek. 38), and the gentile nations breach their God established boundaries and converge from all directions to conduct genocide and to rob the peaceful saints. Bøe summarises as follows:¹⁵ The directions from which Gog’s army has been recruited give an impression of a **universal plot** against Israel; cf. the following list of the nations according to their place on a (modern) map:

38.2 Meshech N

38.2 Tubal N

38.5 Persia E

38.5 Cush SW

38.5 Put W

38.6 Gomer N

38.6 Bel Togarmah N

38.13 Sheba S

38.13 Tarshish W

39.6 “The coastlands” NW

¹⁵ Bøe, Gog and Magog, 107

The contrasts and correspondences between Ezekiel 38 and Deuteronomy 32 in tabular form:

Ezekiel 38	Deuteronomy 32
<p><u>Boundaries of nations breached</u></p> <p>38.10 Thus saith the Lord GOD; It shall also come to pass, <i>that</i> at the same time shall things come into thy mind, and thou shalt think an <u>evil</u> thought.</p> <p>38.9...Thou shalt ascend and come like a storm, thou shalt be like a cloud to <u>cover the land</u>, thou, and all thy bands, and many people with thee.</p>	<p>32.8...<u>Boundaries of the nations established</u> Seventy listed in Genesis 10¹⁶</p> <p>And GOD saw that the wickedness of man <i>was</i> great in the earth, and <i>that</i> every imagination of the thoughts of his heart <i>was</i> only <u>evil</u> continually (Gen 6.5).</p> <p>The flood <u>covered</u> the land (Gen7.19)</p>
<p>38.8...in the latter years</p> <p>38.16...it shall be in the latter days</p>	<p>32.29...<i>that</i> they [Israel] would consider their latter end!</p>
<p>38.8...<i>that is</i> brought back from the sword , <i>and is</i> gathered out of many people, against the mountains</p>	<p>32.26...I said, I would scatter them [Israel] into corners, I would make the remembrance of them to cease from among men</p>
<p>38.19...For in my jealousy <i>and</i> in the fire of my wrath have I spoken [against Gog]</p>	<p>32:22...For a fire is kindled in mine anger [against Israel]</p>
<p>38.17...Art thou he of whom I have spoken in old time (Gog LXX Num 24.7)¹⁷</p>	<p>32.7...Remember the days of old, consider the years... thy elders, and they will tell thee.</p>
<p>38.16...when I shall be sanctified in thee, O Gog</p>	<p>32:51...because ye [Moses] sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel</p>

In Ezekiel 38 all the punishments reserved for apostate Israel are now poured out on Gog and his hoards as they had breached the ordained boundaries and failed to acknowledge that “Jacob was God’s portion (inheritance)”. God is now “sanctified” in his punishment of Gog.

“Were it not that I feared the wrath of the enemy, lest their adversaries should behave themselves strangely, *and* lest they should say, Our hand *is* high, (contrast.Num.24.7; “his king

¹⁶ **Genesis 10:5** – “By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations”.

¹⁷ Note context of Balaam Oracle is entering the land

[Jacob's] shall be higher than Agag, and his [Jacob's] kingdom shall be exalted") and the LORD hath not done all this" (Deuteronomy 32:27).

We find then a complete reversal of fortunes. Israel is safe and secure in the land as there are no walls around Israel's cities...this is as close as it comes to a lamb among seventy wolves. It is the story of Esther writ large....the genocide has been averted. The punishments that Israel was warned about when they entered the land have now been heaped on Gog and his hoards. Bøe posits the following considerations regarding the nations of Ezekiel 38¹⁸

1. All the lands listed are remote nations, geographically as well as culturally.
2. Many of the nations listed were bygone powers, only heard of in historical accounts.
3. None of the peoples with whom Israel and Judah had actually been engaged in war are listed here, e.g. Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, Syria, Edom, Moab, Ammon, the Philistines etc.
4. The only nation with whom Israel ever came to be politically involved is Persia and that took place after the days of Ezekiel.
5. All the names, except for Gog, are also found in the tables of the nations in Genesis 10 and 1 Chronicles 1.

Bøe is essentially correct (with the exception of Amalek), for it was not Israel but God himself who would conduct **perpetual war against Amalek**, "...the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation".

Reuse of Ezekiel in the Apocalypse

Any approach that failed to address the reuse of Ezekiel in the Apocalypse would be remiss as Ezekiel 38 and Ezekiel 39 are intertextually linked with Revelation 19 and 20. Of course the question must be asked why John splits 38 and 39 and reverses their chronological order, with Ezek. 39 forming the subtext for Rev. 19 and Ezek. 38 forming the subtext for Rev. 20. Critical scholars early in this century tended to explain inconsistencies by a two-source theory of Ezekiel and the NT-scholar Mealey (1992:131-132) went so far as to propose that Ezekiel 38 and 39 refer to two entirely different battles. Bøe observes that, "From John's perspective Ezekiel 38-39 probably appeared as an integrated unity held together by the uniform Yahweh speech and its consistent theme of Gog's attack and defeat. He probably did not question its origin as a genuine Ezekielian prophecy, placed at this specific place among the many oracles of salvation for Israel.

¹⁸ Bøe, Gog and Magog, 106

In spite of its penultimate place in the book of Ezekiel, it is not certain that it has been read as chronological information, like a timetable...”¹⁹

Stewart Crane, suggests that the chronological order found in Revelation reflects the chapter order in the version of Ezekiel preserved in **Papyrus 967** - - “Although Revelation is a Christian book, and therefore one step removed from the focus of our investigation, it nevertheless has a significant thematic layout possibly reflecting both **P⁹⁶⁷** and the received text’s chapter order. Lust (1980, p.180) proposes that John likely utilised Ezekiel when writing Revelation’s end time events (Rev. 18- 22), while observing a slightly different order of final events in Revelation than in the received text of Ezekiel. Of special interest is Rev. 20:11-15 that has a second resurrection *after* the battle with Gog and Magog (Rev. 20:7-10), therefore matching **P⁹⁶⁷** chapter order. It does raise the question of what may have inspired John to write of a second resurrection, if he was using Ezekiel’s order of events”.²⁰

The fact that different versions have slightly different chapter alignments is interesting. However, statistical analysis indicates that chapter 38-39 form a unit within the restoration oracles.²¹ Moreover, although Crane argues for the last battle occurring after the second resurrection the text in Revelation 20 seems to suggest that the battle and second resurrection are almost simultaneous events or at the very least closely related.

Even a cursory reading makes it quite clear that John places Ezekiel 39 at the start of the thousand years and Ezekiel 38 at the end of the thousand years. Although John echoes the language of Ezekiel 39 **he omits to mention Gog in Revelation 16** – the enemy in this chapter is the Beast, the Kings of the earth and the false prophet. At the end of the thousand years the enemy **is named as Gog**. Moreover, Ezekiel 39 relates to a cleansing procedure for removal of the dead bodies and the establishment of a memorial to the destruction of Gog --- these elements are not necessary or even possible at the end of the thousand years as God will be “all in all” and the earth will be populated by immortals. Moreover, the mention of sacrifice and birds in Ezekiel 39 is an echo of the land covenant established at Passover with Abraham.²² Finally, Gog

¹⁹ Bøe, Gog and Magog, 85

²⁰ Stewart Crane, *The Restoration of Israel: Ezekiel 36-39 in Early Jewish Interpretation: A textual-comparative study of the oldest extant Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.*(theses Murdoch University, 2006),301

²¹ See Part 3:A Stylometric Analysis of Ezekiel 38-39

²² See, P. Wyns, *Where the Vultures Gather*, Vol.4. No.3. Jul 2010,(Christadelphian Ejournal of Biblical Interpretation, eds. A. Perry, T. Gaston, P. Wyns,2010), Issues page@ <http://www.christadelphian-ejbi.org/index.htm> [accessed Aug 2016]

is cast into the lake of fire where the beast, the kings of the earth and the false prophet already reside (for the past thousand years). Perhaps the best way to highlight the difference in Johannine usage is with a comparison table:

Ezekiel 39	Revelation 19	Ezekiel 38	Revelation 20
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, <i>even</i> a great sacrifice upon the mountains of Israel, that ye may eat flesh, and drink blood.	19.1 Whore judged 19.7 Marriage of the Lamb 19.16 KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. 19.17 saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; 19.19-20 The beast, and the kings of the earth false prophet cast in lake of fire		20.4 First resurrection start of the 1,000 years
		38.8 After many days thou shalt be visited	20.2 Satan bound for 1,000 years
		Papyrus 967?	20.5 Second Resurrection at end of the 1,000 years.
		38:4 I will bring thee forth	20.7 Satan released at end of 1,000 years
		38:2 Gog, the land of Magog	20.8 Gog and Magog
		38.11 Land of unwalled villages...at rest, dwelling safely	20.9 Compassed the camp of the saints
		38:22 Fire, and brimstone.	20.9 Consumed by fire
			20.10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet <i>are</i> , and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.
			20.11-15 Second Resurrection described –wicked mortals condemned to death.

Decisive in this reading is the phrase “it is done” (Ezek.39:8) which links with “it is done” in Rev.16.17. Revelation 16 relates the battle of Armageddon, when Christ “returns as a thief” and the faithful are exhorted to keep their garments (16.15).

It is done

“Behold, it is come, and it is done, saith the Lord GOD; this *is* the day whereof I have spoken” (Ezekiel 39:8).

The phrase “it is done” is used three times in the NT. The first occurrence is Lk 14.22 is in the parable of the wedding feast (a certain man made **a great supper**, and bade many v.16) to demonstrate the unpreparedness of the guests (some attended **without garments**). The second occurrence is in Rev 16.15 in relation to the return of Christ and garments. The third occurrence is at the end of the thousand years when the heavenly Jerusalem is revealed (Rev 21.6). A fourth occurrence (but using a different Greek word) in John 19.30 describes Jesus’ last words as -- “It is finished”. It seems then that versions of this phrase are used at pivotal points in divine history.

The phrase is not, however, used in Revelation 19 because that chapter is an expansion of the sixth vial (Rev.16) --- Rev.19 fills in the details of Rev.16. The Great Supper is the “messianic banquet” where the enemies of the Lord are depicted as sacrifices. Moreover, Psalm 22, which was recited by Jesus on the cross (and is connected with the sacrifice of Genesis 22)²³ ends with similar phraseology, (literally): “he hath done” (Ps.22.31). It cannot be coincidental that Rev.19 echoes Psalm 22:

Revelation 19	Psalm 22
4. The four and twenty elders. And four living creatures.	22: In the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. 21. Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns (the cherubim in the sanctuary).
5. Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.	23. Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel.
6. The voice of a great multitude.	25. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows (marriage vows?) before them that fear him.
6. Hallelujah, for the Lord God Almighty reigneth.	I will declare thy name unto my brethren.
7,9. The marriage supper of the Lamb.	26. The meek shall eat and be satisfied...your heart shall live forever.

²³ See, P. Wyns, *Psalm 22*, Vol. 10, No.2, Apr 2016,(Christadelphian Ejournal of Biblical Interpretation, eds. A. Perry, T. Gaston, P. Wyns,2010), Issues page @ <http://www.christadelphian-ejbi.org/index.htm> [accessed Aug 2016]

Therefore, Armageddon (Rev.16) and the Great Supper (Rev .19) describe **the same event** in the figure of an anti-type. The Lord was crucified and had a “last supper” now the beast is metaphorically crucified and becomes the ingredient (sacrifice) at the “great supper” (wedding feast). This occurs **at the return of Christ**. The next time the pivotal “it is done” phrase is introduced is at the end of the thousand years after the recent Gog invasion and the abolition of death.

The release of Satan at the end of the millennium is the precursor to the recrudescence of evil. This is symbolised by the invasion of Gog and Magog based on the Ezekiel prophecies. There has already been one fulfilment of this prophecy in the banquet of the birds at the start of the millennium, so why is there a second fulfilment at the end of the millennium?

This invasion is different from the earlier one, for although the language of Gog and Magog was employed, the nations were never referred to by name in Revelation chapter 19. Now “*Gog of the land of Magog*” from the prophecy of Ezekiel has become **a pair** of nations in chapter 20, **Gog and Magog**. Gog is therefore, being treated as a true myth, applicable to different historic situations. No longer does the attack come from the uttermost parts of the north (Ezek.39: 2), or even from the east (16: 12), but from the **four- corners** of the earth (20: 7). In this chapter Gog and Magog symbolise something greater than the constituent nations, for as the Abrahamic descendants are prophesied to be like the sand of the sea shore (Gen.22: 17), so Gog and Magog will be like the **sand of the sea** itself. Abraham will be a blessing to all his spiritual descendants who come from many nations, but Gog and Magog will bring the curse of death on all their followers, who also originate from many nations.

The object of the attack is **the camp of God’s people and the city he loves**. **Camp** is the word used in the story of the Exodus for Israel’s wilderness home, and reminds us that **Gods people**, even in the golden age of the millennium, the ecclesia in the wilderness is still the ecclesia in pilgrimage.²⁴

In order to complete the picture we must ask ourselves another important question. What occasion calls for all the saints to be gathered in the beloved city at the end of the millennium? We would expect the saints in their role as Christ’s agents and as part of his theocratic

²⁴ For these two paragraphs, See, G.B. Caird, *The Revelation of St. John the Divine*, (Harper’s New Testament Commentaries, New York: Harper, 1966) on Revelation chapter 20.

government, to be dispersed all over the world. What occasion calls for this summit meeting? The suggestion is that the only event that merits such a huge gathering is **the last judgment**. As king-priests it is not unreasonable to assume that they will participate in the judgment scenario just as they did in ruling the nations.

Those cast outside **the city** are the mortals found wanting at the last (second) resurrection – for, “without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whoso loveth and maketh a lie” (22: 15). “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out.” (Luke 13:28)

The elements, refused entry to **the city**, foment the last rebellion. **The city** is of course the community of saints known as the “New Jerusalem”, with Christ, **the tree of life** in the midst. The imagery comes from Eden with Satan (cf. the serpent) tempting the nations and the rejected sinners denied access to the tree of life and exiled from Eden (the beloved city). It cannot be coincidence that the last rebellion and the last resurrection **both occur at the end of the thousand years**. The angel with the **key** has the authority to release Satan from the pit, but the key is also symbolic of the authority to **raise the dead** from the pit, for Christ has the **key of David** and whatever he opens cannot be shut and vice versa (3: 7). He has the keys to death and hades and can open or shut the doors of the kingdom on whomsoever he chooses. The prophet Isaiah seems to confirm that the release of Satan and the second resurrection are the same event. “And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited. Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the LORD of hosts shall reign in mount Zion, and in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously.” (Isa.24: 22-23)

If the release of Satan from the abyss equates with the wicked elements rejected at the second resurrection, what purpose does it serve? It seems that the wicked are not immediately condemned to the second death (lake of fire). Apparently they function as emissaries of Satan, going out into the world at the end of the millennium to preach rebellion. This is in contrast to the immortal ambassadors of Christ, who continued the gospel mission during the millennial age.

It is obvious that God has allowed this to occur in order to distinguish the “wheat from the chaff.” In an age of longevity and peace, man is again faced with the same choices that he had at

the beginning – love of God or love of self. The antagonistic elements of the mortal population will show their hand - - in their folly they will attack the peaceful and ostensibly unprotected camp of the saints. Those who join the insurrection will be instantly consumed by fire from heaven. Those who choose the side of Christ will be immortalised. The wicked elements that encouraged rebellion because they were rejected at the second resurrection will also be consumed by fire along with all the others. This **second death** is called the lake of fire. Gog and his supporters will in fact join the beast and the false prophet who had also been cast into the lake a thousand years previously (20: 10).

Casting death and hades into the lake of fire (the second death- 20: 14) is a metaphor for condemning those who have the nature of death back to their natural home. **Death to death and ashes to ashes** but Spirit to Spirit, the last enemy, death has been abolished because effectively, all those who bore the nature of sin and death were consumed in the last rebellion. “O death, where is thy victory? O grave, where is thy sting?” (1 Cor. 15: 55). Those mortals who remained loyal to Christ become immortals and unite with the rest of the beloved city. Then the entire globe will contain an immortal population and is prepared to be presented to the Father as a perfect gift, for it is covered with his glory (an immortal population who reflect his image).

Conclusion

The language of Ezekiel 39 is employed by John at the commencement of the thousand years to depict Armageddon in Revelation 16 and 19 **without mentioning Gog by name**.

In contrast, Ezekiel 38 is employed by John in Revelation 20 to depict the final Gog invasion at **the conclusion** of the millennium when sin (Amalek/Agag/Gog) is finally destroyed and all those with the nature of sin (mortality) perish leaving the earth populated with immortals. At that point the divine **universal war** against sin/Amalek/Agag/Gog is finalized - - a war that lasted from *generation to generation* is not necessary when **there are no more generations!** The “beloved city” (a play on the name of David) is actually a “camp” – a temporary dwelling place - - even in the kingdom age the true fulfilment awaits the revelation of the “heavenly Jerusalem” when the entire earthly population is immortalised. Note that the context is not “entering the land” or even entering into the “Sabbath rest” (kingdom) but the final fulfilment of the age (it is done) when God will be all in all. The attack occurs immediately prior to this event when the saints are “dwelling safely without walls”. This is a kingdom picture as depicted in Ezekiel 34:24-27:

“And I the LORD will be their God, and my servant David a prince among them; I the LORD have spoken *it*. And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: (the beast destroyed at Armageddon) and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase, and they shall be safe in their land, and shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have broken the bands of their yoke, and delivered them out of the hand of those that served themselves of them”.