

PRAISE FOR *THE PASSOVER KING*

“Travis Snow has written a genuinely groundbreaking and very important book. Neither sensational, nor fanciful, this is a sober, exegetically sound, and very relevant book that hits on several important end-time themes and texts. By highlighting Torah as the foundation of all biblical prophecy, the Israel-centricity of the biblical narrative, the exodus as the pattern for the return of the Messiah, and the widely misunderstood, though towering oracle of Gog and Magog, this book is a necessary corrective to so many prophecy works available today. I highly recommend this book to every serious student of the Scriptures, and to all who long for and love His appearing.”

—JOEL RICHARDSON, *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR,
AND INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNIZED PROPHECY TEACHER

“*The Passover King* explores new insights into key Old Testament “Antichrist” passages such as Numbers 24, Ezekiel 38-39, and others. It includes a persuasive interpretation linking the Biblical feast of Passover to an eschatological Passover during Jesus’s *second* coming, which is especially developed in the Book of Revelation. Place this book on your reading list today!”

—DR. ALAN KURSCHNER (PHD), FOUNDER OF ESCHATOS
MINISTRIES, AND LEADING EXPERT ON THE BOOK OF
REVELATION

“What a fascinating book! Travis Snow challenges many of our assumptions about the end times, then backs up his arguments with lots of relevant scriptural and academic citations. Whether you agree with every conclusion, this book will force you to think, to study, and to reflect again on the past and future significance of the Passover.”

—DR. MICHAEL BROWN (PHD), MESSIANIC JEWISH SCHOLAR,
AND AUTHOR OF OVER 27 BOOKS

THE

EXPLORING THE PROPHETIC CONNECTION

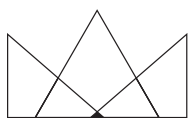
PASSOVER

BETWEEN PASSOVER, THE END TIMES,

KING

AND THE RETURN OF JESUS

TRAVIS M. SNOW



SHILOH
MEDIA

The Passover King

Shiloh Media Inc.

Dallas, T.X.

Copyright © 2020

Shiloh Media Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, scanning, or otherwise, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer who may quote brief passages in a review.

Library of Congress Control Number: 2019915133

Book designed by Mark Karis

Cover image by Pearl

First Edition

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-7340229-0-2

eBook ISBN: 978-1-7340229-1-9

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-7340229-2-6

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD VERSION (NASB).

Scriptures taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE*. Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.lockman.org

Scriptures marked NIV are from the NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com

Scriptures marked ESV are taken from the ENGLISH STANDARD VERSION. Copyright © 2011 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. All rights reserved. www.crossway.org

Scriptures marked KJV are taken from the KING JAMES VERSION, public domain.

Scriptures marked NKJV are taken from the NEW KINGS JAMES VERSION. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scriptures marked HCSB are taken from the HOLMAN CHRISTIAN STANDARD BIBLE (HCSB). Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003 by Holman Bible Publishers, Nashville Tennessee. All rights reserved.

Scriptures marked TLV are taken from the TREE OF LIFE NEW COVENANT, TREE OF LIFE VERSION. Copyright © 2011 by the Messianic Jewish Family Bible (MJFB) Project in cooperation with Destiny Image® Publishers, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scriptures marked JPS are taken from the JEWISH PUBLICATION SOCIETY BIBLE TANAKH translation. Copyright © 1985, 1999 by the Jewish Publication Society.

לא לנו יהוה לא לנו כי-לשמך תן כבוד

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
-------------------------------	----

1	Not Another Book on the End Times!	1
2	Passover as Prophecy	10
3	Rethinking the Biblical Feasts	31
4	The Forgotten Prophecy in Numbers 24	39
5	The End-Times Exodus in Numbers 24	58
6	Gog, the Antichrist in Numbers 24	66
7	The Modern Middle East in Numbers 24	83
8	Understanding the Time of Jacob's Trouble	106
9	Israel & the End Times in Deuteronomy	124
10	The Days of Purging and Redemption in the Hebrew Prophets	138
11	The Forgotten Prophecy in Deuteronomy 33	161
12	The End-Times Exodus in Deuteronomy 33	178
13	The End Times According to Moses	200
14	When Does the Battle of Gog of Magog Take Place?	206
15	The End-Times Passover in Ezekiel 38-39	220
16	Gog and the Russians?	247
17	Gog, the Middle Eastern Antichrist	274
18	The Rapture Deception	293
19	The Rapture According to Jesus	312
20	The End-Times Passover in the Book of Revelation	330

<i>Ways to Help Shiloh Media</i>	361
--	-----

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to my parents, Diane and Jimmy Kaufman, and Joe and Candace Snow, as well as my wife's parents, Richard and Donna Byrne, for your love, support, and encouragement.

Thanks also to my wife Avital and sister Kimberly Martin, for your keen editing work on the early drafts of this book.

I am immensely blessed to have each of you as part of my family.

Last but not least, I want to give a shout out to Mark Karis for designing and formatting this book. Thank you my friend, you're the best in the business!

1

NOT ANOTHER BOOK ON THE END TIMES!

“Many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many.”

—MATTHEW 24:11

IN 2011, a Christian ministry located in Oakland, California called Family Radio spent over 100 million dollars on a world-wide media, outreach, and public advertising campaign. The reason?

After completing a dizzying array of Biblical calculations, which were based on the supposed date of the Genesis flood in the time of Noah, Family Radio’s 89 year-old ministry leader, Harold Camping, had come to the conclusion that on May 21, 2011, God was going to destroy the world with a massive earthquake, judge unrepentant sinners, and simultaneously rapture all true Christians up into heaven. That’s right, Camping believed God had given him the exact date of the Rapture and the end of the world. He was so sure of his predictions that Family Radio sent out ministry volunteers to every corner of the world, warning people that the end was near. The ministry also projected their message on provocative billboards far and wide, which included slogans such as, “Judgment Day May 21, The Bible

Guarantees It,” and “Save the Date! Return of Christ May 21, 2011.” Many devoted followers of Camping even sold their houses, or donated their life savings to his ministry, having become utterly convinced that faithfulness to the Bible required that they accept Camping’s outlandish prophetic calculations.

Needless to say, when Camping’s predictions failed to come true a lot of damage was done. At the surface level, the popular media was given one more reason to look at followers of Jesus, and especially those interested in the end times, as verifiable quacks. At a deeper and even more damaging level, Camping’s predictions also caused the Gospel to be maligned and the Bible to be mocked. Thousands of people lost their money and quit their jobs because of Camping, and I am sure many others also had their faith deeply shaken as well, if not completely shipwrecked.

Of course, we can always argue that people should have known better, especially because Camping had already predicted decades earlier that the world was probably going to end in 1994! But alas, for many, the seductive appeal of having a definitive and comprehensive end-times prediction, right down to the very date of Jesus’ return, was simply too great to resist. It truly is a tragedy that Camping and his followers could not heed the basic warning of Jesus in Matthew 24:36. In this text, our Messiah explicitly said that with respect to the timing of His Second Coming, “But of that *day and hour* no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”

JADED WITH THE END TIMES

The reason I have shared this story with you, is because it perfectly illustrates why so many Christians and Messianic Jews today have become utterly turned off by anything having to do with the end times, Bible prophecy, or the Second Coming of Jesus. For a lot of people, these topics represent too much of a wild west of sensational and dangerous fortune telling, which often do nothing more than distract us from the Gospel and a more “sober-minded” relationship with the Lord.

For others, studying the end times immediately calls to mind complex Bible charts and prophetic timelines, which sometimes look like they belong more in a graduate level physics class than a church meeting hall. Then of course there are the people who are turned off by the geopolitical speculation and commentary on current events that often comes along with studying the end times. These types of people are usually more concerned with how the message of Jesus can help them become a better mom or dad to their small children, or how it can help them face the temptations and struggles of everyday life, than they are with hearing another Bible prophecy “expert” speak about how a recent development in the Middle East is somehow related to an obscure passage in the book of Daniel or Revelation.

Indeed, whether because of the extremes, the apparent complexity, or the perceived lack of relevance, the study of Bible prophecy and the end times often falls on hard times when it comes to the average believer’s daily walk with the Lord. There is no other area of Biblical study that has been more closely associated with irresponsible date setting, subjective speculation, highly-suspect interpretations of Scripture, flat-out superstitions, and at times even deadly practices than end-times prophecy. For this reason, many people decide to leave the topic alone, including many pastors, ministry leaders, and publishing companies. As I evaluated different publishing options for this book, I even came across one very prominent evangelical publisher whose website states in no uncertain terms that they are not interested in any books on the “end times or prophecy.”

MY EXPERIENCE WITH THE END TIMES

The reasons why many people become jaded when it comes to the study of Bible prophecy are perfectly understandable. In the early days of my own walk with the Lord, I too experienced some things that eventually made me somewhat wary of associating with ministries, Bible studies, or churches that I thought placed too much of an emphasis on Biblical eschatology (i.e. the study of the “last days”).

As a new believer back in 2004, I used to tune in to a popular Christian radio show discussing Bible prophecy and current events almost every day. The show was part Bible study part news commentary.

In the first few months of listening, I initially found it all so compelling. I learned about the beasts of Daniel and Revelation. I started to appreciate how close we are to the Second Coming of Jesus. And I also began to develop a deep affinity for following current events in the Middle East.

After a short season however, I started to find this radio program utterly depressing. It seemed like every other day the host of the show was making another far-fetched prediction about why the world would soon be coming to an end, or how some new development in the Middle East, or Russia, or the Vatican was finally going to reveal the deepest mysteries of the Bible to us, or lead to the rise of the Antichrist. None of his predictions ever seemed to pan out, and to make matters worse, I soon realized that he was using Scripture in an irresponsible and misleading manner.

As a result, no more than a few months after I had started, I eventually stopped listening to this program altogether. Then, apart from a few research papers and assignments in Bible college and seminary, I more or less left the topic of end-times prophecy alone for the next twelve years of my life. It's not that I ever stopped believing in the glorious return of the Messiah to this earth. It was just that I had lost my conviction that I needed to rigorously study the end times in order to have a closer personal relationship with the Lord. I also developed somewhat of a distaste towards anyone trying to make any sort of prediction regarding the last days at all, especially when it came to people giving supposedly "prophetic insight" into current events.

FINDING BALANCE

Obviously, since you are now holding a book on Bible prophecy in your hands, it won't come as a surprise for you to realize that over time my relative indifference to studying Biblical eschatology began to shift.

One of the primary reasons this happened was because of my active involvement in Jewish ministry and evangelism, especially right after I graduated from seminary in 2014.

By default, anyone involved in Jewish ministry will usually be required to study the Hebrew Bible, including the writings of the Hebrew prophets, at a deeper level than the average Christian. Because of this, in the process of studying Bible topics relevant to my own ministry, I naturally began to come across many other prophecies in the Hebrew Bible that have historically been linked to the end times. This led me to once again return to a serious consideration of the practicality, relevance, and importance of Biblical eschatology.

What I soon realized through a more active study of Bible prophecy after seminary, was that a decade earlier, after I stopped listening to the radio program, I had in effect committed the error of “over-correction,” or, as some people might describe it, the error of “throwing the baby out with the bath water.” Although I was never categorically opposed to studying eschatology, for over 10 years I did not prioritize the need to intentionally deepen my knowledge of the events connected to the Second Coming of Jesus. In hindsight, I can now see that this was a mistake, and one which many other followers of Jesus are also making at this very moment.

There is a famous Latin phrase that says, “*abusus non tollit usum*.” It translates as, “abuse does not take away use.” Concerning the study of Biblical eschatology, we cannot let the extremes and the antics of some stop us from pursuing a deeper knowledge of this critical topic at this critical hour of history. There are indeed many abuses. But there are also many positive uses.

5 REASONS TO STUDY BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY

To be a little more specific, here are my top five reasons why I believe God’s people need to make a concerted effort to deepen our knowledge of Bible prophecy in the 21st century:

First, the Bible itself is an eschatological book. Many people are surprised to learn that the Bible is made up of roughly 27% prophecy, the large majority of which have not yet been fulfilled. What this means is that from Genesis to Revelation, the Second Coming of the Messiah is a major theme in the overall story of redemption. As a matter of fact, there is arguably more about the glorious return of Jesus in our Bibles than there is about His earthly ministry from 27-30 AD.

For this reason, it is not even possible to understand large portions of Scripture until we begin to seriously engage with the topics related to Biblical eschatology. God certainly put this information in His Word for a reason. If we claim to be Bible-loving believers, we should view Biblical prophecies, even if they are about still future events, as a critical part of the message God wants to communicate to us today. It is not possible to walk before the Lord with the wisdom, hope, and understanding He desires us to have if we are routinely ignoring 27% of the Bible!

Second, Biblical eschatology is part of the Gospel. Although few Christians are accustomed to thinking of the Gospel in these terms, the glorious return of our Messiah to this earth is a central part of the Good News we are supposed to believe in personally, and communicate to the rest of the world. The Gospel is not only about events that took place during the earthly ministry of Jesus in the first century (i.e. the death, burial, resurrection, etc.). In other words, the true Biblical Gospel involves much more than simply being forgiven for our sins. It also involves us being enlisted into the service of a King who will eventually reign over this physical earth with absolute dominion and authority. The more we are able to understand Bible prophecy and the end times, the more equipped we will be as His disciples, and as those who can serve as heralds of His kingdom to others.

This does not mean a person's salvation is necessarily contingent on them adhering to any particular view or position on the end times. So no, this is not a "salvation issue" per se. However, the connection between Biblical eschatology and the Gospel does mean that we cannot

truly understand who Jesus is, or the totality of His mission to destroy the powers of darkness, until we first enter in to a deeper study of the events connected to His Second Coming. Good Biblical eschatology should always deepen our faith in Jesus, fortify our resolve to obey Him, and create a greater longing in our hearts for His kingdom. It is precisely because the Gospel matters that Bible prophecy matters.

Third, studying the end times can help us focus on the Great Commission. We are all prone to become careless when it comes to praying for non-believers, sharing our faith with friends and family, giving more sacrificially to the work of the Gospel, etc. I have often found in my own life that keeping the return of the Lord Jesus always set before me is one of the best ways to motivate faithful ministry, and a more faithful walk with the Lord. Indeed, this is one of the primary reasons why Jesus actually commanded His disciples to be watchful, and to recognize the signs of the times (Matt. 24:32-51).

Being frequently reminded that Jesus is coming back, that this world is not our home, and that everyone will eventually have to stand before Him, has a profound ability to help us keep our priorities straight. Bible prophecy reminds us that the King is coming, and that we need to be about His business, not our own.

Fourth, we should study Biblical eschatology because life abhors a vacuum. In other words, if most of God's people abandon the study and teaching ministry of Biblical eschatology, it leaves too much room for less-qualified, likely misled, sometimes manipulative, and often dangerous people to come in and fill the void. When this happens, the fallout and consequences for God's people are never good. Yes, there will always be abuses and senseless people that make us want to wash our hands of the whole thing, and be done with the controversial topic of the end times. However, this would be a serious mistake. In the days ahead, people will be looking for insight and a perspective on Biblical eschatology that is rational and firmly rooted in Scripture. We can't let

these people down by abandoning them to the quacks, or the wolves in sheep's clothing.

Fifth, Bible prophecy is worthy of our attention because Jesus is coming back to the real world. As I previously shared, I of all people understand that prophecy teachers often go to unhealthy extremes when trying to connect current events to passages written by the Biblical prophets. Some people call this “newspaper exegesis.” Yet, as uncomfortable as some of these extremes might make us, we must still recognize that the Bible does predict that certain real-world events will take place in the real world before, during, and after the Second Coming of Jesus. There will be nations involved. There will be political leaders involved. There will be actual things predicted in the Bible happening before our very own eyes. As a result, we need to know what the Bible says about these real-world events. This way, whether it is us, our children, or our grandchildren who see them take place, God's people will be prepared to understand the Biblical significance of the times they are living in. We can't afford to turn off the news and put our heads in the sand.

OUR PURPOSE

Throughout the duration of our time together, I pray this book will help you grow in each of these five areas related to Biblical eschatology. I pray that your understanding of God's Word would be expanded, that your faith in the Gospel would be strengthened, and that your commitment to the Great Commission would increase. I also pray you would come to further appreciate why we should not abandon the study of eschatology to those who are Biblically off base, and why we should stay focused on what is happening at the geopolitical level in our world today.

In summary, although this book will cover a wide variety of topics ranging from the Antichrist, to the modern Middle East, to the prophetic significance of Passover, to the famous battle of Gog of Magog, and many other things in between, please always remember that everything we will study is ultimately all about our Great King, and all about

His will for your life. As the prophet Daniel said when speaking about the last days in Daniel 12:3, “Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.” May this verse become a reality in your life, and in the lives of your children. Amen.

2

PASSOVER AS PROPHECY

“Many rabbis believed that the Messiah would arrive suddenly on the eve of Passover, the first redemption, which serves as a model of the final redemption.”

—DR. DAVID ARIEL, FORMER PRESIDENT, OXFORD CENTRE FOR
HEBREW AND JEWISH STUDIES

THE ORIGINAL PASSOVER STORY offers us one of the most important keys to understanding the end times and the return of Jesus in all of Scripture. This is the central idea we will explore in the rest of this book. In later chapters we will dive deep into what I call the Bible’s Passover Paradigm of the last days, including its practical and geopolitical implications. But to start, in this chapter, we will first establish a Biblical foundation, one that will help us see how both the New Testament and many historic Jewish traditions support the idea that Passover has always had a unique and elevated significance as the Biblical feast that most clearly foreshadows the second coming of the Messiah.

JESUS AND THE PASSOVER

On the night before His crucifixion, Jesus told His disciples, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, **I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom**

of God” (Luke 22:15-16).

I first discovered these verses back in 2014. At that time, a significant part of my ministry involved traveling to different churches to teach on the prophetic meaning of Passover. Ever since I became a follower of Jesus I had always been personally fascinated by the rich typological precursors to the Gospel in the original Passover story. Therefore, I considered it a privilege to be able to share with God’s people how the life and ministry of Jesus are so beautifully foreshadowed in one of the most noteworthy historical events in the entire Old Testament.

Like many people in ministry who teach on this topic, I initially always focused on what I thought were the most obvious, though not unimportant, connections between Passover and the Gospel. These connections included how Jesus is the true “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (Jn. 1:29). How even as Israel needed the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts of their houses, so too we need to apply the blood of Jesus to our hearts by faith in order to escape God’s judgment (Ex. 12:13). I would also emphasize how even as the Jewish priests were slaying their Passover lambs in Jerusalem, Jesus was being crucified and hung on a cross at the exact same time, signifying that He is our true Suffering Servant and ultimate Passover sacrifice. Another major topic I would spend considerable time speaking about, was how the Jewish Passover meal provides us with the historical background necessary to understand the New Testament institution of “communion,” or, “the Lord’s Table” (1 Cor. 5:7).

Sharing this message of “the Messiah in the Passover” with Christians from so many different denominations, and then having the honor to participate in communion with them, was always a delight. It strengthened my own faith and appreciation for the sacrifice of Jesus in such a profound way, and I know many other people also found this to be the case as well.

PASSOVER AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN LUKE 22:15-16

As much as I enjoyed teaching on how the Passover story anticipates the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross, I eventually also realized that

the traditional explanation of how Passover is connected to the Gospel is missing something. It's not as though it is completely wrong. It is simply incomplete.

My own increasing awareness that there is a lot more to Passover than just a prophetic picture of the sacrifice of Jesus began to develop as I continued to study and meditate on Luke 22:15-16. Right there at the Last Supper Jesus clearly said two things about the Passover that are almost universally ignored:

1. Believers will actually celebrate Passover with Jesus when He returns.
2. The reason we will do this is because Passover will not be completely fulfilled until the Messianic Kingdom is established on this earth. In other words, Jesus recognized that the feast of Passover is directly connected to His Second Coming.

Based on Luke 22:15-16, we can conclude that the atoning sacrifice of the Messiah only represents a *partial* fulfillment of the Passover. However, at an even deeper level, Passover is also related to future prophetic events that will not take place until the time most commonly described in Judaism as the Age to Come (*Olam Ha'ba*).

Usually when we see something in Scripture that completely challenges our prior paradigm of understanding, it means we are probably on the verge of some exciting new discoveries that will significantly deepen our understanding of God's Word. Since discovering Luke 22:15-16 for myself, and really having my heart captured by these two verses, this has definitely been the case in my life. I am still in awe at how this one little statement by Jesus has so radically reshaped so many different aspects of my walk with the Lord, including my understanding of Biblical eschatology.

THE DEEPER MEANING OF PASSOVER

At first, as I considered the future prophetic significance of Passover, I initially equated this idea with the concept of general deliverance. After all,

Passover was not only about the lamb, but it was also about Israel being delivered from slavery and bondage. Thus, I thought that in Luke 22:15-16, Jesus could simply be saying that Passover will be completely “fulfilled in the kingdom of God,” because this will be the time when believers will experience our final deliverance from bondage, corruption, sin, and death.

As I continued studying Passover and digging even deeper, I eventually realized that there is a lot more to it than that. In other words, meditating on the idea of general deliverance only uncovers the tip of the iceberg when it comes to Passover’s deeper prophetic meaning.

I soon discovered that in Luke 22:15-16, Jesus was drawing on a well-established Jewish tradition related to Passover going all the way back to the very beginning pages of the Bible, which His disciples and other Jewish people in the first century would certainly have been aware of. This Biblical tradition related to Passover, which is rooted in the Torah and then further developed by the Hebrew prophets, establishes the Jewish Passover and Israel’s original exodus from Egypt as *the* prophetic prototype of what will take place before, during, and after the glorious return of the Messiah to this earth. From the book of Exodus to Revelation, the Bible presents the Jewish Passover as the basic Biblical blueprint that explains the end times, the Second Coming of Jesus, and the inauguration of the kingdom of God. As we will see in the rest of this book, nearly all of the most important topics that fall under the broader heading of Biblical eschatology, from the identity of the Antichrist, to what Israel will experience in the last days, to the Rapture of believers, etc., are somehow connected back to the original Passover story. Jesus knew that Passover is one of the ultimate keys that unlocks a proper understanding of future prophetic events. That’s why He said what He did about Passover in Luke 22:15-16. There is a future fulfillment of Passover that has not yet taken place.

PASSOVER, ESCHATOLOGY, & FIRST CENTURY JUDAISM

I am aware that for many people, the notion that Passover is associated with the glorious return of the Messiah will initially sound a little bit

far-fetched and sensational. Be that as it may, it is important to recognize that in addition to the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, there are also other longstanding traditions within Judaism that link Passover to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.

In the rest of this chapter, I want to spend some time explaining how Passover has been understood from a traditional Jewish point of view. I also want to highlight how some of the ancient Jewish literature and Passover traditions from the first century unmistakably connect this holy time of year to the glorious appearance of the Messiah. I believe this will help us better understand why as a first century Jew Himself, Jesus also taught that Passover still has a future eschatological significance related to His Second Coming.

PASSOVER IN THE TALMUD

One of the best examples of a connection between the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom and Passover in the ancient Jewish literature, is in the Babylonian Talmud. The Talmudic tractate *Rosh HaShanah* (i.e. New Year) records a debate between two of first century Judaism's most prominent Rabbis, Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah (c. 50-130 AD), and Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurcanus (c. 45-117 AD).

In this selected text, Rabbi Eliezer tries to convince Rabbi Joshua that the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people, and the arrival of the Messiah, will occur in the month of *Tishri*, which is in the fall, and also the time when the Jewish people have typically celebrated their New Year for at least the last 2,000-2,500 years (i.e. *Rosh HaShanah*). In effect, Rabbi Eliezer was saying that the Messiah will come on *Rosh HaShanah*, which is synonymous with the Biblical Feast of Trumpets.

Interestingly, Rabbi Joshua argues against this notion proposed by Rabbi Eliezer, and says instead, **“in *Nisan* [i.e. on Passover] the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt; and in *Nisan* in the future the Jewish people will be redeemed in the final redemption.”**¹

What Rabbi Joshua is saying in this passage is that because Israel's original Passover and exodus from Egypt occurred in the month of

1 *The William Davidson Talmud, Rosh Hashanah* 11a, Sefaria online, https://www.sefaria.org/Rosh_Hashanah.11a?lang=bi.

Nisan, which is technically called *Aviv* in the Bible, it would also make the most sense that their ultimate redemption in the days of the Messiah will occur around the same time as well. By linking the final redemption to *Nisan/Aviv*, Rabbi Joshua was expressing his belief that the Messiah will establish His kingdom on Passover.

Now at this point, I do need to emphatically state that I am not seeking to elevate the words of Rabbi Joshua in the Talmud to the same level as the inspired Word of God. Nor am I trying to make any sort of dogmatic prediction about the exact timing of the Second Coming, which is an issue I will discuss more at the end of this chapter. I am also not saying I believe it is wrong for Jewish people to celebrate *Rosh HaShanah* in the fall.

My primary intention is simply to highlight that in addition to the words of Jesus in Luke 22:15-16, we also have testimony from other Jewish sages who lived in the first century, which indicates that they too understood the eschatological significance of Passover, and how it will be linked to the establishment of God's kingdom. There is an interesting point of congruence between the words of Jesus in the Gospels and the words of Rabbi Joshua in the Talmud that is at the very least worthy of our consideration. This text shows us that there was actually a broader debate in Judaism in the first century over which Biblical feast day most clearly foreshadows *the initial* arrival of the Messiah to this earth.

Rabbi Jesus of Nazareth (c. 30 AD)	Rabbi Joshua ben Hananiah (c. 50-130 AD)
"I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15-16).	"in <i>Nisan</i> [i.e. on Passover] the Jewish people were redeemed from Egypt; and in <i>Nisan</i> in the future the Jewish people will be redeemed in the final redemption" (Babylonian Talmud, <i>Rosh Hashana</i> 11a). ²

2 Ibid.

PASSOVER, THE SEASON OF NEW BEGINNINGS

To understand why Passover has historically been the holy day on which God has carried out many of His most significant redemptive actions in the past, and to understand why this will probably also be the case in the future when Jesus returns, we need to first comprehend where Passover falls on the Biblical calendar. In essence, Passover marks the beginning of spring, and it also signified the start of ancient Israel's agricultural new year. This is why when speaking of the month of *Aviv* in the Bible God said to Israel in Exodus 12:2, "This month [i.e. *Nisan/Aviv*] shall be the beginning of months for you; it is to be the first month of the year to you [i.e. your new year]." ³

From a Biblical perspective, Passover represents the ultimate season of new birth and new beginnings, and this is the case at both the natural and supernatural levels. This is the time of year when the days begin to grow longer, when the cold begins to thaw, and when the natural world transitions from the dormancy of winter into the new life of spring. It is at the dawn of spring that flowers come into bloom and jubilant song birds begin to announce the beauty of renewal within God's creation.

What better time of year then could God have chosen to display His covenant faithfulness to Israel when He brought them out of Egypt? What better time of year could God have chosen to accomplish our redemption through the death, burial, and resurrection of the Messiah? As the earth came out of its dormancy and darkness, so too did Israel come into the light of God's presence in the month of *Aviv*. As new life was springing forth throughout all creation, our Messiah burst forth from the grave

3 Some may wonder why the Jewish people today celebrate their New Year in the fall, during the Feast of Trumpets, which is also called *Rosh Hashanah* (i.e. Head of the Year) in traditional Judaism. Put simply, placing the Jewish New Year in the fall is a tradition that developed while the Jews were in exile in Babylon, because this was when the Babylonians celebrated their new year. Of course, this does not mean I endorse the sensational and mistaken claim that *Rosh Hashana* is inherently pagan, or that it is inherently wrong to celebrate the Jewish New Year in the fall for cultural reasons. However, it is vital to understand that technically, the true Biblical New Year is in *Aviv*, during the Passover season. *Aviv* is "the first month," whereas *Rosh Hashanah*/Feast of Trumpets occurs in the "seventh month."

during the Passover season, signifying that He is the first fruits of the new life and resurrection that we will all one day experience (1 Cor. 15:23).

Given these historical precedents, it is safe to say that the Lord seems to have an inclination to want to align His most powerful demonstrations of faithfulness to His people to the time of year that is symbolically most associated with rebirth and regeneration. Based on Luke 22:15-16, and the broader testimony of Scripture as a whole, I am convinced that this will be the case in the future as well.

The Passover is not only about looking back. It is also about anticipating the Messianic Age. With each new spring season, the natural world gives us a foretaste of the redemption we will experience when Jesus returns. Jesus understood that each Passover season is a shadow of greater things to come. He knew that Passover harkens forward to the ultimate period of transition in all of human history, when He will establish His kingdom, and when this world will finally throw off the shackles of darkness, and be liberated by the majesty of His glorious light.

THE MESSIANIC REDEMPTION AND THE TRADITIONAL PASSOVER SEDER

This connection between Passover and the future Messianic redemption is also evident in Judaism even to this day, especially in certain elements of the traditional Jewish Passover Seder meal. Although it is well beyond the scope of this book to summarize all of the elements of a typical Passover Seder, there are a few aspects of the meal that are important to our discussion. As we will see, these observances associated with the celebration of Passover in traditional Judaism reveal how for at least the last 2,000 years, Passover has always been just as much about anticipating the future Messianic Kingdom as it has been about looking back to Israel's historic exodus from Egypt.

For summary purposes, it is first important to understand that the traditional Passover Seder is generally broken up into three main parts. The first part consists of a series of interactive teachings, liturgical readings, and songs. The second part is the meal itself, and the third part

concludes with more teaching, community discussion, and a series of hymns. These three parts make up the entire Seder, which in Hebrew means the “order” of service. Notably, it is in this third part of the Passover Seder that the participants are specifically directed to look forward to the coming of the Messiah and the kingdom of God.

THE EMPHASIS ON ELIJAH

At this time, as the meal draws to a close and right before the singing of certain key Psalms, a cup of wine is poured for the prophet Elijah, and a Hebrew song called “*Eliyahu HaNavi*” (i.e. Elijah the prophet) is traditionally sung. It is also customary during this portion of the Seder for someone to open the front door of the house to see if Elijah has arrived.

The reason Elijah has such a prominent place at the end of the Passover meal, is because it is particularly the prophet Elijah who is linked to the arrival of the Messiah and the end times in Judaism. This is based on Malachi 4:5 which reads, “Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD.”

In Matthew 11:14, Jesus recognized the need for Elijah, or at least an Elijah-type prophet, to arrive before the appearance of the Messiah. For this reason, Jesus identified John the Baptist as the fulfillment of the Elijah prophecy in Malachi 4:5. In this verse Jesus said, “For all the prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come” (Matt. 11:14).

Whether or not Elijah will appear again before the Second Coming of Jesus is a matter of debate. I personally believe Malachi 4:5 still has some relationship to future prophetic events that have not yet taken place.

But in any case, at this time, I am only trying to point out that the shift to focus on Elijah at the end of the Passover meal represents an even broader transition within the meal itself. During this portion of the Seder, the focus is not on Israel’s past redemption from Egypt, but instead, it is on the future Messianic redemption and the Age to Come. As the meal draws to a close, the liturgy guides the participants to look forward to the coming of the Messiah and His kingdom.

THE EGYPTIAN HALLEL PSALMS

After the cup is poured for Elijah, a series of final hymns are recited or sung at the end of the Seder, including Psalms 115-118. These Psalms make up what are often described as the Hallel Psalms, also known as the Egyptian Hallel in Judaism, which altogether include Psalms 113-118.

In contrast to the final Psalms of the Egyptian Hallel (115-118), Psalms 113-114 are recited before the meal, during the first portion of the Seder. In addition to being incorporated into the Seder, the Egyptian Hallel was also recited by the priests in the Temple as the Passover lambs were being sacrificed in the first century. Historically, the Egyptian Hallel has been associated with the Song of Moses in Exodus 15:1-18, which gives thanks and praise to God for vanquishing the Egyptians and leading Israel into the Promised Land.

Like the cup of Elijah, the reason the final four Psalms of the Egyptian Hallel are not recited until the end of the Seder, is because they have most often been understood within Judaism to be focused on the appearance of the Messiah, and the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people. Elaborating on this idea, Orthodox Jewish Rabbi Baruch Davidson has written:

The Talmud explains that the Hallel mentions five topics of redemption: the exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea, the giving of the Torah, the resurrection of the dead, and the birth pangs of the final redemption. The Talmud proceeds to explain where in the Hallel each of these topics is mentioned—explicitly or via allusion.

The exodus from Egypt, the crossing of the sea, and the giving of the Torah are all mentioned in the first two chapters of the Hallel. [...] both of which commemorate the miracles of redemption in the past.

The following chapters of the Hallel [i.e. Psalms 115-118] mention the miracles which will happen in the future, with the coming of Moshiach [i.e. Messiah]—a topic of their own, worthy of being discussed separately. They are appropriately recited towards the end of the Seder, when we have just greeted Elijah the prophet, who will herald the coming

of Moshiach [Messiah], and **when we focus on our anticipation of, yearning for, and belief in the messianic redemption.**

The Orthodox Jewish website Chabad.org further summarizes how the Cup of Elijah and the Hallel Psalms are meant to inspire the Seder participants to look forward to the Messianic redemption:

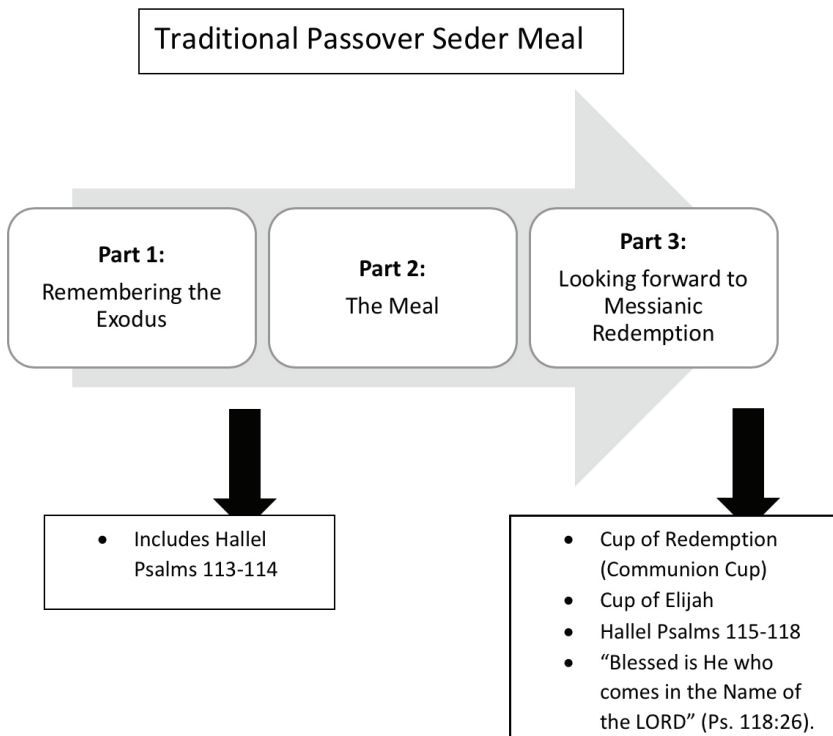
The timing of the pouring of the “Cup of Elijah” is also apropos, right before we start reading the Hallel, whose focus is on future redemption [...]. **After commemorating the very first redemption of the Jewish people from Egypt we express our hope and firm belief in the coming of Moshiach, who will usher in the new and final redemption very very soon.**

The important point to take away from this discussion on the Cup of Elijah and the final Hallel Psalms, is that even according to Orthodox Jews living in the 21st century, Passover has always been, and still is to this day, about both remembering Israel’s original exodus from Egypt, and looking forward to the final Messianic redemption that is still to come. Both the focus on Elijah, as well as the recitation of Psalms 115-118 at the end of the Passover meal, establish Passover as the Biblical feast most definitively connected to the arrival of the kingdom of God. This also explains why even as a traditional religious Jew Himself, just like many of these Orthodox Jews living today, Jesus linked Passover to future prophetic events and the establishment of God’s kingdom in the Messianic Age.

Of course, all of the Biblical feasts besides Passover will also have a future fulfillment in the kingdom of God (more on this in ch. 15). However, it is specifically the Passover that is understood to foreshadow the *initial* inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom in traditional Judaism. In effect, Israel’s original exodus from Egypt has historically been understood by traditional Jews (including Jesus) to be a prophetic prototype of the deliverance God’s people will ultimately experience when the Messiah appears at the dawn of the Age to Come.

The Passover Seder meal is an anticipatory celebration of the

Messianic Kingdom and the Second Coming of Jesus. Once we understand this, the words of Jesus in Luke 22:15-16 begin to make a lot more sense. Furthermore, Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 11:26 about communion, which was historically rooted in the Jewish Passover Seder, also begins to make more sense: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, **you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.**" Just like many Orthodox Jewish people living today, and Rabbi Joshua in the first century, both Jesus and Paul connected Passover and the institution of communion to the Second Coming of the Messiah. Below is a chart that will help us better visualize how the traditional Jewish Passover meal transitions from looking back to the original exodus, to looking forward to the Messianic redemption.



MATTHEW 23:39 AND THE HALLEL PSALMS

Another place in the Gospels where we see Jesus quite possibly connecting His Second Coming to Passover, is in Matthew 23:39. Many people are aware that two days before Passover, Jesus told a group of Jewish people in Jerusalem, “For I say to you, from now on you will not see Me until you say, ‘Blessed is He Who comes in the Name of the Lord’” (Matt. 23:39).

What often escapes notice however, is that in this passage Jesus is quoting directly from Psalm 118:26, which is from the final Psalm in the Egyptian Hallel. As we saw in the last section, Psalm 118 is an expression of longing for the Messianic redemption, which was recited both in the Temple, and at the end of the Seder meal, during Passover. Psalm 118 is a song of praise for God’s deliverance that will one day come through the Messiah in the Age to Come. By reciting this Psalm during Passover, the Jewish people were/are actually blessing the Messiah at the close of the Seder and expressing their hope and faith that He will soon appear to redeem them:

The sound of joyful shouting and salvation is in the tents of the righteous; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly. The right hand of the LORD is exalted; [...] **Blessed is He who comes in the name of the LORD; We have blessed you [King Messiah] from the house of the LORD.** The LORD is God, and He has given us light; Bind the festival sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. You are my God, and I give thanks to You; You are my God, I extol You. (Ps. 118:15-16, 26-28).

In quite provocative fashion, by quoting Psalm 118 as a reference to Himself in Matthew 23:39, on the eve of Passover no less, Jesus was in essence telling His Jewish brothers and sisters, “until you recognize that the Messianic Psalms of deliverance you are about to sing at Passover are about me, you will not experience the redemption you long for. I am the One the Passover liturgy looks forward to.”

Given that Psalm 118 held such a prominent place in the Passover

liturgy during the first century, it is not likely that Jesus' Jewish audience would have missed the clear connection He was making between His Second Coming and Passover. For this reason, I believe the message of Matthew 23:39 harmonizes with the message of Luke 22:15-16. Both of these texts give us deeper insight into the Jewish eschatology of Jesus, including how He understood the establishment of God's kingdom on this earth to be conceptually linked to Passover. Throughout the rest of this book, we will study many of the other passages in the Hebrew Bible that were undoubtedly informing Jesus' eschatological worldview in the Gospels.

WHY WERE THE DISCIPLES CONFUSED?

Once we begin to appreciate how Jewish eschatological hope has permeated the celebration of Passover for thousands of years, it is much easier to understand why Jesus' disciples were initially so confused and demoralized after His crucifixion. In the first century, Messianic fervor and expectation reached a high point during Passover. As Jews across Israel suffered under the cruel burden of Roman oppression and extreme taxation, they awaited the time when God would finally set them free, just as He had done for their ancestors in Egypt. Many first century Jews believed that their Messianic deliverance would take place on Passover.

Jewish scholar Hayyim Schauss comments on how Jewish Messianic hope was connected to Passover in the first century, especially in Israel:

The highest point in the evolution of Pesach [i.e. Passover] came in the last century of the second Temple, when the Jews suffered from the heavy oppression of the Romans. It was during this period that the Messianic hope flamed up, and in the minds of the Jews the deliverance of the future became bound up with the first redemption in Jewish history: the deliverance of Egypt. Jews had long believed that in the deliverance to come, God would show the same sort of miracles that He had performed in redeeming the Jews from Egypt. This belief gained added strength in the period of Roman occupation and oppression.

Jews began to believe that the Messiah would be a second Moses [who] would free the Jews the self-same eve, the eve of Pesach. So Pesach became the festival of the second as well as the first redemption; in every part of the world where Jews lived, especially in [Israel], Jewish hearts beat faster on the eve of Pesach, beat with the hope that this night the Jews would be freed from the bondage of Rome, just as their ancestors were released from Egyptian slavery.⁴

Schauss' comments allow us to gain some important perspective into what the religious atmosphere would have been like as Jesus entered Jerusalem in the first century, days before Passover. Notably, we read in Matthew 21:9 that when He did so, a large Jewish crowd suddenly began shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He who comes in the Name of the LORD! Hosanna in the highest!" (cf. Ps. 118:26).

Notice in particular how these Jewish people applied Psalm 118:26 to Jesus, which as we saw earlier, was a passage that inspired hope in the Messianic deliverance during the Passover. By applying this Psalm to Jesus, the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem was proclaiming Him to be Israel's Messianic Passover Deliverer, or, the New Moses who would vanquish the Romans and reinstate the Davidic monarchy. They thought their time of political redemption had come, which in turn, also made the Romans extremely nervous, not least because conservative estimates suggest that anywhere from 250,000 to 3 million Jewish people would have been present in Jerusalem during Passover. This makes it easier to understand why the Romans always feared a Jewish revolt at this time of year.

When the controversy surrounding Jesus hit a critical mass, the Jewish authorities and the Romans decided to try and squash the Messianic fervor in Jerusalem by having Him crucified. In essence, Jesus was crucified under the false pretense that He was attempting to carry out a Passover revolt against Caesar, which many of His disciples were actually expecting Him to do.

4 Hayyim Schauss, *Guide to Jewish Holy Days: History and Observance* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970), 46-47.

As Jesus hung on the cross however, all of His disciples' hopes of Messianic redemption connected to the Passover were dashed against a rock and shattered into a thousand pieces. When the disciples celebrated Passover with Jesus the night before, they truly believed He was going to inaugurate the kingdom of God in the way they were originally expecting, as a sort of eschatological Passover victory over the Romans. But instead, they saw their New Moses hanging on a cross, humiliated, and utterly defeated. For a time therefore, many of the disciples believed they had been duped and deceived regarding Jesus' Messianic identity. Consequently, they scattered in fear, and Peter even denied knowing Jesus altogether.

With the benefit of hindsight, and the rest of New Testament revelation, we now know that at the time of His First Advent, Jesus only came to partially fulfill Passover as God's sacrificial Passover Lamb. Unfortunately however, this has led many Christian scholars to conclude that Jesus "subverted" or "reformulated" traditional Jewish hopes of Messianic deliverance associated with Passover, opting instead to only rescue God's people from spiritual, rather than political, bondage.

However, this is not an accurate assessment of how Jesus will ultimately fulfill the Passover and bring God's program of Messianic redemption for the world to a conclusion. Jesus did not negate the fact that He will one day act as the Passover Deliverer and Judge His disciples were originally expecting in the first century. He merely postponed this deliverance for a later time (cf. Acts 1:6-7). As Jesus said in Luke 22:15-16, Passover will be fulfilled by Him in "the kingdom of God," in precisely the way many first century Jews were expecting.

A WORD ABOUT DATE SETTING

Now at this point, and as much as I am in favor of helping people see the connections between Passover and the Second Coming, I do also need to say a word about prophetic date setting, as I am sure there will be inevitable concerns in this area that arise in response to this book. My primary goal in teaching on the relationship between Passover and the end times

is not to try and predict the precise “day or the hour” of Jesus’ return. I have no idea exactly when Jesus is coming back. My main purpose in this book is to help you acquire a better understanding of *the events* that will occur before, during, and after the Second Coming of Jesus to this earth, and their practical significance, not their precise *timing*. This is an important distinction to keep in mind as we move forward.

Our primary goal should always be to study Bible prophecy so that we can walk before the Lord with more wisdom in the days ahead. Of course, people will always find it intriguing (and profitable) to speculate on the specific timing of eschatological events. However, instead of getting distracted by precise date setting, what we should do instead is try to gain as thorough a grasp of the future prophetic events foretold in the Bible as possible, so that when these events do occur, at whatever time God Himself has ordained, we are already prepared and well informed.

CAN WE KNOW THE MONTH OR THE SEASON?

In response to this, I am aware that someone might still ask, “well, even though we cannot know the exact day or the hour of the Messiah’s return, does Matthew 24:36 preclude us from knowing the *month*, or even the *general season* when the events connected to the Second Coming will take place?”

This is a more difficult question for me to answer. The Bible does not ever say in point blank terms the exact month in which Jesus will return. However, what it does say is that there are still future fulfillments of the Passover that must occur at the time of His Second Coming (i.e. Luke 22:15-16). In the same way that Jesus had to fulfill certain elements related to being God’s Passover Lamb on the actual day of Passover in the first century, I also believe the future eschatological fulfillments of Passover will take place around the time of the Biblical Passover, in the month of *Aviv* (i.e. *Nisan*). Like Rabbi Joshua, this has led me to believe that the Messiah probably arrives sometime in the early part of spring, at the beginning of the month of *Aviv*, or perhaps in one of the late winter months at the earliest (i.e. the Biblical 10th, 11th, or 12th month).

It is my conclusion that even as *Aviv* was the month of redemption for God's people in the past, both at the time of the original exodus, and at the time of Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, so too it will probably also be the month of world redemption in the Age to Come, and the time when the kingdom of God will be visibly manifest in the future. This is in contrast to the popular view espoused by many people who teach on the Biblical feasts today, most of whom believe that Jesus' Second Coming is exclusively linked to the fall feasts (more on this in the next chapter).

In the Old Testament, the Lord performed His most significant acts of redemption during the time of Israel's original Passover, in the spring. This was also the case in the New Testament as well. And when Jesus returns, it is quite possible that the Lord will continue this same pattern, and once again tie His most climactic works of redemption on behalf of Israel and the nations to Passover.

As I will explain in more detail in chapter 15, I personally believe the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom will take place over a period of several months, beginning with the eschatological Passover, and culminating with the celebration of the fall feasts six to seven months later, after Jesus has firmly solidified His rule on the earth. Because all of the Biblical feasts have a deeper meaning connected to the end times and the return of Jesus, it makes no sense to me to say that the fall feasts which occur towards the end of the year, would reach their final eschatological fulfillments before the spring feasts.

Nevertheless, I also need to emphasize that even though I do not believe discussing *the general season* of Jesus' return is completely irrelevant, or in some way the same thing as trying to predict "*the day or the hour*," this is still only a side issue when it comes to the broader focus of this book, and not something I would ever want to be too dogmatic about. I am indeed convinced it is a serious blind spot among God's people today that more of us have not seen the relationship between Passover and future prophetic events. But this is because there are vital lessons related to the fullness of the Gospel, and what is soon to

take place on this earth, that can only be properly understood if we first acquire a deeper understanding of the full Biblical significance of Passover. However, as we bring the awareness of this reality to God's people today, we always need to be extremely cautious not to blemish the message of Passover's deeper prophetic meaning by falling into the opposing extremes of Bible prophecy fanaticism, divisive dogmatism, or any type of speculative date setting.

Part of me did not even want to say as much as I have about my belief that Jesus could very well return in the spring, around the start of Passover. But, since I knew everything I have shared up to this point would certainly leave the question begging, I decided to go ahead and share my opinion on this matter, in part so words cannot be put in my mouth later.

So let me repeat: Nothing in this book should ever be used to formulate any sort of precise date-setting predictions or rigid conclusions on this issue! We should study the relationship between Passover and the end times as a way to look with greater expectancy towards the return of our Glorious King, not as a way to go beyond what is clearly written in Scripture!

THE SEQUENCE OF SECOND COMING EVENTS

One of the primary reasons some people still remain unnecessarily concerned about date setting when they initially hear me speak about the relationship between Passover and the return of Jesus, is because they actually have an overly simplistic and un-Biblical view of the Second Coming. To briefly elaborate, most believers are under the mistaken impression that the Second Coming of Jesus will be a very short and abbreviated event. They believe that Jesus will be revealed from heaven, come back to the earth, and then set up His kingdom fairly quickly, perhaps in a matter of days, or even hours. As a result, when they hear me say that the return of Jesus is linked to Passover, they think I must be saying Jesus has to return on the very day of Passover, or perhaps within a few days of Passover, and then establish His kingdom right then and there.

In reality, as I will explain in the rest of this book, the return of Jesus, as well as what I will call the End-Times Passover, will include a constellation of events that will take place over the span of many months. Below are some of the most important events connected to this End-Times Passover:

1. A series of Passover plagues and judgments that will be unleashed against the ungodly.
2. The actual return of Jesus to this earth with His army of saints and angels.
3. Israel's End-Times Exodus out of Egypt, which will be led by Jesus Himself, performing miracles on Israel's behalf as their New Moses.
4. The defeat of the Antichrist, who is presented in the Bible as the End-Times Pharaoh.
5. The establishment of Jesus' Millennial Kingdom, and the first Passover feast "in the kingdom of God."

Each of these events represent one component part of the End-Times Passover, and collectively, they will lead to the fulfillment of Passover "in the kingdom of God." As previously mentioned, I do believe these events will take place around the time of Passover, in the spring. However, Scripture does not allow us to formulate a precise timeline regarding when exactly each of these events will take place on the calendar, how long each of them will last, or even when exactly Jesus will come back to the earth in relation to the plagues of judgment that will initiate the End-Times Passover.

This is why I say, yes, the return of Jesus will definitely coincide with Passover in some way. However, we cannot be overly dogmatic concerning the precise dates and times when everything will happen. God has still reserved the right to hold some of His cards a little closer.

All of this will become even more clear in later chapters. At the

outset, I just wanted to offer an overview of what the End-Times Passover will entail, as well as a further explanation of why connecting the return of Jesus to Passover is not the same thing as engaging in speculative date setting, which we are commanded to avoid.

RESHAPING OUR PARADIGM

At the most basic level, I believe everything we will cover in this book has the potential to completely reshape and refine your entire understanding of the Gospel, the person of Jesus, the end times, Bible prophecy, and the kingdom of God, and that is why I felt such an urgency to transfer this book from my heart onto paper. Once I was able to start looking at Biblical eschatology more and more through the lens of the Jewish Passover, it was like a whole new world opened up to me. For the first time in my life I was able to truly begin appreciating the Second Coming of Jesus in a much more profound way.

As I continued to study the end times through the lens of the Passover Paradigm, Bible passages that had always seemed obscure and mysterious to me all of a sudden started making perfect sense. Whereas before my understanding of many end-time prophecies could be likened to watching an old television in black and white, being able to see them in relation to the original Passover and exodus felt like getting an upgrade to full HD color. So many different strands of Scripture began coming together for me in such a vivid and coherent picture. Because of this, I know that you too will be more adequately equipped to discern the signs of the times, and what is soon to take place on the earth, by reading this book. Passover truly is one of the unifying Biblical themes that helps explain many of the most important topics related to the last days and the return of Jesus.

In the next chapter we will cover one more foundational passage in the New Testament that links the Biblical feasts to future events. Then, in subsequent chapters, we will begin a more intensive study of the specific passages from Genesis to Revelation that establish a Passover Paradigm of the end times.

3

RETHINKING THE BIBLICAL FEASTS

“The celebration of the Feasts was for the Israelites also a joyous anticipation of future deliverance.”

—DR. SAMUELE BACCHIOCCHI, FORMER PROFESSOR OF
CHURCH HISTORY, ANDREWS UNIVERSITY

BEGINNING TO APPRECIATE the deeper prophetic significance of the Passover, as it was understood by Jesus and the Apostles, will be a paradigm shifting and exciting experience for many people. Before we can begin to unpack the complete eschatological meaning of Passover however, we first need to take a broader look at all of the Biblical feasts in the Torah, as well as one central yet mistaken idea related to the feasts that most commonly stops people from accepting the Passover Paradigm of the end times.

THE APPOINTED TIMES IN LEVITICUS 23

In Leviticus 23 we are given the most systematic presentation of the Biblical feasts, or, “appointed times” (Hebrew: *moedim*; pronounced *mo-eh-deem*) of the Lord in the entire Bible. There are in essence eight different appointed times that are individually highlighted in this passage, all of which formed the fundamental core of ancient Israel’s

national and religious life. In order of appearance, these eight *moedim* include:

1. The Sabbath (Lev. 23:3)
2. Passover (Lev. 23:4-5)
3. The Feast of Unleavened Bread (Lev. 23:6-8)
4. The Early First Fruits (Lev. 23:9-14)
5. The Feast of Weeks (i.e. *Shavuot*/Pentecost) (Lev. 23:15-21)
6. The Feast of Trumpets (Lev. 23:22-25)
7. The Day of Atonement (Lev. 23:26-32)
8. The Feast of Tabernacles (i.e. *Sukkot*/Feast of Booths (Lev. 23:33-36, 39-43)

Since the 1960s, there has been a growing desire among God's people to understand the Biblical and prophetic significance of these appointed times in Leviticus 23, and rightly so. The *moedim* were not only important within the historical context of ancient Israel's relationship with the Lord, but they also all have many important lessons to teach us today about the Gospel and the kingdom of God that are relevant to all true followers of Jesus. This does not mean we should become legalistic, divisive, or overly dogmatic in terms of how we approach the feasts. Yet nevertheless, we should recognize that growing in our understanding of the Biblical feasts can help us better comprehend God's prophetic purposes for the world.

This is precisely why in Colossians 2:16-17 Paul wrote:

Therefore, no one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day; things which are *a mere shadow of what is to come*; but the substance belongs to Christ.

Or, as the Tree of Life version translates these verses:

Therefore, do not let anyone pass judgment on you in matters of food or drink, or in respect to a festival or new moon or *Shabbat*. **These are a foreshadowing of things to come, but the reality is Messiah.**

In this passage, Paul tells us that all of the festivals and appointed times of the Lord in Leviticus 23 have a “substance,” a body (Greek: *soma*), or a core meaning that is specifically connected to the life, work, and ministry of the Messiah.

As more and more Christians and Messianic Jews have recognized this connection between the Gospel and the Biblical feasts, a flurry of new books that analyze the feasts from a Messianic perspective have been published in the last 50 years. Today, many different Christian and Messianic Jewish organizations are dedicated to helping God’s people better appreciate how the *moedim* in Leviticus 23 foreshadow the Gospel and other prophetic events. Whereas in the mid-20th century it would have been rare for the average Protestant Christian to understand how the life and ministry of Jesus are foreshadowed in the feasts of the Torah, now, this message has essentially gone mainstream. People from nearly every Christian denomination imaginable have grown to appreciate how the Biblical feasts can give us deeper insight into Bible prophecy and the outworking of redemption history.

MOVING BEYOND THE CONSENSUS

To be sure, the rediscovery of the prophetic implications of the Biblical feasts in the last 50 years has certainly been a good thing, and a critical part of how the Holy Spirit is currently drawing many people into a deeper relationship with the Lord. However, ironically, the way in which the Biblical feasts are most commonly taught is also reinforcing a significant doctrinal error among God’s people, which in turn is stopping them from truly understanding the full prophetic depth of the *moedim* and the end times, as well as how these appointed times will ultimately be fulfilled by Jesus in the future.

A bold statement, I know, but let me explain.

If you survey the various books and blogs that have been written on the Biblical feasts, or listen to the most common teachings on this topic, you will inevitably encounter one central idea over and over. Namely, that “the spring feasts were fulfilled by Jesus at the time of His First Advent, in the first century AD, and therefore, only the fall feasts will be fulfilled by Jesus at the time of His Second Coming.” This idea is so widespread and well established that it is hardly ever questioned. It is simply accepted as dogma whenever the Biblical feasts are discussed by most Christians and Messianic believers today.

Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Early First Fruits, and the Feast of Weeks, all occur in the spring/summer, typically sometime between March and the end of June on our solar calendar. In contrast, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles all occur in the fall, typically from September to October.

SPRING FEASTS

1 st Month- <i>Aviv</i>	Passover, Unleavened Bread, Early First Fruits
2 nd Month	
3 rd Month	Feast of Weeks (<i>Shavuot</i> /Pentecost)
4 th Month	
5 th Month	
6 th Month	

FALL FEASTS

7 th Month	Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, Feast of Tabernacles
8 th Month	
9 th Month	
10 th Month	
11 th Month	
12 th Month	

On the surface, since we know Jesus fulfilled certain key elements from the Passover in the first century, and that the Holy Spirit was then poured out on the early Church on the day of *Shavuot* (i.e Pentecost) in Acts 2:1-47, it might seem appropriate to say that these spring feasts have already reached their prophetic fulfillment, and that only the fall feasts are yet to be fulfilled in the future. However, if we look closely at the words of Paul in Colossians 2:16-17, we will see that such an understanding of the Biblical feasts establishes a false dichotomy that is misleading and un-Biblical. In this verse, Paul states that the festivals, which would include Passover and the other spring feasts, are a “shadow of what is to come.” This is clearly eschatological language being applied to *all* of the feasts by Paul, not merely to the fall feasts.

To briefly elaborate on what Paul is saying here, when he uses the phrase, “what is to come” in reference to the Biblical feasts, he is using a specific phrase that occurs throughout the New Testament to refer to the end times and the kingdom of God. In addition to Colossians 2:17, derivatives of this phrase can also be found in Romans 8:38, 1 Corinthians 3:22, Ephesians 1:21, Hebrews 2:5, Hebrews 6:5, Hebrews 13:14, 1 Peter 5:1, and Revelation 1:19.

In each of these passages, the focus is always on Biblical eschatology

and the Second Coming of Jesus. For example, in Ephesians 1:21, Paul speaks of how Jesus is above all rule and authority, “not only in this age but also in *the one to come*.” And in Hebrews 2:5 and 6:5, similar language to what Paul uses in Colossians 2:17 is used to discuss the “world to come” and the “age to come.”

The eschatological connotations of Paul’s phrase “what is to come” in Colossians 2:17, which he uses in a general sense to refer to all of the Biblical festivals, is a critical point to comprehend, not least because so many people are wrongly teaching that only the fall feasts of Israel still have a future prophetic fulfillment. Furthermore, Paul’s statement regarding how the *moedim* of Leviticus 23 give us a “shadow,” an outline, or a basic representation of “what is to come,” is in perfect harmony with the words of Jesus in Luke 22:15-16, when He spoke about the future “fulfillment” of Passover in the kingdom of God.

In essence, both Jesus and Paul recognized that the entire list of Biblical feasts, beginning with the spring feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, and Weeks, and then culminating with the fall feasts of Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles, and also including the Sabbath, have future prophetic fulfillments that are yet to come to pass. Jesus and Paul understood that all of the feasts foreshadow the Second Coming and other end-time events.

Unfortunately, very few people are teaching on the deeper prophetic meaning of the spring feasts, which in turn is hindering God’s people from being able to fully comprehend the end times, a number of important Bible prophecies, and even the glorious return of our Messiah to this earth. To understand the end times properly, we need to first understand the fuller story of how Biblical eschatology relates to all of the feasts, and especially the Passover.

THE LEVELS OF FULFILLMENT AND THE FEASTS

At this point, please do not misunderstand me. I do not mean to imply that the spring feasts have zero prophetic relevance to events that have already occurred. I am only trying to say that rather than reinforcing

the prevailing false dichotomy when it comes to the fulfillment of the spring and fall feasts, it would be much more helpful for us to recognize that each of the feasts have essentially four layers of meaning. These layers of meaning include:

1. Historical Meaning(s) in Ancient Israel
2. First Century Fulfillment(s) in the Messiah
3. Personal Application(s) to Believers Today
4. Future Prophetic/Eschatological Fulfillment(s) in the Kingdom of God

Although he does not categorize each of these layers of fulfillment in exactly the same way as I have above, one prominent Messianic Jewish leader and scholar who also recognizes the deeper meaning of all of the Biblical feasts is Dr. Dan Juster. As Juster notes:

All the feasts have great future prophetic references awaiting fulfillment. Hence each feast has historic reference to God's salvation in ancient Israel, the meaning of fulfillment in Yeshua [i.e. Jesus], who brings out the deepest meaning of the feast, to agricultural significance in celebrating God as the provider, **and reference to the last days and the millennial Age to Come.**¹

I include this quote only to illustrate that it is not a completely novel or unheard of idea to posit that there is a lot more to the Biblical feasts than most people realize.² Both the Gospels and the writings of Paul reveal to us that a fundamental belief of the first century Body of Messiah was the idea that all of the appointed times of Leviticus 23, including the Passover, have quite a lot to teach us about the last days,

1 Daniel Juster, *Jewish Roots: Understanding Your Jewish Faith* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image Publishers, 2013), 17.

2 Not coincidentally, Juster has also written a short book called *The Passover Key*, which discusses how Passover is connected to the Second Coming of Jesus in the book of Revelation.

the return of Jesus, and the kingdom of God (i.e. “what is to come”).

We could of course also spend an immense amount of time more fully exploring how the other Biblical feasts besides Passover are related to future prophetic events as well. However, that would require a book at least double this size! In this book, though I will touch briefly upon the other feasts in chapter 15, our primary goal will be to understand how Passover is connected to the end times and the inauguration of the Messianic Kingdom throughout the Bible.

4

THE FORGOTTEN PROPHECY IN NUMBERS 24

“How lovely are your tents, O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel!”

—NUMBERS 24:5¹

IN ORDER TO BEGIN DELVING DEEPER into what the future fulfillment of Passover will entail, we have now reached the point where we need to take a closer look at the book of Numbers, chapter 24. The reason this passage is so important for us to understand is because in many respects, Numbers 24 is the first portion of Scripture that fully introduces and elaborates on the idea that the return of Jesus to this earth will be a prophetic replay of Israel’s original Passover and exodus from Egypt. In other words, if we are looking at the books of the Bible chronologically, the book of Numbers is the best place for us to start as we seek to grasp how and why this Passover Paradigm of the end times eventually became such a central component of the Bible’s broader eschatological message. Nearly everything we will study in the writings of the later Biblical prophets concerning Passover and the return of Jesus

1 Author’s translation.

is in some way rooted in, and built upon, the theology of Numbers 24. Since we will spend the next four chapters carefully analyzing the two prophecies in Numbers 24, I also recommend that before we begin readers pause now and take a few moments to read through this passage one or two times.

THE ORACLES OF BALAAM

Numbers 24 makes up the second half of what are most commonly referred to as the Balaam Oracles. Many of us know the story of Balaam well, including how this pagan expert in divination and witchcraft unwittingly ended up articulating some of the most beautiful and poetic prophecies in the entire Bible.

For those who need a little bit of a refresher on the Balaam story, Numbers 22:1 notes that as the Israelites were preparing to enter the Promised Land they traveled east and “camped in the plains of Moab, beyond the Jordan, opposite Jericho.”

Fearful of the Israelites, Balak, the king of Moab, hired Balaam to come to Moab to curse the Israelites, and basically cast a voodoo spell on God’s Chosen People. Much to Balak’s disappointment however, God was so intent on protecting the Israelites that all Balaam could do in the end was bless the sons of Israel, and essentially curse their enemies (including Balak!), on four separate occasions. The four blessings that make up the Balaam Oracles can be found in Numbers 23:7-10, Numbers 23:18-24, Numbers 24:3-9, and Numbers 24:14-24.

The first prophecy in Numbers 24 we will begin examining in this chapter is in Numbers 24:3-9. It reads as follows:

He [Balaam] took up his discourse and said, “The oracle of Balaam the son of Beor, and the oracle of the man whose eye is opened; The oracle of him who hears the words of God, who sees the vision of the Almighty, falling down, yet having his eyes uncovered. How fair are your tents O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel! Like valleys that stretch out, like gardens beside the river, like aloes planted by the LORD, like

cedars beside the waters. Water will flow from his buckets, and his seed will be by many waters, and his king shall be higher than Agag [or Gog], and his kingdom shall be exalted. God brings him out of Egypt, He is for him like the horns of the wild ox. He will devour the nations who are his adversaries, and will crush their bones in pieces, and shatter them with his arrows. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him? Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you.”

IS NUMBERS 24:3-9 ABOUT THE MESSIAH?

A surface-level reading of Numbers 24:3-9 often causes many people to conclude that this passage is not about the Messiah at all. Those who support a non-Messianic interpretation of this text argue that it is merely about the nation of Israel at the time of their original exodus from Egypt.

After all, this prophecy opens with Balaam pronouncing a blessing on Jacob and Israel, saying, “How fair are your tents O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel!” and then in verse 8 also states, “God brings him out of Egypt [...]” By all accounts, it seems that the entire nation of Israel is in view here, and indeed, this is how the majority of Christian scholars and commentators have read these verses for the last 2,000 years. Furthermore, because the Hebrew word for Messiah (*moschiach*) never actually appears in Numbers 24:3-9, some might say it is a stretch, and a little bit presumptuous, to view this passage as a direct Messianic prophecy about Jesus and the last days.

However, when we take a deeper look at the precise Hebrew language and grammar used in Numbers 24:3-9, as well as the broader context of this passage, the traditional non-Messianic interpretation does not hold up. To briefly elaborate, there are some very clear linguistic, literary, and grammatical strategies used in this passage, all of which were intended to alert the reader that it is primarily the Messiah that is being spoken of here, not merely the nation of Israel.

THE STRATEGIC MESSIANIC TERMINOLOGY

When studying the first prophecy in Numbers 24, one of the primary things we need to recognize is that when the Holy Spirit inspired Balaam to give this prophecy, He led him to use overt Messianic language which is actually rooted in the earlier Messianic prophecies in the book of Genesis. Therefore, although Balaam never came right out and said, “I’m talking about the Messiah here!” he really didn’t need to. The choice of words and terminology he did use were so thoroughly connected to the other Messianic passages of the Torah, that any ancient Israelite with a broader understanding of the book of Genesis would have understood the linguistic clues pointing to God’s Ultimate Redeemer in Numbers 24.

In total, Numbers 24:3-9 contains at least five different linguistic clues, terms, or phrases, all of which indicate that Balaam was speaking about the Messiah in this passage. These Messianic linguistic clues can be seen in:

1. The phrase “how fair are your tents O Jacob, your dwellings, O Israel” in Numbers 24:5.
2. The reference to Israel’s “seed” being by “many waters” in Numbers 24:7.
3. The introduction of the “king” of Israel in Numbers 24:7.
4. The indication in Numbers 24:8 that the referent of this oracle will “crush” and “shatter” his enemies.
5. The phrase “He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him?” in Numbers 24:9.

In one way or another, every single one of these references above represent an allusion back to the earlier Messianic prophecies in the book of Genesis. If we miss this critical point, we will not be able to understand what Balaam is saying in Numbers 24:3-9, including how he is speaking in this passage of the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom, and other events connected to the return of Jesus.

THE MESSIANIC FOUNDATIONS OF GENESIS

To better appreciate how deeply Messianic the language in Numbers 24 actually is, we need to briefly digress for a few moments to consider the Messianic underpinnings and structure of the book of Genesis. To do this, it will be most helpful to start with Genesis 3:15.

I often tell people without exaggeration that the entire book of Genesis, and to a certain extent, the entire Bible, is built around Genesis 3:15. Genesis 3:15 is the pivotal Messianic prophecy that gives rise to the entire Biblical narrative of redemption.

In this text, God says the following to the Serpent after the fall of Adam and Eve:

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed (*zera*) and her seed (*zera*); He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel (Gen. 3:15).

Unfortunately, many liberal scholars have argued that Genesis 3:15 is probably only referring to the general, plural descendants of Eve, not to an individual Messiah who will act on God's behalf to redeem humanity. One reason they say this is because even though the Hebrew word "seed" or "offspring" (*zera*) is in the singular form in this verse, *zera* is like the English words "sheep" and "moose," which do not have a separate plural form. It is of course true that this singular form of *zera* does often denote plural offspring and descendants throughout the Bible, which is why many scholars feel justified in arguing that Genesis 3:15 is only referring to a general battle between the forces of good and evil, not to a specific, chosen, and individual offspring (*zera*) who would come forth from the line of Eve.

Ultimately however, this skepticism regarding the Messianic nature of Genesis 3:15 is misguided. I say this because for one, even though *zera* is often used throughout Scripture to refer to a person's plural offspring and descendants, the Hebrew text of Genesis 3:15 uses third person *singular* pronouns, *singular* verb forms, and *singular* suffixes in relation to *zera*. This indicates that there is in fact one primary individual in view in this verse.

According to the rules of Hebrew grammar, because *zera* can be either singular or plural, it is primarily the wider grammatical context and verb forms used in connection with this word that can help us determine whether it should be interpreted in a primarily singular or plural fashion. This point is aptly summarized by Old Testament scholar John C. Collins when he writes, “when *zera* denotes a specific descendant, it appears with singular verb inflections, adjectives, and pronouns [...]”² The very fact that Genesis 3:15 grammatically emphasizes individuality should be enough for us to accept that it is speaking of the one Ultimate Redeemer who will defeat the Serpent and reverse the effects of the Fall.

More support for the primarily singular interpretation of Genesis 3:15 is also found in the Greek Septuagint (LXX), which is a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek that predates the birth of Jesus by 250 years. As noted by Old Testament scholar Walter C. Kaiser, the Septuagint scholars almost always translated *zera* as the Greek word *sperma*, and then used *plural* personal pronouns to denote that this word most often refers to a person’s *plural* descendants. However, in Genesis 3:15, the Greek translators broke with their own “grammatical rules” and made sure to use a *singular* personal pronoun with *sperma*.³

This implies that the historic Jewish view of Genesis 3:15, which is amply supported by the weight of grammatical evidence, is that this verse is a direct Messianic prophecy. In simple terms, the “He” and the “Him” in Genesis 3:15 is the individual Messiah, just like the “you” in this same verse is the individual Serpent figure. Genesis 3:15 predicts an ultimate battle between the Seed of the woman, that is, the Messiah, and the Devil.

2 John C. Collins, “A Syntactical Note on Genesis 3:15: Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?”, *Tyndale Bulletin* (1997): 144.

3 Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 40.

THE MESSIANIC GENEALOGIES AND THE NARRATIVE OF GENESIS

If we understand the Messianic “seed” prophecy that is introduced in Genesis 3:15, the rest of the book of Genesis is much easier to make sense of. After Genesis 3, the primary purpose of the book of Genesis is to identify who this offspring of Eve will be, and where He will come from. This is why immediately after the fall of Adam and Eve the book of Genesis begins to manifest a certain preoccupation with genealogies, and the specific descendants of specific people. The entire story is about trying to identify the coming Messiah.

After Eve has Cain and Abel, Abel, as we all know, is murdered by Cain. In response however, God gives Eve another offspring named Seth who begins the Messianic line after Eve (Gen. 4:25-26). This is why right after Seth is introduced in Genesis 4, Genesis 5 begins with a genealogy of Adam’s descendants through Seth, which culminates with the birth of Noah and his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth (Gen. 5:32).

THE MESSIANIC LINE INTRODUCED IN GENESIS 5:1-32

Adam & Eve → Seth → Enosh → Kenan → Mahalalel → Jared →
 Enoch → Methuselah → Lamech → Noah → Shem, Ham, & Japheth

Any attentive reader of Genesis 5 would have recognized that Seth and his descendants, through Noah, were being singled out as the recipients of the Genesis 3:15 seed promise. Consequently, the next question that would naturally arise in their minds would be, “which of Noah’s three descendants will carry on the line of Eve and Seth and bring us the Redeemer?”

After the flood in the time of Noah, Genesis 9:18-27 answers this question for us. Ham and his son Canaan are cursed, while Japheth and Shem are blessed by Noah. Furthermore, it is specifically the descendants of Shem who are chosen to be the unique recipients of God’s presence and divine blessing in the future. Thus, Genesis 9:25-27 reads:

“Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants he shall be to his brothers.”

He [Noah] also said, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant.

May God enlarge Japheth, and let Him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant.”

Here we see that Shem is given God’s double blessing, so much so that the Lord Himself is even identified as “the God of Shem.” Also, when Genesis 9:27 says, “May God enlarge Japheth, and let Him dwell in the tents of Shem,” it is not saying that *Japheth* would dwell in the tents of Shem, but rather, that *God Himself* would dwell in the tents of Shem. In other words, the main subject of Genesis 9:27 is God, not Japheth. As noted by Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser, “the Hebrew language presumes that the subject of a previous clause will carry over to the next one when no other subject is interjected, especially when, as here, it is in a parallel line of Hebrew poetry.”⁴

In contrast to Kaiser, many scholars still argue that this verse teaches that Japheth’s descendants, not God Himself, would dwell in the tents of Shem. These scholars then postulate that this verse was perhaps fulfilled when Japheth’s descendants, which included many Indo-European peoples, eventually conquered the lands occupied by Shem’s descendants in the east in later history.

Certainly, many of Japheth’s descendants from Europe, including the Greeks, did eventually conquer territory in the Middle East [i.e. the land of Shem]. However, to interpret Genesis 9:27 as a prediction related to Japheth’s descendants conquering lands occupied by Shem’s descendants in the Middle East, and therefore, dwelling in their tents, misses the point that this passage is a blessing upon Shem, not a curse. If this verse were saying that Japheth would someday overtake Shem, that would have resulted in Shem’s humiliation. Such a reading of the

4 Ibid., 44.

text would in turn go against the entire trajectory of Genesis 9:25-27. In this poem, Shem is being blessed and honored above his brothers, not humiliated and subjugated to Japheth!

As a result, I am of the opinion that this verse most likely teaches that Shem would be distinctively blessed because God would be distinctively present among him and his descendants, and would quite literally dwell in their tents in the future. Or, stated somewhat differently, God will dwell in the tents of Shem (v. 27) because He is first and foremost identified as “the God of Shem” (v. 26). That seems to be the point, and this reading is also found in the ancient Jewish Targum Onkelos, which translates Genesis 9:27 as follows: “The Lord shall enlarge Yapheth, and He shall make His Shekinah [Glory] to dwell in the tabernacles of Shem: and Kenaan shall be servant unto them.”⁵

These verses were partially fulfilled when God dwelt in the tents of Abraham (a Shemite) later in Genesis (Gen. 18), and also when God dwelt in His tabernacle among the Israelites in the book of Exodus (Ex. 40:34-38). However, ultimately, the prediction in Genesis 9:27 that God would dwell in the tents of Shem was also a prediction about the coming of the Messiah. It was Shem who was being singled out as the recipient of the promise related to the Messianic Redeemer in Genesis 3:15. In essence, Genesis 9:27 implies that the Messiah would come forth from the line of Shem, and that God’s tangible presence and blessing would come to the world through Shem’s divine Messianic descendant. This prediction was fulfilled in the first century, as we read in the Gospel of Luke that Jesus traces his lineage back to Adam and Eve through Shem, not Japheth or Ham (Lk. 3:36). At an even deeper level though, as we will see when we look more at Numbers 24, Genesis 9:27 is also a prediction of how the Divine Messiah will dwell in the tents of Israel in the Messianic Age (cf. Ezek. 43:7).

The idea that Genesis 9:27 was written to highlight that it was specifically Shem who was receiving the blessings associated with the

5 *Targum Onkelos*, Sefaria, https://www.sefaria.org/Onkelos_Genesis.9?lang=bi.

Messianic promise of Genesis 3:15, is clarified in Genesis 11:10-32. Not surprisingly, Genesis 11:10-32 is a genealogy of Shem and his descendants, which further demarcates and narrows down the Messianic line.

THE MESSIANIC LINE EXPANDED IN GENESIS 11:10-32

Shem → Arpachshad → Shelah → Eber → Peleg → Reu →
Serug → Nahor → Terah → Abram, Nahor, & Haran

At the end of Genesis 10 we see that Shem's genealogy culminates with Terah, who was the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran (Gen. 11:10-32). In the rest of the book of Genesis, the undeniable shift to focus primarily on Abraham and his descendants is simply connected back to the original seed promise given to Eve. Or, stated somewhat differently, from Genesis 12-50, the primary purpose of the Biblical narrative is to show us that it would be through the line of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that the Messianic Redeemer would appear on the scene of history. This is why these three Patriarchs play such a prominent role in the rest of the book of Genesis.

Abraham is given the blessings associated with the Messianic promise in Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 15:1-21, Genesis 17:1-18, and Genesis 22:15-18. However, with Abraham this promise is also expanded to include personal protection and the possession of God's Promised Land. The famous line in Genesis 22:18, which records God saying to Abraham, "In your seed (*zera*) all the nations of the earth shall be blessed," is a clear textual allusion back to the original Messianic promise in Genesis 3:15.

In Genesis 17:19-22, Genesis 24:60, Genesis 26:1-5, and Genesis 26:23-24 the Messianic promise is transferred to Abraham's son Isaac. Then, in Genesis 25:23, Genesis 28:10-15, and Genesis 35:9-12 we discover that it is Abraham and Isaac's offspring Jacob who will be the individual recipient of the blessings associated with carrying on the Messianic line.

Because Jacob had twelve different sons however (Gen. 35:22-26), the question begging in anyone's mind who understood the theology of Genesis would then become, "from which of Jacob's sons will the Messianic Redeemer come forth?" Which of Jacob's descendants will overcome the Serpent, and destroy the forces of evil as God originally predicted after the fall of Adam and Eve?

This is where Genesis 49:8-11 comes in, which is in many respects the prophetic climax of the book of Genesis. In this passage, as Jacob is blessing his twelve sons, he says the following about Judah:

Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down to you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? **The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.** He ties his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine; he washes his garments in wine, and his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are dull from wine, and his teeth white from milk (Gen. 49:8-11).

This passage is rich with metaphors and symbolism. However, its primary message is that Judah and his descendants would possess ruling and governing authority over the twelve tribes of Israel until the Messiah appeared on the earth. Genesis 49:10 also indicates that the Messiah Himself would come from the tribe of Judah.

Judah's right to rule as king and monarch among his brothers is indicated by the phrase "your brothers shall praise you," as well as by the phrase "your father's sons shall bow down to you" in verse 8. It is also indicated by the comparison between Judah and a lion in verse 9, and the mention of the "scepter" and the "ruler's staff" belonging to Judah in this same verse. All of these terms and metaphors indicate that Judah and his descendants would have a uniquely regal and royal position once the sons of Israel became established in the Promised Land.

It is precisely because of Genesis 49:8-11 that when Israel did finally enter the land of Canaan, Saul's kingdom did not last, and the nucleus of Israel's kingdom and monarchy was moved to the territory of Judah, and overseen by a Judean king, beginning with David (2 Sam. 5:1-5). Furthermore, it is also because of Genesis 49:8-11 that it was such a scandalous ordeal when the additional tribes of Israel eventually defied the authority of Judah and split apart into a second kingdom in the book of 1 Kings 12. Based on this prophecy the Israelites should have known that out of all of Jacob's sons, only Judah was given the kingdom authority to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel by Jacob himself.

As Genesis 49:8-11 progresses, there is also an intentional shift in verse 10 to focus not only on the plural descendants of Judah, but on one singular individual. In a direct parallel to Genesis 3:15, this individual is also identified through the use of a third person singular pronoun (i.e. Him), and is further referred to as "Shiloh":

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples (Gen. 49:10).

THE MEANING OF SHILOH

Throughout much of Christian history, many interpreters have understood the word Shiloh as nothing more than a proper name for the Messiah. However, it is more likely that Shiloh is a compound Hebrew word (*shilo*), which translates roughly as "him to whom it belongs." Without going into too much detail, Shiloh is a shortened combination of the Hebrew words *asher*, which means "which, what, or whom," *le*, which means "to," and *o*, which is a third person masculine singular possessive suffix often added to the end of Hebrew words. Thus, when you shorten *asher* to sound like *sh*, and then you add the two other words, you end up with *shilo*.

Elaborating on this point, Old Testament scholar John Sailhamer has summarized how we should read and understand the word Shiloh:

The word Shiloh, found in some English versions, is simply an untranslated form of the Hebrew expression meaning, “one to whom it belongs.” It is not a name as such, nor is it to be associated with the site of the tabernacle in the days of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:3).⁶

If we wanted to paraphrase, we could say that Shiloh means, “the one who has the authority to rule.” The Hebrew meaning of Shiloh implies that when Jacob blessed Judah, he knew that there would eventually only be one sovereign individual who would possess the right to reign as king over the sons of Israel. In other words, Jacob understood that the Messiah is “the one to whom belongs (*shilo*)” judicial and royal authority over the twelve tribes, and that his sons could only rule as monarchs over their brothers until the Messiah appeared in Israel.

Where did Jacob get this idea concerning the Messiah’s right to reign over the twelve tribes of Israel from? It appears that Jacob was aware of the seed promise outlined in Genesis 3:15. He understood that God would eventually reverse the effects of the Fall through the life and work of one Ultimate Redeemer.

Jacob knew that because the seed promise going back to Genesis 3:15 was passed on to him and his descendants, there would have to be one individual who would finally emerge from among his sons to destroy the powers of darkness, rule and reign in their midst, subdue the nations, and usher in a period of peace and justice for all humanity.

Genesis 49:10 elaborates on Genesis 3:15. It tells us that the Messiah will not merely destroy evil and the Serpent in some cosmic or abstract sense. Instead, the Messiah will achieve victory by reigning as a Judean king among His Jewish brethren, on this very same earth that we inhabit today. Judah and his sons were only allowed to steward the monarchy in Israel until the Messiah, Shiloh, or, “him to whom that authority always

6 John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 235.

belonged,” arrived on the scene of history.⁷ According to Jacob in Genesis 49:10, it is the Messiah who will possess the “scepter” and the “ruler’s staff” to reign in Israel, and to secure the obedience of the Gentiles.

The latter portion of this prophecy, which mentions the Messiah tying “his colt to the vine,” washing “his robes in the blood of grapes,” having eyes “dull from wine” and “teeth white from milk” (Gen. 49:11-12), is simply meant to signify the prosperity that will accompany the Messianic Age. An abundant grape harvest and plentiful amounts of fresh dairy were viewed as signs of God’s blessing in the Ancient Near East. When the Messiah reigns therefore,

wine, the symbol of prosperity and blessing, will be so abundant that even the choicest vines will be put to such everyday use as tethering the animals of burden, and vintage wine will be as commonplace as wash water.⁸

The reference to the Messiah’s teeth being whiter than milk may also be a metaphor for strength and vitality.⁹ Thus, these were all appropriate metaphors through which to describe the Messianic Age and the arrival of the Messianic King to this earth. No one will go hungry when the Messiah appears, and the return of Jesus will be accompanied by great abundance and great feasting.

It is no overstatement to say that in many respects, Genesis 49:10-12 is one of the most foundational passages when it comes to the Bible’s

7 According to Jewish tradition, Judah lost their “scepter” and “ruler’s staff” in the first century, when the Romans took judicial authority away from the Jewish Sanhedrin, and subsequently destroyed the Temple and all of the genealogical records in 70 AD. What many Jewish sages did not realize however, is that Judah lost its authority at this time in Israel because the Messiah had already appeared in the first century, in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. As a result, there can never be another monarchy in Israel until Jesus returns. He is now the only one with the right to reign as the King of Israel. The scepter has departed from the plural descendants of Judah, and now it only belongs to their “seed,” the Messiah.

8 Sailhamer, 235-236.

9 Ibid., 236.

broader teaching on the end times and the kingdom of God. When understood together, Genesis 3:15 and 49:10-12 set the entire Biblical narrative on a trajectory of hope and expectation for the coming Redeemer; the One who would vanquish the Serpent, and reign as God's Regent, Viceroy, and King in the Land of Israel. These two prophecies are like complementary bookends which reveal to us the basic outline of God's plan to redeem His world from the effects of the Fall in Genesis 3. Below is a chart that summarizes the clear Messianic hope that is already present in the book of Genesis:

THE MESSIANIC & END-TIMES THEOLOGY OF GENESIS

Genesis 3:15	There will be one individual Redeemer who will arise from the descendants of Eve. He will overcome the Serpent and destroy the powers of evil, but will also be "bruised" in the process.
Genesis 9:18-27	God will be present in the world primarily through His identification with Shem and his descendants. God will "dwell in the tents of Shem," and the Redeemer will trace His lineage back to Eve through Shem.
Genesis 17:1-22 & 28:10-17	Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants will be uniquely preserved and protected by God. From their line will come forth the promised Redeemer of Genesis 3:15. In addition, they will be given a Promised Land, which in the future will be the nucleus of the Redeemer's Messianic Kingdom.

Genesis 49:8-12	The Messiah will come forth from the line of Judah. He will reign in the midst of the twelve tribes of Israel, subdue the Gentile nations, and usher in a Messianic Age characterized by true peace and prosperity.
-----------------	---

BACK TO NUMBERS 24

Now that we have covered the key Messianic passages in the book of Genesis, we are in a much better position to understand how Numbers 24 elaborates on these passages to give us an even fuller picture of the glorious return of the Messiah to this earth.

As I previously mentioned, the first reference to the Messiah in the third Balaam oracle can be seen in Numbers 24:5. In this verse, Balaam states, “How fair are **your tents** O Jacob, your dwellings O Israel.”

To some, this verse may seem to imply that Balaam thought the tents of Israel were aesthetically pleasing to look at. Or, it may seem a little bit bizarre, leading us to ask, “why in the world was Balaam praising the tents of Israel?” However, to avoid confusion, we must understand that Numbers 24:5 is an allusion back to the earlier Messianic prophecy in Genesis 9:27: “May God enlarge Japheth, and let Him dwell **in the tents of Shem** [...]”

The reason Balaam exclaimed, “How fair are your tents O Jacob!” was because He understood that it is God Himself who dwells in the tents of Israel. Balaam understood that the dwelling places of Israel were utterly unique and worthy of praise because God was in their midst, in the “tents of Shem.”

This is why after Numbers 24:5 Balaam then uses four distinct similes to elaborate on the wonder of God’s presence among the Israelites: “Like valleys that stretch out, like gardens beside the river, like aloes planted by the LORD, like cedars beside the waters” (Num. 24:6).

In the Ancient Near East gods and goddesses were often associated

with lush natural environments and gardens. Therefore, these were all appropriate metaphors and symbols through which to describe God's presence within the tents of Jacob. According to Balaam, the camp of the Israelites was majestic and awe-inspiring not because they as a people were anything special, but rather because the Most High God had chosen to make His abode among them.

It becomes even more apparent in Numbers 24:7 that Balaam understood God's awesome presence among the Israelites to be connected to the eventual arrival of Israel's Messianic King. This verse reads, "water will flow from his [Israel's] buckets, and his [Israel's] **seed** [*zera*] will be by many waters, and **his king** will be higher than Agag [or Gog], and his kingdom shall be exalted."

As you may have already realized, the reference here to Israel's "seed" (*zera*) is an undeniable reference back to the original Messianic seed promise in Genesis 3:15. Just like in Genesis 3:15, the Greek Septuagint translators of Numbers 24:7 also translated "seed" in this verse as a singular, not a plural noun. This is further evidence that many ancient Jewish people understood that Balaam refers here to Israel's one Seed, the Messiah, not Israel's plural descendants. As a matter of fact, the reference to Israel's Seed in Numbers 24:7 is one of the most emphatic references to the Messiah in the Balaam Oracles, which in turn sets the remaining verses in this passage on an undeniable Messianic and eschatological trajectory.

Old Testament scholar John Sailhamer comments on the relationship between Numbers 24:7-9 and the Messianic theology of Genesis:

[I]n Numbers 24:9b, the author identifies the individual "king" of Balaam's oracle (Num. 24:7-9) with the "seed" of Abraham in the Genesis promise narratives. The king whom Balaam foresaw is the individual "seed" of Abraham through whom the nations will be blessed (Num 24:9b).¹⁰

¹⁰ John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 478.

When Balaam notes in this verse that the Messianic Redeemer, the “seed” of Eve and Abraham, “will be by many waters,” he is implying that the Messiah’s kingdom will be territorially expansive. In modern terms, we might say this verse speaks of how the Messiah will reign “from sea to sea,” and over many different peoples and nations (see parallel text in Zechariah 9:10).

The “many waters” language also communicates that the Messiah will enjoy economic and military superiority when He reigns on this earth. In the ancient world, just like today, access to large bodies of water meant prosperity, security, and control.

Thus, one primary point being made in Numbers 24:7 is that Israel’s Messiah will not rule over some backwater kingdom. His reign will be all-encompassing and dominant. It will encompass “many waters.”

Carrying this thought even further, the latter half of Numbers 24:7 then makes an overt reference to how Israel’s Messianic King will be higher than his enemies, and have an exalted kingdom. This reference to Israel’s eschatological King is an allusion back to Genesis 49:10, which spoke of the Messianic King emerging from Judah. Just as Genesis 49:10 predicts that all the nations will be obedient to Israel’s Messianic King, Numbers 24:7 also indicates that the Messiah’s kingdom will be supreme and above all others.

In later chapters we will explore what the Balaam Oracles reveal to us about the Messiah’s enemies at the time of His return. For now however, the primary point to take away from this introductory study of Numbers 24:3-9, is that the Holy Spirit strategically inspired Balaam to use a number of Messianic terms from the book of Genesis when he gave this prophecy, primarily so that Israel would know he was speaking about the Messiah and the Age to Come.

Of course, many of these Messianic allusions are not obvious to the modern reader. Yet, anyone with a deeper understanding of the theology of Genesis would have recognized that the references to Israel’s “tents,” Israel’s “seed,” and Israel’s “king” in this passage carry Messianic connotations. Some of the other Messianic allusions in this text that I

mentioned earlier will also be covered in the next few chapters as well.

But at this point, it is only important to recognize that Scripture builds on Scripture. Therefore, in Numbers 24:3-9 the Holy Spirit was picking up the prior theological threads from earlier in the Torah and weaving them into a more complete picture of what will take place in the Messianic Age, when Jesus establishes His kingdom. In essence, what Balaam tells us specifically in Numbers 24:3-9 is that Israel's dwelling places are to be praised because God is present in their midst, and will one day reign from their midst through the Messiah. Without a doubt, Numbers 24:3-9 is one of the most widely overlooked Messianic prophecies in the entire Bible. However, as we will soon see, it is indeed one of the most important prophetic texts in Scripture, especially when it comes to understanding the relationship between Passover and the return of Jesus.

5

THE END-TIMES EXODUS IN NUMBERS 24

“And He will raise His staff over the waters, as He did in Egypt.”

—ISAIAH 10:26

MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE that when Jesus returns to this earth, He will descend from heaven and then immediately take up His throne in Jerusalem. What we need to recognize however, is that the return of Jesus will actually include a much more complex series of events than most people realize. Yes, Jesus will ultimately end up in Jerusalem to rule and reign (Zech. 14:4). Nevertheless, there are still many other things that He will have to do first in order to fulfill all of the prophecies that concern His Second Coming.

One of the most important events that will take place soon after Jesus returns is what I call the End-Times Exodus. The Bible tells us that before Jesus reigns as Israel’s King in the Promised Land, He will first go down into the land of Egypt and lead the Jewish people through a prophetic replay of the historic exodus that took place under Moses 3,500 years ago. At the start of the Messianic Age history will repeat itself, and Jesus will finally fulfill His ministry as Israel’s New Moses

and eschatological Passover Deliverer, just as He promised He would on the night before His crucifixion.

The first time this End-Times Exodus is specifically mentioned in the Bible is in Numbers 24:8-9. In this chapter, I want to briefly look at the significance of this passage with you, including how it is related to the future fulfillment of Passover Jesus spoke of in Luke 22:15-16. In later chapters, we will also cover many of the other events connected to this final exodus that will take place at the start of the Age to Come, as well as why it will even be necessary in the first place.

NUMBERS 24:8: JESUS COMES OUT OF EGYPT

As we saw in the last chapter, Numbers 24:5-7 is all about the Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom. Because most Bible commentators miss this critical fact, they often do not catch what the rest of Numbers 24:8-9 is also telling us about the Messiah and the Age to Come. It is in Numbers 24:8-9 that Balaam begins to elaborate on the actual events that will take place when Jesus returns. Quite notably, in this passage we read:

God brings him out of Egypt, he is for him like the horns of the wild ox. He will devour the nations who are his adversaries, and will crush their bones in pieces, and will shatter them with his arrows. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him? Blessed is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you.

After analyzing Numbers 24:8-9, many scholars throughout history have come to the conclusion that these verses are about Israel, and that they are describing the historic exodus from Egypt. Although a surface-level reading of these verses may lead us to assume the same, because we know that the primary subject of this prophecy is the Messiah, it only makes sense to also read Numbers 24:8-9 in a Messianic and eschatological light as well. In simple terms, the Messianic character of this prophecy makes it just about impossible to defend the idea

that Numbers 24:8-9 is about Israel's original exodus 3,500 years ago. Because Numbers 24:3-7 is about the Messiah (i.e. Israel's Seed and King), simple consistency requires that we also understand Numbers 24:8-9 to be about the Messiah as well. This is a unified passage, communicating a unified message about the coming King of Israel. What Numbers 24:8 tells us is that before the Messiah reigns as the King of Israel in the Promised Land (Gen. 49:10-11), He will first come "out of Egypt" and wage war against the powers of darkness that will rule the earth at this time.

HISTORY REPEATS IN THE MESSIANIC AGE

Besides the undeniable Messianic language scattered throughout Numbers 24:3-9, there is also another reason we can be even more certain this passage does in fact teach that Jesus will lead Israel through an End-Times Exodus "out of Egypt" when He returns. If we zoom out and look at the Balaam Oracles holistically, it is easier to see that the way they are structured is meant to communicate that Israel's past history when they originally left Egypt will repeat itself again when their King and Seed begins to reign in their midst.

In order to understand how Numbers 24 gets this point across, it is necessary to compare and contrast Numbers 24:8-9 with the Balaam oracle that immediately precedes it, which can be found in Numbers 23:18-24. Numbers 24:8-9 directly parallels Numbers 23:18-24. However, there are some key differences between each of these texts as well. Both passages speak about someone coming "out of Egypt." Yet notably, the earlier text in Numbers 23:18-24 uses *plural* pronouns and verb forms to refer to the collective nation of Israel as a whole coming out of Egypt, whereas in Numbers 24:8-9, there is a very intentional shift to *singular* pronouns and verb forms. The purpose of this grammatical shift is to highlight that in Numbers 24:8-9 it is primarily the singular Messiah that is in view, not merely the corporate nation of Israel. This juxtaposition in the Balaam Oracles between the first exodus out of Egypt that took place under Moses, and the final exodus that will

take place under the Messiah, is easy to see if we compare these two passages side by side.

Numbers 23:22-24: Historic Exodus	Numbers 24:8-9: Messiah in the Last Days
<p>God brings them [the Israelites, plural] out of Egypt, He is for them [plural] like the horns of the wild ox. For there is no omen against Jacob, nor is there any divination against Israel; At the proper time it shall be said to Jacob and to Israel what God has done! Behold, a people rises like a lioness, and as a lion it lifts itself; It will not lie down until it devours the prey, and drinks the blood of the slain.</p>	<p>God brings him [singular] out of Egypt, He is for him [singular] like the horns of the wild ox. He [singular] will devour the nations who are his adversaries, and will crush their bones in pieces, and shatter them with his arrows. He [singular] couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him? Blessed is everyone who blesses you [singular], and cursed is everyone who curses you.</p>

As we can see, there are undeniable similarities and differences between these two passages. On the surface, they both appear to be speaking of the same thing. However, upon closer inspection, it becomes evident that in Numbers 23:22-24 the primary topic of discussion is the original and historic exodus of the Israelites from Egypt. As we read in Numbers 23:22, “God brings *them* out of Egypt.” Then, in the rest of the passage, Balaam proceeded to predict how Israel as a “people” would enter their Promised Land “like a lioness,” and as a warrior nation that “devours the prey, and drinks the blood of the slain.”

In contrast, in Numbers 24:8 we read, “God brings *him* out of Egypt.” Subsequently, in the remaining verses, all the pronoun and verb forms are singular as well, not plural, because Balaam is speaking primarily about the Messiah he had already introduced a couple verses earlier. He is telling us that Israel’s historic exodus was as a type, or prophetic foreshadow, of what will one day happen in the days of the

Messiah. As the ultimate Seed and King of Israel, the Messiah will retrace Israel's steps and relive the exodus experience with them, but in a much more dramatic and climactic way at the end of this age. Israel will come out of Egypt again in the last days, but they will do so in conjunction with the Messiah, to such an extent that their history and final redemption will become bound up with the victorious actions of their King.

Two scholars who have started to recognize the Messianic typology in Israel's original exodus, and the underlying message in Numbers 23 and 24, are Old Testament scholars Michael Rydelnik and John Sailhamer. Rydelnik and Sailhamer do not make all of the same eschatological connections I will expound upon in the rest of this book, but their perspective on these passages is still helpful.

In his book, *The Messianic Hope*, Rydelnik comments on Numbers 23 and 24:

What is especially significant is that the third oracle, juxtaposed to the second, deliberately uses similar descriptions of its subject (24:8-9). However, just as deliberately, there is a difference, namely a shift to the singular pronoun. [...] Further, the third oracle, in a fashion similar to the second, states that God is for him (the king) like the horns of a wild ox and that the king will be as powerful as a lion. The author of the Torah is using a significant compositional strategy in placing these two oracles next to each other. The oracles are intentionally similar (same phrases) and intentionally different (singular and plural pronouns). **The writer's strategy was intended to establish a pattern or type: what God will do for Israel, He will also do for the future king of Israel.**¹

Similarly, in his book, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, Sailhamer also notes:

1 Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2010), 102.

Moreover, the two sets of oracles make many allusions to each other and have many parallels. For example, what is said about Israel's past in Numbers 23 is repeated in Numbers 24, but here it describes the work of a future king. This parallel structure is not always appreciated in English translations [...]. Nevertheless, in the Hebrew text the writer has been careful to distinguish the two sets of oracles. [...] It is clear from Numbers 23:24 that Balaam is speaking about the people of Israel and the exodus from Egypt. In Numbers 24:8 however, Balaam repeats the same line and applies it, using singular forms, to the king he has introduced in 24:7. [...] The writer's purpose appears to be to view the reign of the future king in terms taken from God's great acts of salvation in the past. **The future is going to be like the past. What God did for Israel in the past is seen as a type of what he will do for them in the future when he sends his promised king.**²

Without a doubt, it is in fact Numbers 24:8 that lays the foundation for the Bible's entire Passover Paradigm of the end times. It is here that for perhaps the first time in Scripture, we see very clearly that Israel's original exodus from Egypt is one of the primary prophetic pictures of what will take place when Jesus returns. There may be a few other hints earlier in the book of Exodus that Israel's flight from Egypt was in some way prophetic of future events (see Ex. 15:1-15). However, this idea does not really come into its own and become manifest in unequivocal terms until the Balaam Oracles in Numbers 24. As we will see later, nearly every other text in the Bible that speaks of the Passover and exodus in an end-times context is in some way rooted in and connected back to the theology of Numbers 24:3-9.

Of course, I am aware that in response to this interpretation of Numbers 24:8-9 some people might argue that this passage was perhaps already fulfilled in the first century, when Jesus went down to Egypt as a child, and then came back to live in the Promised Land (Matt. 2:13-23).

2 John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 408.

Others might say this passage is somehow being “spiritually fulfilled” by Jesus today, as He leads the Church through a “spiritual exodus” out of the land of sin and darkness by the power of the Holy Spirit.

While both of these ideas are worth considering, they do not adequately capture the true meaning of what Balaam communicates in Numbers 24:8-9. Unless we are willing to irresponsibly allegorize and disregard the plain meaning of Scripture, it is not possible that this passage could refer to anything other than a literal sequence of events that will occur at a literal time in the future, when the Messiah is exalted over His enemies.

The time when the Messiah comes “out of Egypt” will also be the time when He devours “the nations who are his adversaries,” crushes “their bones in pieces,” and shatters “them with his arrows” (Num. 24:8). None of these things have happened yet, and such statements certainly do not describe events that took place when Jesus was a small boy! This entire passage is about the Second Coming.

GENTLE JESUS, MEEK AND MILD?

When Jesus does return and come out of Egypt, He is going to wage a military campaign against the forces of evil unlike anything the world has ever seen. At this time, His actions will resemble those of a “wild ox” bucking with its horns. Jesus will wreak havoc on His adversaries, and leave anyone who might try to subdue Him in complete and utter disarray. Although at the time of His first coming Jesus came to us as the Lamb of God, when He returns He will roar like a predatory lion in the wild, and utterly destroy those foolish enough to confront Him (Num. 24:9).

This comparison between the Messianic figure in Numbers 24:9 and a lion is also a definite reference back to the Messianic prophecy in Genesis 49:8-12, which compares Judah to a lion going up “from the prey.” Indeed, Jesus is coming back to this earth as our Warrior King, leading a new exodus of God’s people out of Egypt and against the powers of darkness. For this reason, as Balaam warned, anyone who

blesses the Messiah will be blessed, but anyone who curses and opposes Him will be met with destruction (Num. 24:9).

I have no doubt that when Jesus spoke about the future fulfillment of Passover and the exodus in Luke 22:15-16, He had Numbers 24:3-9 and other correlated texts from the Hebrew Bible on His mind. Jesus knew that at the time of His Second Coming He will have to once again go down into Egypt and lead the Israelites in a victorious procession through the wilderness. In chapter eight we will begin looking in more detail at exactly why Jesus will have to go down into Egypt to rescue the Jewish people when He returns. In later chapters, we will also see how this End-Times Exodus is connected to other events that will take place in Israel and the Middle East in the last days.

6

GOG, THE ANTICHRIST IN NUMBERS 24

“You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”

—PSALM 2:9 (NIV)

IN THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER, we saw how Numbers 24:3-9 establishes the Biblical connection between the return of Jesus and Israel’s original exodus from Egypt. In this chapter, what I want to do is show you how in addition to this idea related to Israel’s eschatological exodus, Numbers 24:3-9 also lays the foundation for what would eventually blossom into the Bible’s full-fledged doctrine of the Antichrist [i.e. the End-Times Pharaoh].

Although this is not widely recognized by most prophecy teachers today, it is in Numbers 24 that we are introduced to the Antichrist for the very first time in Scripture. This is absolutely critical to understand if we want to have a more accurate Biblical theology of the end times. A failure to recognize the presence of the Antichrist in Numbers 24 has led to some serious misinterpretations not only of this passage itself, but also of many other passages that are about the Antichrist that appear later in the Biblical canon. In effect, to miss out on what Numbers 24

teaches about the Antichrist is to have one's entire doctrine of the end times built on an incomplete, shaky, and unstable foundation, which then often leads to many other compounding errors further down the road. Moreover, it is only by understanding what this passage tells us about the Antichrist that we will be able to paint an even more complete picture of what the last-days fulfillment of Passover, and the glorious return of our Messiah to this earth, will look like.

GOG NOT AGAG IN NUMBERS 24:7

In order to begin seeing how Numbers 24 lays the foundation for the Bible's doctrine of the Antichrist, it is necessary to recognize that Numbers 24:7 is the first text in the Bible that gives the ultimate end-times enemy of the Messiah a proper name. It is here that we are initially introduced to the idea that in the last days there will be one primary political enemy of Israel and the people of God, who will in essence represent the will of the Serpent on this earth.¹

In Numbers 24:7 this person is introduced to us simply as "Gog." This verse reads:

Water will flow from his [Israel's] buckets, and his [Israel's] seed [the Messiah] will be by many waters, and his [Israel's] king [the Messiah] shall be higher than Gog, and his kingdom shall be exalted. [*Author's translation*]

Unfortunately, almost every English translation of Numbers 24:7 translates this verse as though it refers to "Agag" instead of Gog, which is a reading based on the Masoretic Text of the Hebrew Bible. Agag was an Amalekite king who lived in the time of Saul, David, and Samuel (cf. 1 Sam. 15). Thus, according to most interpreters, this verse is only saying

1 The idea of an Antichrist figure is also hinted at in Genesis 3:15, with the reference to the "seed" of the Serpent. However, it is not until Numbers 24:7 that this Antichrist figure is first identified for us by name, and revealed to be a geopolitical leader who will rule over a kingdom of darkness in the last days.

that Israel's king, David, would subjugate Agag and the Amalekites, which did in fact happen in the time of the Davidic monarchy (1 Sam 30).

RECONSIDERING THE MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE OF NUMBERS 24:7

The problems with interpreting Numbers 24:7 as a reference to Agag however, are essentially three-fold. First, many early Hebrew and Greek manuscripts of the Bible support the idea that in this verse Balaam refers to Gog, not Agag. This variant reading can be found in the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, and also in some versions of Theodotion and Symmachus.²

As I mentioned in chapter four, the Septuagint is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that was completed roughly 200 years before the time of Jesus. Theodotion and Symmachus were other Greek translations of the Old Testament completed between 100-200 AD.³ In addition to these Greek versions of the Old Testament, the Samaritan Pentateuch is one of the oldest Hebrew versions of the five Books of Moses still in existence, which is probably “derived from a Hebrew text at least as old as the second century B.C.”⁴

The translation of Numbers 24:7 found specifically in the Septuagint reads as follows:

There shall come a man out of his seed; and he shall rule over many nations and his kingdom shall be more exalted than Gog and his kingdom shall be increased.⁵

Now to be clear, normally scholars would not favor the reading of the Septuagint or another one of these ancient manuscripts over the Masoretic Text (MT), simply because the Masoretic Text is widely

2 Sverre Boe, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38-39 as Pre-text for Revelation 19,17-21 and 20,7-10* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 51.

3 Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity, 3rd Edition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 432-438.

4 Ibid., 535.

5 From Boe, 51.

regarded as one of our most reliable ancient versions of the Hebrew Scriptures. The Masoretic Text was consolidated in the second century AD, and then the Hebrew vowel pointings were added to this text by the ninth and tenth centuries AD.⁶ Without the Masoretic Text our ability to accurately discern the original words of the Old Testament with any degree of certainty would be greatly diminished.

However, as reliable as the Masoretic Text certainly is in many respects, when so many other ancient versions of the Bible give the same reading of a verse, and this reading contradicts what is found in the Masoretic Text, it often leads scholars to legitimately question the Masoretic translation. In the case of Numbers 24:7, because all of the other most reliable manuscripts of the Torah refer to Gog in this verse, and not Agag, we have to ask whether the Masoretic translation of this verse, which has in turn been used in our English Bibles, is inaccurate, and perhaps the result of a scribal error, or even some type of theological bias. Without a doubt, it is indeed striking and quite suspect that not only one ancient manuscript of the Hebrew Scriptures, but an entire list of manuscripts from before and shortly after the time of Jesus, disagree with the Masoretic Text in their translation of Numbers 24:7.

According to Messianic Jewish scholar Michael Rydelnik, the reason for this disparity is most likely because of a theological and specifically anti-Messianic bias among the Masoretic scholars, which in turn led them to substitute Agag for Gog when translating Numbers 24:7. As Rydelnik notes, the Masoretic Text does often reflect the biases of later “rabbinic theology” and the “theological perspective of post-Christian, rabbinic Judaism.”⁷

What this means is that because the Masoretic Text was completed in a time when Jews and Christians often did not have the best relationship, the Rabbinic scribes who completed the Masoretic Text

6 Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2010), 35.

7 Ibid., 36.

sometimes gravitated more towards a “distinctly non-messianic” and non-eschatological presentation of certain verses, particularly to try and distance themselves from a Christian and Messianic interpretation of the Hebrew Bible.⁸ As Rydelnik astutely points out, the Masoretic Text does contain numerous scribal changes to the original text of the Hebrew Bible, many of which were intended to dilute the Messianic meaning of various passages in Scripture.

In addition to Rydelnik, Old Testament scholars John Sailhamer and Sverre Boe also favor the translation of Number 24:7 found in the Septuagint and the Samaritan Pentateuch, not the Masoretic Text. Sailhamer describes the Masoretes translation of Numbers 24:7 as the result of “postbiblical, that is, secondary interpretation.”⁹ In this same vein Boe has also written:

Text critically the weight of the LXX [Septuagint] and the Samaritan Pentateuch together against the MT is considerable, and G. Gerlman makes high claims for this reading, stating that **there is no doubt that Gog, not Agag, was the common reading in pre-Christian times.**¹⁰

When all of the manuscript evidence is taken into consideration, I too am convinced that in the original Hebrew text of Numbers 24:7 we would find the word Gog, not Agag. As a matter of fact, I would even advise that you cross out Agag in your English Bible and write Gog in its place.

Of course, going with a variant reading not found in nearly every English translation of this verse is not a decision I take lightly. Nor does this imply that I am some conspiracy theorist who believes the Masoretic Text is unreliable all of the time, or that we cannot ever trust the words of our English Bibles. People who make such claims know absolutely

8 See Ibid., 34-46.

9 John H. Sailhamer, *Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 220-221.

10 Boe, 52.

nothing about textual criticism, including how we can actually compare different manuscripts of the Bible to determine the original text with somewhere close to 98-100% accuracy.

Manuscripts of Numbers 24:7 Containing “Gog”	Manuscripts of Numbers 24:7 Containing “Agag”
The Samaritan Pentateuch (c. 100s BC)	Hebrew Masoretic Text (c. 100-900 AD)
The Greek Septuagint (c. 200s BC)	Latin Vulgate (300s AD)
Greek Theodotion (c. 100-200 AD)	
Greek Symmachus (c. 100-200 AD)	
Old Latin (c. 100-300s AD; Pre-Vulgate)	

This decision regarding the original wording in Numbers 24:7 highlights that sometimes, comparing slight variations among different manuscripts of the Bible can help ensure that we end up with the best translation, rather than an inherited tradition based on theological bias. As Rydelnik has helpfully pointed out, we must be aware that most translation teams who produce English Bibles are very reluctant to adopt a variant reading of a verse that goes against the status quo, even when the manuscript evidence favors this variant reading.

In an online interview, Rydelnik recounted his own experience with theological bias over the translation of Numbers 24:7 in the following terms:

Having been part of a translation team for a modern translation, I found the editors reluctant to adopt a reading that is distinctive or different. I was part of a team of OT scholars that went to the editor in chief of this modern translation, asking him to revise this translation to “Gog.” **He replied that the text critical evidence seemed to support the Gog reading** but he said he would find it hard to convince the publisher to adopt a reading so radically different from other translations. Sadly, this is no different than commentary tradition. “It’s always been understood this way so we can’t change it.”¹¹

Rather than adhering to an arbitrarily defined “commentary tradition,” I would rather know what the actual words of Balaam’s original prophecy were, so that I can then build my theology on a firmer foundation. The manuscript evidence makes it difficult to defend the position that Numbers 24:7 refers to Agag. Balaam was speaking in this verse of how the Messiah, Israel’s King and Seed, will be “higher than Gog,” not of how king David would be higher than the Amalekites.

THE TRADITIONAL INTERPRETATION AND THE BROADER CONTEXT

In addition to the manuscript evidence, the second major problem with interpreting Numbers 24:7 as a reference to Agag instead of Gog is related to the broader context of this prophecy as a whole. As we saw in the last two chapters, Numbers 24 is about the Messiah and the inauguration of His kingdom. The Messianic language and allusions in this passage could not be any more obvious.

Israel’s King and Seed in this passage is the Messiah, not David. Therefore, because the historical reign of David is not even the subject of Numbers 24:3-9, it would make absolutely no sense for the historical figure Agag to suddenly make an appearance in a passage that is about the last days and the Second Coming of Jesus.

11 “Gog & Jesus in Numbers 24: Michael Rydelnik’s Response,” online, *My Digital Seminary*, 15 August 2015, <http://mydigitalseminary.com/gog-jesus-in-numbers-24-michael-rydelniks-response/>.

This point has been summarized by Old Testament scholar William A. Tooman:

Some scholars have tried to explain away the reference to Gog in Num 24:7. In most cases, they assume that Num 24 must be a prediction of the coming Davidic monarchy. In some cases, it is claimed that the LXX [Septuagint] translators “introduced” Gog into the poem, rendering the original oracles eschatological. [...] **The main problem with the reading “Agag” is that it does not suit the circumstances portrayed in the oracles.**

[...] [I]nasmuch as the coming king is said to “devour” and rule over “many nations,” the oracles do not correspond with any pre-exilic hope or reality regarding the monarchy. **Of the two readings, only Gog makes sense in the context.** [...] [T]he king [Messiah] in Num 24 is depicted as a contemporary of the Gog character, excluding any known Israelite or Judean monarch from view.¹²

To briefly review Tooman’s point here, simple consistency requires that if we read Numbers 24:7 as a prophecy about Israel’s future King, we must also understand the Messiah’s enemy in this passage to be an eschatological figure as well, not merely a historical figure who lived during the time of Israel’s ancient monarchy. The entire context of this passage is Messianic and eschatological. It is not a prediction of David’s triumph over the Amalekites. It is a prediction of the Messiah’s exaltation over His enemies in the last days. Therefore, we can confidently conclude that when Jesus returns He will subjugate and defeat a person identified as Gog.

NUMBERS 24:7, GOG, AND EZEKIEL 38-39

The third and final reason we can be so sure Numbers 24:7 refers to Gog, is because of a parallel passage that speaks of this end-times figure in Ezekiel 38:16-17. This passage from Ezekiel reads:

12 William A. Tooman, *Gog of Magog: Reuse of Scripture and Compositional Technique in Ezekiel 38-39* (Tubingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 142-143.

“It shall come about in the last days that I will bring you against My land, so that the nations may know Me when I am sanctified through you before their eyes, O Gog.” Thus says the Lord God, “Are you the one of **whom I spoke in former days through My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you [Gog] against them?**”

This passage teaches that in addition to Ezekiel, God’s prophets in the “former days” also spoke of Gog. Throughout Jewish and Christian history interpreters have been greatly puzzled over this idea that Gog is referenced in earlier portions of Scripture, precisely because apart from Ezekiel 38-39, they do not see anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible where a last-days figure named Gog is ever mentioned. There is a Gog mentioned once in 1 Chronicles 5:4, but this is a historical person not related to the eschatological figure in Ezekiel. In response to the supposed dilemma presented by Ezekiel 38:16-17, commentators have come up with many different explanations to try and sidestep the undeniable fact that Ezekiel said the prophets before him “prophesied” for “many years” about a last-days figure known as Gog.

What these commentators are missing however, is that Ezekiel’s Gog figure first appears in Numbers 24:7. Moses and Balaam are the prophets God has in mind when He says Israel’s earlier prophets spoke about Gog. As a matter of fact, Ezekiel based his entire theology of the end times in Ezekiel 38-39 on Numbers 24. This is why Ezekiel said that Gog was mentioned by the earlier prophets. He knew that Numbers 24:7 is about Gog, not Agag.

Although very few interpreters have properly discerned the relationship between the Gog in Numbers 24:7, and the Gog who appears later in Ezekiel 38-39, some scholars do recognize that it is in fact the same end-times figure being spoken of in both passages. In his extensive scholarly work, *Gog of Magog: Reuse of Scripture and Compositional Technique in Ezekiel 38-39*, Tooman expounds on this connection in the following terms:

There are several good reasons to identify Numbers 24:7 as the original source for the Gog figure in [Ezekiel 38-39] [...] The weight of the text-critical evidence [i.e. the ancient manuscripts] and the correspondence between Numbers 24 and [Ezekiel 38-39] strongly suggest that [Ezekiel] derived his villain from the Balaam Oracles.

The Septuagint, Samaritan Pentateuch, Theodotian, and Old Latin reveal an ancient understanding of the Balaam Oracles in which a foe named Gog is defeated by the king of Israel in the [latter days]. [Ezekiel] gave his adversary the same name and situated his defeat in the same indeterminate future time period.¹³

In a later chapter we will take an even deeper look at how Ezekiel's entire paradigm of the end times in Ezekiel 38-39 is rooted in the Balaam Oracles. But suffice it to say for now, if Numbers 24:7 did not refer to Gog, then Ezekiel's words in Ezekiel 38:16-17 would be completely unintelligible and contradictory, precisely because Numbers 24:7 is the only other place in the Bible that definitely mentions an end-times figure named Gog.¹⁴

SO WHO IS GOG THEN?

Now that we have looked at the manuscript evidence, the contextual evidence in Numbers 24 itself, and the Biblical evidence in Ezekiel 38 that supports reading Numbers 24:7 as a reference to Gog instead of

13 Tooman, 140-143.

14 The Septuagint does also mention Gog as a replacement for Og, "the giant of Bashan," in Deuteronomy 3:1, 3:13, and 4:47. The LXX also mentions Gog in Amos 7:1 as "king of the locust invasion," associating him with demonic activity. However, we do not have enough manuscript evidence to know if these references to Gog are original, or if they were inserted as an alternate reading by the Septuagint scholars. From manuscript evidence alone, Numbers 24:7 is the only other instance where we can be relatively certain that Gog is mentioned outside of Ezekiel 38-39. See Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2015), 365.

Agag, we are in a much better position to understand who this end-times enemy of the Messiah actually is. Admittedly, to us modern readers, the sudden appearance of the name Gog in Numbers 24:7 will seem a bit random. This is the first time the name Gog is ever used in the Bible, and apart from the one instance I mentioned earlier in 1 Chronicles 5:4, the word Gog appears only seven other times in the Old Testament, in Ezekiel 38-39.

We have to assume that the name Gog meant something significant to Balaam and the ancient Israelites, because it is not likely Balaam would have used a term that had no real meaning to his original audience. Unfortunately however, the Bible does not tell us a whole lot about why this name in particular was given to this mysterious end-times figure in the Balaam Oracles.

As a result of this ambiguity, scholars continue to debate the origins of the name Gog. Some believe Gog is associated with a “name mentioned in the Assyrian records,” which refer to “the chief of a mountain tribe north of Assyria” named “Gagu.”¹⁵ Other scholars have suggested that the name Gog “may reflect a personification of spiritual darkness if it derives from the Sumerian word *gug* (“darkness”), though this is uncertain.”¹⁶

Even with these suggestions taken into consideration, it still needs to be stated that all attempts to trace the origins of the name Gog end up resting on inconclusive evidence. We simply do not know exactly why this name suddenly appears in the book of Numbers and Ezekiel.

Furthermore, the most important thing to know about the name Gog as it was used in Numbers 24:7, is that Balaam viewed Gog as an eschatological figure who will oppose the Messiah and be inspired by the powers of darkness. In other words, Balaam did not understand Gog to be merely one of his historical contemporaries.

15 See “Gog” in R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., & Bruce K Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), 153.

16 Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible* (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2015), 365.

In his book, *The Unseen Realm*, Old Testament scholar Michael Heiser perfectly summarizes how Gog would have been understood in the time of Balaam:

Gog would have been perceived as either a figure empowered by supernatural evil or an evil quasi-divine figure from the supernatural world bent on the destruction of God's people. **For this reason, Gog is regarded by many biblical scholars as a template for the New Testament antichrist figure.**¹⁷

THE CASE THAT GOG IS THE ANTICHRIST

Now I am well aware that many people will find it difficult to accept that Numbers 24:7 contains the first direct reference to the Antichrist in Scripture. However, if we look objectively at the language used in Numbers 24:7 in relation to Gog, this is really the only viable explanation for who this person could be. As we will see in the rest of this chapter, there are at least three contextual and Biblical clues within Numbers 24:7-9 that further confirm that the Gog figure in this passage must be the Antichrist.

THE PHRASE “HIGHER THAN GOG”

For one, the phrase that Israel's King “will be higher than Gog” implies that Jesus will engage in battle with Gog when He returns. In other words, Gog is not presented in this text as some random end-times personality who will disappear from the scene of history before the Second Coming. Rather, Gog is presented as the ultimate end-times archenemy of the Messiah, and indeed, as the primary individual who will try and stand in Jesus' way when He returns to establish His kingdom. The point of Numbers 24:7 is that Israel's Messiah will be exalted, specifically by achieving victory over Gog.

In many other passages in Scripture we are also told that Jesus will defeat the Antichrist when He returns. For example, 2 Thessalonians 2:8 says Jesus will slay the Antichrist, the “lawless one,” with the “breath

17 Ibid., 365.

of His mouth,” and bring him to his end “by the appearance of His coming.” Likewise, in Daniel 2:44 we are told that a “stone” representing Jesus’ Messianic Kingdom will “crush and put an end” to the kingdom of the Antichrist. In Revelation 19:20 as well we are told that the Antichrist, who is described in this passage as “the beast,” will be “seized” and thrown into the lake of fire after Jesus defeats him.

By all accounts, Scripture teaches that Jesus will engage in military conflict with the Antichrist shortly after His Second Coming. As a result, when we read in Numbers 24:7 that the Messiah will be “higher than Gog,” we should accept that this text communicates the exact same thing as all of the other passages throughout the Bible that also refer to the conflict between Jesus and the Antichrist. The very fact that Numbers 24:7-9 tells us Jesus will subjugate the kingdom of Gog when He returns, proves that Gog’s kingdom is identical to the kingdom of the Antichrist. There is simply no other primary kingdom of darkness Jesus is coming back to destroy.

I would even go so far as to say that when the later prophets spoke of the Messiah overcoming the kingdom of the Antichrist in the last days, they were actually building their theology on this foundational text in Numbers 24:7. Numbers 24:7 represents the inception of the idea that Jesus will defeat the Antichrist before He establishes the Messianic Kingdom.

THE COMPARISON BETWEEN GOG’S KINGDOM AND THE MESSIANIC KINGDOM

The second reason we can be so sure that Gog in Numbers 24:7 is the Antichrist, is because of the way in which the Messiah’s kingdom is juxtaposed and compared to Gog’s kingdom. As we have repeatedly seen, the entire purpose of Numbers 24 is to highlight the Messiah’s unsurpassed dominance over the entire earth, and by default, also over all the forces of evil. If Gog were just some second-rate end-times dictator, and not the Antichrist, then saying that Jesus will be “higher than Gog” wouldn’t harmonize with Balaam’s broader message in this text. It

would be like saying the Messiah will be greater than some lower-level end-times personality who will be beneath the Antichrist. Such a statement wouldn't make any sense in this context, and wouldn't be much of a compliment to Jesus at all.

However, if Gog is the Antichrist, as I believe he most certainly is, then Balaam saying that the Messiah will be "higher than Gog" was a perfect way for him to concisely state that Israel's King will completely vanquish all the powers of evil on this earth, and then establish His own unrivaled kingdom in the Messianic Age. This reading of Numbers 24:7 fits in much better with the overall message of Numbers 24. All Balaam is saying in this verse is that by defeating Gog the Messiah will effectively defeat evil, which in turn proves that Gog must be the Antichrist, the absolute embodiment of evil and rebellion against God in the last days.

To give an illustration that explains how the phrase "higher than Gog" does in fact prove that Gog is the Antichrist, imagine if someone asked you, "who was the greatest U.S. president to ever live?" In response to this question many people would probably say either George Washington or Abraham Lincoln. Therefore, if I was involved in a political campaign, and I wanted to tell you that I believed our candidate would not only become the next president, but would also be the greatest president of all time, I might say, "Our candidate is going to be greater than Washington," or "greater than Lincoln."

You see, to describe the greatness of my candidate I would naturally have to compare him to someone else who was also universally regarded as great and noteworthy, otherwise the comparison would not serve my purposes at all. For example, even though the 13th U.S. President Millard Fillmore may have done some good things, most people have never heard of him. So if I said to you, "my candidate is going to be greater than Millard Fillmore," you'd probably say, "So what! That doesn't mean anything."

In the same way, when it comes to Numbers 24:7, the very fact that the Messiah is regarded as greater than Gog, and "higher than Gog," must of necessity also mean that Gog will in some ways attempt to rival the Messiah in his greatness, but that in the end, the Messiah's kingdom

will be greater. The notion that Jesus will be “higher than Gog” elevates Gog to the level of being the Messiah’s most formidable adversary in all of history. And who will be the Messiah’s primary adversary when He returns? The Antichrist, the very personification of Satan himself, the ultimate seed of the Serpent (Gen. 3:15).

GOG, LEADER OF THE KINGDOM OF DARKNESS

The third reason we can be confident that Gog in Numbers 24:7 is the Antichrist, is because the larger context of this verse implies that Gog will be the primary political leader of the nations Jesus will defeat when He returns. As we have already seen, the immediately following verses in Numbers 24:8-9 mention how the Messiah will come “out of Egypt” like a wild ox and a roaring lion, crushing, devouring, and shattering His enemies with His arrows. Interestingly, Numbers 24:8 mostly speaks in generic terms of the “nations” that will act as the Messiah’s adversaries at the time of His Second Coming. However, Gog is the one person from among these nations who is specifically singled out in the third Balaam oracle and given a proper name. Why? Because he represents them. He is their leader.

Scripture unambiguously tells us in many other places that it will be the Antichrist who will lead the end-times kingdom of nations that Jesus will destroy when He returns. In Numbers 24:7-9 Gog is presented in precisely the same light. Therefore, we have every right to deduce that he is in fact the same Antichrist figure who is mentioned in numerous other Biblical passages as well.

GOG = ANTICHRIST

Taken as a whole, both the specific language used in Numbers 24:3-9, as well as the eschatological context of this passage, supports the idea that Gog is the Antichrist.

Many prophecy teachers over the last 100 years have wrongly assumed that Gog must be an end-times figure distinct from the Antichrist, and someone whom God will actually judge during the

seven-year tribulation period, many years before the Second Coming of Jesus. However, this is a faulty understanding of who Gog is, precisely because Numbers 24:7-8 states that Gog will engage in battle with Jesus when He comes out of Egypt.

In other words, Balaam tells us that Gog will be alive and on the earth when Jesus returns, and that he will function as the quintessential archenemy of Israel, the Messiah, and all the people of God, right up until the time Jesus comes back to deal with him. We know from many other Scriptures that Jesus' primary enemy when He returns will be the Antichrist. Thus, we can safely conclude that since Gog is presented as the primary enemy of the returning Messiah in Numbers 24, Gog and the Antichrist are one and the same. This point will be even further proven when we examine Ezekiel 38-39 in later chapters.

For now however, we can confidently say that Numbers 24 is the first place in Scripture where we see that the scheme of the Serpent to destroy God's Messianic program for the world, which we were first introduced to in Genesis 3:15, will eventually manifest itself through the evil actions of one geopolitical leader, a man whom Balaam identifies as Gog. In essence, Gog should be understood as the personification of the Serpent figure from Genesis 3:15, and as the incarnation of spiritual darkness and rebellion against God.

Furthermore, just as Genesis 3:15 predicted that the Messiah would have victory over the Serpent, and "crush" or "bruise" his head, in a parallel fashion, Numbers 24:7-9 also predicts that when the Messiah comes out of Egypt He will be "higher than Gog," will "crush" Gog's bones, and will "shatter" him with His arrows. Numbers 24:7 tells us that the Messiah will overcome the Serpent in large part by overcoming his representative on the earth, that is Gog, the Antichrist. Additionally, we can conclude from this passage that in conjunction with Israel's End-Times Exodus, the defeat of Gog will also be a central part of how Passover will be fulfilled by Jesus when He returns (more on this in chapter 15).

In the end, only the Messiah will be "exalted," and only the Lion

from the tribe of Judah will reign. Just like in Genesis 3:14-15, where God said to the Serpent, “Cursed are you!” Numbers 24:9 also implies that Gog and his hordes will be cursed and defeated for opposing Israel’s King: “Blessed is everyone who blesses you [King Messiah], and cursed is everyone [including Gog] who curses and opposes you” (Numbers 24:9; *Author’s expanded translation*).

7

THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST IN NUMBERS 24

“The Bible is and always has been a thoroughly Jerusalem-, Israel-, and Middle Eastern-centric book.”

—NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR, JOEL RICHARDSON

ONE OF THE MOST POPULAR IDEAS among conservative Bible prophecy teachers today, is that the Antichrist will arise from Europe, and that his end-times empire will initially be made up of mostly European nations. When I was a new believer back in 2004-2005, I remember watching a very compelling documentary about how the European Union is supposedly paving the way for the arrival of the Antichrist. At that time, I naïvely accepted this proposition as Biblical truth.

The more I have looked into this issue for myself however, and studied the teachings of those who hold to an alternate position, the more I have come to understand that in reality, the Bible consistently connects the Antichrist and his kingdom primarily to the nations of the Middle East, not Europe. As we saw in the last chapter, in Numbers 24:3-9 the Antichrist (Gog) is already mentioned in conjunction with the nation of Egypt. This implies that Egypt will be integrated into Gog’s kingdom, which as we will see later, is in fact confirmed by the prophet Daniel.

Because it is so important to understand what the Bible says about the specific nations that will be involved in end-time events, what I want to do in this chapter is explain how the final Balaam oracle in Numbers 24 also supports the idea that the nations of the Middle East will comprise the nucleus of the last-days kingdom of darkness on this earth. As we will see, Numbers 24:14-25, as well as many other passages in the Bible, teach that when Jesus returns to fulfill the Passover He will wage war against the Middle Eastern nations that are either in allegiance with Gog, or in some way antagonistic towards Israel.

THE LATTER DAYS IN NUMBERS 24

The fourth and final Balaam oracle can be found in Numbers 24:14-25. This prophecy opens with a unique prefacing comment by Balaam which reads, “I am going to my people; come, and I will advise you [Balak] what this people [Israel] will do to your people *in the latter days*.”

The phrase “the latter days” in this verse (*acharit (ha)yawmim*, אַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים), which is wrongly translated as “the days to come” in the NASB, is highly significant. In addition to Numbers 24:14, references to the “latter days” in the Hebrew Bible can also be found in a variety of other passages. Some of the most significant include Genesis 49:1, Deuteronomy 4:30, Deuteronomy 31:29, Isaiah 2:1-5, Jeremiah 23:20, Jeremiah 30:24, Jeremiah 48:47, Jeremiah 49:39, Hosea 3:5, and Daniel 10:14. We will look at some of these texts in subsequent chapters.

For now however, I only want to point out that although the precise meaning of *acharit (ha)yawmim* (“latter days”) has often been a topic of debate among scholars, it appears to be a kind of strategic signpost phrase, indicating that the material it is connected to is somehow uniquely significant and uniquely related to the last days. In other words, this was a phrase often used by the prophets when they wanted to make sure their readers understood they were speaking of events directly connected to the end times and the Age to Come.

Some have even suggested that the phrase *acharit (ha)yawmim* is meant to correspond directly to the phrase “In the beginning” in Genesis

1:1. According to this view, this phrase communicates that even as history has a beginning, it also has a God-ordained end. History is linear. It is moving towards a predetermined point in time when God will finally reign victorious over His creation in the “latter days.”

BALAAM'S FINAL PROPHECY

After Balaam established that his final prophetic oracle would be about the distant future and the end times, he then said the following in Numbers 24:17-19:

I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near; a star shall come forth from Jacob. **A scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab**, and tear down the sons of Sheth. Edom shall be a possession. Seir, its enemies also will be a possession, while Israel performs valiantly. One from Jacob shall have dominion, and will destroy the remnant from the city.

After this, the conclusion of the final Balaam oracle is recorded in Numbers 24:20-25:

And he looked at Amalek and took up his discourse and said, “Amalek was the first of the nations, but his end shall be destruction.” And he looked at the Kenite, and took up his discourse and said, “Your dwelling place is enduring, and your nest is set in the cliff. Nevertheless Kain will be consumed; How long will Asshur keep you captive?” Then he took up his discourse and said, “Alas, who can live except God has ordained it? But ships will come from the coast of Kittim, and they shall afflict Asshur and will afflict Eber; So they also will come to destruction.” Then Balaam arose and departed and returned to his place, and Balak also went his way.

THE SCEPTER OF MESSIAH RISES

As we saw in chapter 4, Balaam used a wide variety of linguistic allusions from the book of Genesis, all of which were intended to alert his audience

when he was speaking about the Messiah. Without a doubt, the “star of Jacob” and the “scepter” that shall “arise from Israel” that are mentioned in Numbers 24:17 are intended to be read in a Messianic light.

In the ancient world, stars were often understood to be symbolic of rulers and kings, and the mention of the “scepter” in this verse is undeniably connected to the earlier prophecy in Genesis 49:10, which spoke of the Messiah possessing the “scepter” of Judah. Additionally, the use of third person singular pronouns and verb forms in Numbers 24:17, as well as the idea that this last-days individual will “crush through the forehead” of his enemies, is definitely strategic. This language is linked both grammatically and thematically to the idea in Genesis 3:15 that the Offspring of Eve will “bruise” and crush the head of the Serpent.

By all accounts then, there can be no doubt that the Holy Spirit wanted us to see that the final Balaam oracle, like the one that precedes it in Numbers 24:3-9, is a prophecy concerning the days of the Messiah and the Second Coming of Jesus. The Messianic terminology in Numbers 24:14-19 is so strong that this passage has historically been interpreted in both Judaism and Christianity as one of the most foundational Messianic prophecies in the entire Bible. For example, the Jerusalem Targum translates Numbers 24:17 as, “A King is to arise from the house of Jacob, and a Redeemer and Ruler from the house of Israel [...]”¹

To briefly refresh your memory, below is a chart that compares the Messianic theology in Numbers 24 to the Messianic theology in Genesis. This chart demonstrates the narrative strategy of Moses when he wrote the Torah. It shows how he intentionally linked different Messianic passages throughout the Torah by repeating certain key vocabulary words and phrases.

1 *Jerusalem Targum*, Sefaria, https://www.sefaria.org/Targum_Jerusalem%2C_Numbers.24?lang=bi.

Messianic Theology in Genesis	Messianic Theology in Numbers 24
Genesis 9:27: The “tents” of Shem will be blessed by the presence of God. →	Numbers 24:5: Balaam sees that the “tents” of Israel are beautiful because the Messiah will reign from their midst.
Genesis 3:15: The “Seed” of Eve will overcome the Serpent and crush his head. →	Numbers 24:7: Israel’s “Seed” will be a King who overcomes Gog, and crushes His enemies.
Genesis 49:9: Judah, and the King of Judah, “couches, he lies down like a lion, and as a lion who dares rouse him?” →	Numbers 24:9: When He returns, the Messiah “couches, He lies down like a lion, and as a lion who dares rouse Him?”
Genesis 49:10: The Messiah will possess the “scepter” of Judah and the ruler’s staff in Israel, and through this means He will overcome the powers of darkness. →	Numbers 24:17: “A scepter will rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab.”

THE END TIMES AND THE MODERN MIDDLE EAST

To be sure, both the third and fourth Balaam oracles draw on the Messianic theology of Genesis, and as a result, both of these prophecies describe the victory of the Messiah over the forces of darkness. However, the final prophecy in Numbers 24:14-25 is also particularly unique. I say this because it gives us much more detail in terms of the specific nations Jesus will wage war against after He leads Israel “out of Egypt,” at the dawn of the Messianic Age.

As we saw in the last chapter, Numbers 24:7-8 only mentions a political leader named Gog, and also hints that Egypt will be one of the primary eschatological foes of Israel. Other than that, the references to the enemies of the Messiah and Israel in Numbers 24:3-9 are simply described using the generic term “nations.” “He will devour the nations

who are his adversaries” (Num. 24:7).

In Numbers 24:17-25 however, there is an entire list of individual nations and regions that are marked out for judgment at the time of the Messiah’s Second Coming. These nations/regions are included in the list below. Because of Numbers 24:7-8 I also include Egypt in this list as well. When Numbers 24 is viewed as a whole, this brings the total number of regions that are spoken of as being antagonistic to the Messiah and His people in the “latter days” to 10:

1. Moab
2. Sheth
3. Edom
4. Seir
5. Amalek
6. Kenite
7. Kain
8. Asshur
9. Eber
10. Egypt

In Balaam’s final prophecy, the judgement sequence in which these nations are mentioned begins with the prediction in verse 17 that the Messiah will “crush through the forehead of Moab.” As noted above, the language used in this verse is meant to evoke the idea of the Messiah’s final victory over the Serpent in Genesis 3:15.

What this connection between Numbers 24:17 and Genesis 3:15 implies, is that Moab will be in effect a geopolitical agent of the Serpent on this earth. Or, stated somewhat differently, what applies to the Serpent in Genesis applies to Moab in Numbers. Furthermore, when

this idea in Numbers 24:17 is coupled with the prior emphasis on the Messiah's exaltation over Gog in Numbers 24:7, this is a definite indication that Balaam saw "Moab," along with Gog, as one of the primary end-times enemies of Israel and God's people in the last days.

Figuratively speaking, the nation of Moab will have its head crushed, because like Gog, it will operate as an instrument of the Serpent on the earth and stand in opposition to the Messiah and His purposes for the world. In addition to Moab being judged when Jesus returns, this prophecy also tells us that Jesus will "tear down all the sons of Sheth," and make Edom and Seir "a possession." He will bring "destruction" on Amalek (Num. 24:20). Kain will be "consumed" and held "captive" by Asshur. Yet, Asshur and Eber will be afflicted by ships from "Kittim," and will therefore "also come to destruction" in the end (Num. 24:24).

HOW SHOULD WE INTERPRET THESE NATIONS?

Before we move any further, I want to point out that most commentators interpret the nations and events in Numbers 24:17-25 in either a strictly historical, or strictly symbolic/allegorical sense. On the historical side, we know that some of the events foretold in this passage had a certain level of fulfillment during later Biblical history. For example, Israel did eventually conquer the Land of Canaan, and King David did in fact subjugate both the Moabites and the Edomites (1 Sam. 14:47; 2 Sam. 8:1). Thus, many have said Numbers 24:17-25, though it should be interpreted literally to a degree, is only referring to events that have already happened.

The problem with this merely historical view of Numbers 24:17-25 however, is that the eschatological and Messianic nature of this passage most definitely implies that it is much more than just a prophetic prediction related to the Davidic monarchy, or ancient Israelite history. Nothing in the context warrants a rigidly historical (i.e. preterist) interpretation. All of the language in this passage, from the Messianic terminology that is used, to the mention of the "latter days" in Numbers 24:14, points to the distant future and the dawn of the Messianic Age.

In contrast to the historical interpretation of this passage, which predominates within liberal academic circles, the trend among most conservatives and evangelicals when interpreting the fourth Balaam oracle is to view it in strictly symbolic terms. As a result, the nations mentioned in the text are often viewed by many evangelicals as “generic” representatives of those who will oppose God and His kingdom, not as the actual territorial descriptions of nations that will play a key role in end-time events. Some have even said the nations mentioned in Numbers 24 are symbolic of European nations such as England, Germany, and Italy. These verses are also sometimes interpreted in a kind of spiritualized sense by conservative scholars, as though they only speak of the victory of Jesus over sin and evil, without any geopolitical connotations whatsoever.

The problem with the symbolic interpretation of this passage is just the opposite of the problem with the historical interpretation. For all its weaknesses, at least the historical position takes the normal rules of speech and grammar seriously when interpreting Numbers 24:17-25. The prevailing symbolic approach essentially amounts to nothing more than subjective allegorizing, which by default, causes the actual meaning of the words in the text to be completely lost.

Instead of either ignoring that this passage is about the last days, as historicists/preterists do, or allegorizing it to the point where its words fundamentally lose their meaning, as many evangelicals do, it is better to interpret Numbers 24:17-25 as a direct prophecy of future events, albeit one that Balaam delivered using the geographical place names that were available to him roughly 3,500 years ago. In other words, most of these nations do not actually exist anymore by name, and will not exist when Jesus returns. However, they should still be viewed as *geographical indicators* of the nations that will be either centrally-involved players in the kingdom of Gog, or at the very least, as nations that will in some way be uniquely singled out for judgment at the time of the Second Coming. Interpreting the nations mentioned in Numbers 24:17-25 more literally is the only way to preserve the idea that this text has real prophetic value and insight concerning the future, as Balaam clearly said it does.

This approach is much more exegetically responsible than carelessly saying that these place names, even though they are mentioned with great care and specificity, essentially have no objective meaning in relationship to Biblical eschatology. I think we need to be a little bit more cautious with the Biblical text than that, and endeavor to always take the words we see in Scripture seriously. This is why I argue that if we want to know which nations Balaam was referring to in an eschatological sense, we need to identify the *modern nations* that currently occupy the same territorial boundaries as the people groups mentioned in this passage. Balaam did see the future, but he saw it through the lens of his own understanding of ancient geography.

One of the pioneers of this “End-Times Geographical” approach to the regions and peoples mentioned in Numbers 24:17-25, is Bible prophecy teacher Joel Richardson. Richardson’s book *Mideast Beast* is a landmark study on Bible prophecy and the end times. In the next section, when discussing the nations mentioned in Numbers 24:17-25, I will summarize many of the salient points presented in Richardson’s work and also expand on what I believe this passage communicates in light of its relationship to the earlier prophecy in Numbers 24:3-9.

GOG AND THE NATIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Without exception, all of the places Balaam singles out for judgment in Numbers 24 were located in what is now the modern Middle East and North Africa. This list of names, Egypt, Moab, Sheth, Edom, Seir, Amalek, Kenite, Kain, Asshur, and Eber basically takes us on a tour from the land of the pyramids in the south, up through southern Arabia, into modern Jordan, Syria, and southern Turkey, as well as east towards northern Iraq.

Of course, we all know where Egypt is, and was, so that needs very little clarification. Moab was the kingdom of Balak, situated just east of the modern state of Israel, across the Jordan River, in the land that is now occupied by the country of Jordan.

The territorial boundaries of Sheth are more difficult to determine. Some have read this as a reference to Adam’s son Seth, and therefore

understood Numbers 24:17 to be speaking of “the whole human race.”² However, as noted by Richardson, one ancient Jewish interpretation identifies Sheth as representing Middle Eastern nations. This interpretation can be found in the Jerusalem Targum, which translates Sheth in Numbers 24:17 as “all the sons of the east.” Furthermore, Richardson also writes that the “Babylonian Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel goes further and explains it [Sheth] as a reference to ‘the armies of Gog who were themselves against Israel in battle array.’”³

As a brief aside, notice how this Targum connects the nations mentioned in the final Balaam oracle with the armies of Gog from the preceding prophecy in Numbers 24:7. This is yet another piece of evidence that 1) Gog is in fact the individual mentioned in this earlier prophecy, which many ancient Jews understood, and 2) that the purpose of the final Balaam oracle is to elaborate more on the specific nations that will be involved with Gog’s kingdom in the last days. Given that nearly every other nation mentioned in Numbers 24:17-25 is in the Middle East (except Kittim), it is most probable that the “sons of Sheth” represent a localized group of people from the neighboring regions around Israel, although we cannot say with absolute precision exactly where they lived.

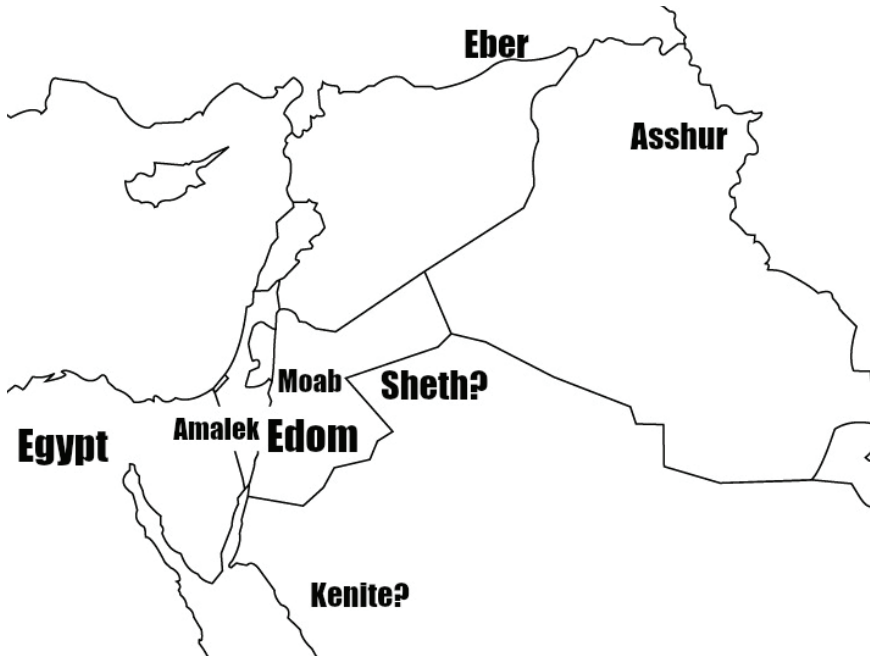
Edom was located just south of Moab. It occupied territory that is now in the southern portion of Israel and also southeast of modern Israel, in Jordan and the western part of Saudi Arabia. Seir was a mountain located in Edom (i.e. Jordan). Amalek controlled territory in southern Israel, and also to the east. The Kenites, who seem to be synonymous with “Kain” in Numbers 24:21-22, were probably a nomadic people who inhabited the regions around Israel. Moses’ father-in-law Jethro was a Kenite who lived in Midian (Judges 1:16; Ex. 3:1), near Mt. Sinai, which was most likely in modern day Saudi Arabia, just east of the Gulf of Aqaba.⁴

2 Walter C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 56.

3 Joel Richardson, *Mideast Beast: The Scriptural Case for an Islamic AntiChrist* (Washington D.C.: WND Books, 2012), 18.

4 See Joel Richardson, *Mount Sinai in Arabia: The True Location Revealed* (Winepress Media, 2019).

Asshur and Eber were descendants of Shem. Asshur settled in modern Iraq, on the bank of the Tigris River.⁵ The city of Asshur was also part of the “Old Assyrian Kingdom” which dates back to the time of the Biblical Patriarchs. In modern terms Asshur would be located about 50 miles southeast of Mosul, Iraq. Eber settled northwest of Asshur, around what is now the border of southern Turkey and Syria.



When we look at this list of nations and people groups mentioned in Numbers 24:17-25 through a modern geographical lens, it indicates that the governments of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and Iraq will be among the primary enemies of Israel, Jesus, and His people during the end times. Furthermore, because these nations are mentioned in the same context as Gog and the nations he will lead in the last days, this is one of the first indications in Scripture that the nucleus of the Antichrist’s

5 Thomas V. Brisco, *Holman Bible Atlas* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 36.

kingdom will in fact be comprised of Middle Eastern and North African nations (more on this in chapter 17).

One of the purposes of Numbers 24:17-25 is to reveal the exaltation of the Messiah over Gog and the powers of darkness with more detail than what can be found in the earlier prophecy in Numbers 24:7-9. The two passages are interrelated, and together they form the climax of Balaam's eschatological vision. Therefore, it simply stands to reason that since these are the nations that are specifically demarcated as sharing in the judgment, destruction, and crushing of Gog and the Serpent in the last Balaam oracle, they were also understood by Balaam and Moses to be the nations that will be either in allegiance with Gog, or at the very least, in league with the Serpent in some unique way, and thus, major players on the chessboard of geopolitics in the last days.

Furthermore, since we know Jesus will return to this earth and come "out of Egypt" to wage war against Gog and his armies, it makes perfect sense that Gog's armies would be specifically identified with other Middle Eastern nations that either border, or are within the same general region as Egypt. This of course does not imply that other nations around the world will not also be involved in end-times events. It only means that when we are seeking to identify the central hub of the Antichrist's kingdom, Numbers 24 does point us to the nations of the Middle East and North Africa, as do many other Biblical passages we will study later.

THE EXTENT OF GOG'S KINGDOM

With all of this said, I do want to clarify that I am not necessarily saying that every nation mentioned in Numbers 24:17-25 will be a part of Gog's kingdom, and 100% on his side in the last days. Some of them certainly will be, but that does not mean we can carelessly make a list from this text and then say without any qualification, "these will all be nations that will forge an alliance with the Antichrist." In reality, things will probably not be quite that simple.

In part, the reason I say this is because of a parallel passage about the Antichrist that can be found in Daniel 11:40-43. This passage reads:

At the end time the king of the South will collide with him [the Antichrist], and the king of the North [i.e. Antichrist] will storm against him with chariots, with horsemen, and with many ships; and he will enter countries, overflow them and pass through. He will also enter the Beautiful Land, and many countries will fall; **but these will be rescued out of his [the Antichrist's] hand; Edom, Moab, and the foremost sons of Ammon.** Then he will stretch out his hand against other countries, and the land of Egypt will not escape. **But he will gain control over the hidden treasures of gold and silver and over all the precious things of Egypt;** and Libyans and Ethiopians [i.e. Cushites]⁶ will follow at his heels.

Many prophecy teachers rightly understand the “king of the North” in this passage to be a reference to the Antichrist. (Why the Antichrist is connected to the north will be further explained in chapter 17, when we look at Ezekiel 38-39). What is notable in this text from Daniel however, is that when Daniel speaks of the conquests of the Antichrist he says that Edom and Moab, which are both mentioned by name in Numbers 24:17-18, will be “rescued out of” the Antichrist’s hand. Yet, at the same time, Daniel also mentions Egypt, Libya, the Cushites [i.e. Sudan], and “many” other countries that “will fall,” coming under the Antichrist’s power. When we connect this passage back to Numbers 24:8, why Jesus will wage war in Egypt and come “out of Egypt” when He returns begins to make even more sense. He will do so, because based on Daniel 11:40-43, Egypt will be one of the primary nations that is under the control of the Antichrist.

This picture in Daniel reveals that Gog’s kingdom, or, to use Daniel’s language, the kingdom controlled by the “king of the North,” will be comprised of countries across the Middle East and North Africa. Yet, there will also be countries from this same region that are not fully

6 The NASB translates the *cushim* (Cushites) in v. 43 as Ethiopians. However, many Bible scholars believe Cush should more accurately be connected to the region now occupied by Sudan.

conquered by the Antichrist. These other nations will be at war with the Antichrist throughout the duration of the end times, and will defy his authority to a significant degree. This is why Daniel 9:26 also says, “even to the end there will be war; desolations are determined.” In other words, there is never a time when the Antichrist conquers all of his enemies and is able to completely cease from warfare.

Therefore, although Numbers 24:17-25 certainly does single out the nations of the Middle East and North Africa as comprising the nucleus of Gog’s kingdom in the last days, we must still look to the writings of the other Biblical prophets to try and decipher more specifically which of these nations will be a part of Gog’s kingdom before the return of Jesus. What the writings of the later prophets reveal to us, is that not every Middle Eastern nation singled out for judgment in Numbers 24 will be controlled by the Antichrist. These nations will likely oppose Israel and the followers of Jesus to a significant degree, and for that reason, they will also suffer the fate of the Messiah’s adversaries when He returns. But they will also quite likely be at war with the Antichrist himself until the time of the Second Coming.

GOG’S (SOMEWHAT) LIMITED KINGDOM

For many people, beginning to envision the true nature of Gog’s kingdom in the last days will be a paradigm shifting mental exercise. This is because many popular prophecy teachers over the years have endorsed the erroneous idea that the Antichrist will reign over a world-wide kingdom, and that no one will be able to escape his power. This idea has also given rise to the notion that in the near future a “one-world government” will emerge and take over the entire planet. However, as we have already seen from the book of Daniel, this is not an accurate representation of what will take place during the end times.

As noted by Richardson, when we study Scripture from an objective perspective, we see that the Antichrist’s kingdom is often presented

in the Bible as a “ten-nation alliance,” not an “absolute global empire.”⁷ That the Antichrist’s kingdom will be limited, rather than universal, is evident in Daniel 7:7-8, and 7:23-27. In this passage Daniel writes:

After this, I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast [i.e. the last-days kingdom of Antichrist], dreadful and terrifying and extremely strong; and it had large iron teeth. It devoured and crushed and trampled down the remainder with its feet; and it was different from all the beasts that were before it, and **it had ten horns**. While I was contemplating the horns, behold another horn, a little one came up among them [i.e. the Antichrist himself], and three of the first horns were pulled out by the roots before it; and behold this horn possessed eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth uttering great boasts.

The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth which will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth [*kol artza*] and tread it down and crush it. **As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise, and another [the Antichrist] will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings.** He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law, and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time [3 ½ years]. But the court will sit for judgement, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated, and destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, the dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.

7 Richardson, *Mideast Beast*, 36.

As is evident here, the last-days empire of the Antichrist will certainly be unique. It is described by Daniel as “dreadful, and terrifying, and extremely strong” (v. 7), “different from the previous ones” (v. 24), and one that will devour, crush, and trample its enemies (v. 7). Based on this language, it seems probable that the kingdom of the Antichrist will possess more power than any kingdom or empire in the history of mankind.

Yet, even with that being the case, this empire is still presented as geographically limited to the territorial boundaries controlled by “ten kings” (i.e. the horns of Dan. 7:7-8; cf. Rev. 17:11-13), at least initially. Furthermore, as we saw in the text from Daniel 11:40-43, Daniel also mentioned specific nations that will be rescued from the Antichrist’s hand.

Simply put, none of the Biblical data indicates that the Antichrist will reign over a categorically universal empire. He will have nearly universal and far-reaching political clout, such that his influence will likely surpass that of any other political leader in all of history. I assume he will also have followers, proxies, worshippers, and revolutionaries in almost every nation. But this is not quite the same thing as saying he will directly control the government of every country in the world, as many prophecy teachers have wrongly assumed. The situation at the grassroots level will be more complicated.

WHAT ABOUT “THE WHOLE EARTH”?

In response to this notion that the Antichrist will oversee a partially limited, rather than universal empire, some might ask about the meaning of Daniel 7:23. As you may have noticed, this verse states that the Antichrist’s kingdom will “be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour *the whole earth* and tread it down and crush it.” A similar idea is also found in Revelation 13:7-8.

After reading these verses in Daniel and Revelation, it is certainly fair to ask the questions: “Don’t these verses imply that the Antichrist’s kingdom will be absolutely universal? Doesn’t “the whole earth” in the Bible mean the whole earth, and every nation in the world as we know it today? Shouldn’t we do our best to interpret Scripture literally?”

As valid and sincere as these questions may be, a strictly universal interpretation of the phrase “the whole earth” in Daniel 7:23 does not seem tenable for two primary reasons. First, as we have already seen, the wider context of this passage describes the kingdom of the Antichrist as a ten-nation coalition. Revelation 17:11-13 also picks up on this precise idea when referencing the kingdom of the Antichrist:

The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they will receive authority as kings with the beast [Antichrist] for one hour. These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast (cf. Rev. 13:1).

When all of these passages in Daniel and Revelation are taken into consideration, simple consistency requires that we don’t interpret the phrase “the whole earth” in Daniel 7:23 in a hyper-literal fashion. To say otherwise would be to say that Daniel was contradicting himself in this passage. We can’t have it both ways. We can’t believe that the Antichrist’s kingdom will be absolutely universal in scope, and yet a ten-kingdom alliance at the same time.

The second reason we can be sure that the phrase “the whole earth” in Daniel 7:23 does not mean the entire earth as we know it today, is because Daniel uses this same phrase (*kol artza*) in Daniel 2:39 when speaking about the kingdom of Greece. In this text, Daniel refers to the Greek empire, which arose after the Babylonian and Persian empires, in the following terms:

After you [Babylon], there will arise another kingdom inferior to you [Persia], then another third kingdom of bronze [Greece], which **will rule over all the earth** (Dan. 2:39).

As Joel Richardson has rightly pointed out, “no historian would ever claim that the Greek Empire ever actually ruled the entire planet. [...] Alexander the Great did *not* rule over every last nation on the earth,”

and yet, Daniel still described his reign as extending “over all the earth.”⁸

What does this mean? In simple terms, it means that we must be comfortable accepting that the phrase the “whole earth” and “all the earth,” when it is applied to the kingdom of the Antichrist in Daniel and Revelation, does not always mean the entire inhabited planet as we know it today.

THE BIBLICAL MEANING OF DANIEL 7:23

When all of the evidence is weighed, it is best to interpret the phrase “the whole earth” in Daniel 7:23 as a figure of speech. This phrase implies that the Antichrist will possess an extraordinarily large, and probably even unprecedented degree of land and power, but not necessarily that he will control every blade of grass in the world.

I understand that some might hear this and accuse me of “not interpreting Scripture literally,” or of “violating the Word of God.” However, we have to remember that interpreting Scripture literally requires that we accept when the Biblical authors were using symbolic language and figures of speech to communicate a point. In the case of Daniel 7:23, the phrase the “whole earth” is quite obviously an instance of hyperbole, such as when people today say, “I’m starving,” or, “I’ve been waiting here forever,” or, “I just drove all over creation.”

When we use this type of language in the modern day no one thinks that we are actually starving, or that we’ve been waiting on something since eternity past, or that we literally just drove across every continent in the world. This is overstated language that does not fit precisely into a dictionary definition of words. Yet, it still makes up a normal part of everyday discourse, and people still know exactly what is meant by these types of phrases.

In the same way, when Daniel spoke of the kingdom of the Antichrist devouring the “whole earth,” he was saying that in the broader region where the Antichrist will have control, i.e. the Middle East and

8 Richardson, 42.

North Africa, his control will be awe-inspiring, expansive, and unlike anything the world has ever seen. Any person in the ancient Near East reading Daniel 7 would have understood this. They would not have interpreted the phrase the “whole earth” as implying that the Antichrist will control every square inch of land in the world any more than they would have interpreted Daniel 2:39 as implying that the Greek empire would control every square inch of land in the world. The “whole earth” means a substantial part of the earth in Daniel 7:23.

The primary reason it is so important to grasp this point, is because the Lord’s people need to be able to watch for prophetic events that are actually going to happen. Namely, the rise of the Antichrist’s Middle Eastern and North African empire. We don’t want to be distracted by popular theories and predictions that will never take place (i.e. the establishment of a one-world government).

THE FINAL EXODUS, THE MIDDLE EAST, AND NUMBERS 24:15-25

Now that we have taken the time to understand how Numbers 24, as well as certain key texts in the book of Daniel, link the kingdom of the Antichrist to the nations of the modern Middle East, we are in an even better position to envision the specific events that will occur after the Second Coming of Jesus. In Numbers 24:3-9, Balaam predicted that Jesus will come out of Egypt and wage war against Gog, as well as the nations that are either a part of Gog’s kingdom, or antagonistic to Israel in some way.

When this passage is viewed in light of the final Balaam oracle in Numbers 24, it reveals that when Jesus proceeds out of Egypt He will in effect retrace the path of Israel’s original exodus and fight a series of battles against the Middle Eastern nations that are situated en route to Israel. These nations will probably include at least Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan, and also some of the other Middle Eastern and North African nations as well. Thus, the forehead of Moab (Jordan) will be crushed, and the sons of Sheth from the Middle East will be torn down (Num. 24:17).

ISAIAH 27

Further support for this position regarding the specific regions where Jesus will first concentrate His judgments when He returns can also be found in Isaiah 27:12-13. The preceding context of this passage contains many allusions to the Lord's eschatological judgement of the powers of darkness, especially when it speaks of the time when the Lord will "punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent," "Leviathan the twisted serpent," and "kill the dragon who lives in the sea" (Isa. 27:1). Then, in verses 12-13 we read of this judgment and Israel's End-Times Exodus in more specific terms:

In that day the LORD **will start His threshing from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, and you will be gathered up one by one, O sons of Israel.** It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

Not coincidentally, and just like Numbers 24, Isaiah speaks in this passage of Israel's final exodus and return to the Promised Land, albeit within a context in which the Middle Eastern nations are receiving the judgment of the Lord in the last days. Quite notably, Isaiah says here that the Lord will "start His threshing," that is, His separation of the righteous from the wicked, in the regions situated between the Euphrates River, which would include parts of Turkey, Syria, and Iraq, and the "brook of Egypt," which was most likely located in what is now the central Sinai Peninsula.

Given these geographic details, this passage could mean essentially two things. It could mean that at the time of His Second Coming Jesus will first step foot somewhere near the Euphrates River, then go across the Middle East into Egypt, before leading His people into the Land of Israel, and up to Jerusalem. Or, this passage could simply be saying in more general terms that Jesus will start His threshing in the Middle

Eastern nations as a whole, without any precise details in terms of where He will begin this process.

We do know for a fact from Numbers 24 that Jesus will eventually end up in Egypt and then be on His way to the Promised Land. However, the question is where will He go first, and what will be the exact sequence of His “threshing” across the Middle Eastern nations when He returns?

Interestingly, when speaking of events that will take place right before the Messianic Age, Isaiah 19:1 says, “Behold, the LORD is riding on a swift cloud and is about to come to Egypt, the idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence, and the heart of the Egyptians will melt within them.” Based on the broader context of Isaiah 19, this verse in all likelihood refers to Jesus going down into Egypt at the time of His return, just as Numbers 24:8 says He will. Though we cannot be 100% certain of this, Isaiah 19:1 could very well indicate that Jesus returns and goes down into Egypt first, before traveling through the other Middle Eastern nations. In any case, what we can be sure of is that the eschatological exodus of Israel and the judgment of Gog we were first introduced to in Numbers 24:3-9, will initially be a somewhat localized event involving the nations of the Middle East and North Africa (Num. 24:15-25; Dan. 11:40-43; Isa. 27:12-13).

To be clear, in no way does this suggest that there will not also be last-days judgments experienced by other nations on the earth. Although we do not have the time to analyze them now, there are plenty of other passages in the Bible that refer to global end-time events that will be experienced on a very large scale (Isa. 13:6-16; 24:1-24; Rev. 15).

The only reason I have zeroed in on the passages we have studied so far related to the nations in the Middle East, is because it is important for us to develop a more accurate picture of the return of Jesus. Jesus will not come back to this earth in some abstract and universalized manner. Nor will He return immediately to Jerusalem and set up His kingdom in a matter of hours as many people have been led to believe. Instead, before going up to Jerusalem, Jesus will be physically present in the

nations the Bible singles out as uniquely connected to His initial return to this earth. Jesus will return to the Middle East, and wage war against the political powers of darkness in this region, which will undoubtedly include the Antichrist (Gog) and his armies.

At this time, according to Numbers 24:18, even as Jesus is waging war against the political powers of darkness throughout the Middle East, Israel will also “perform valiantly” with Him. During the first Passover and exodus, Israel left Egypt as a warrior nation dressed in “martial array” and set on conquest (Ex. 13:18). When Jesus returns, He will again enlist Israel into the Lord’s army a second time, as He begins the process of effecting “the obedience of the Gentiles” (Gen. 49:10), and instituting the kingdom of God on this earth.

SERVING THE PEOPLE OF THE MIDDLE EAST

In light of what we have covered in this chapter, I do also feel that before we move forward, I should pause to say a few words about how I believe this material should impact our posture and view towards the modern Middle Eastern and North African nations in the 21st century. In no way is it my intention to support xenophobic, prejudicial, or racist attitudes towards Middle Easterners, North Africans, Muslims, refugees, etc.

I love the people of the Middle East, and in my own personal life, have often found them to be among the most warm, welcoming, and hospitable people in the world. When I lived in Israel from 2006-2007 I had many great interactions with Arab Muslims and Palestinians. As a matter of fact, one of the first people I ever led to the Lord after I got saved was an Arab Muslim I met at the Sea of Galilee. In 2009 I had the privilege of going on a missions trip to Egypt and totally fell in love with the people there. When I was in my mid-20s I almost dropped out of seminary so I could move to Turkey to become a missionary. But, the Lord had other plans. Currently (2019) I work in the public-school system in Texas, and as a general rule, I often find the Middle Eastern and Muslim students to be extremely hard-working, respectable, and kind.

All this to say, we do need to understand and teach how the nations

of the Middle East will be involved in end-time events. At the same time, we also need to balance this message with the idea that God still has a deep love and burden for the people in this region.

In the Age to Come, the Lord will reconcile the peoples of the Middle East to Himself, and will also heal the divide between the Muslim world and the Jewish world (see Isa. 19:19-24). As a result, even as we keep our eyes on current events in the Middle East at a geopolitical level, we also need to recognize that we are still called to be agents of reconciliation between the Lord and the peoples of this region in the here and now. Our posture should always be one of love, service, and sacrifice. Our understanding of Bible prophecy should increase our urgency to partner with the Holy Spirit to reach the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa with the love of Jesus. Just because the political powers that control the Middle Eastern and North African nations will play a key role in the unfolding of end-time events, does not mean we should therefore abandon all the people who live in these nations to the powers of darkness. There will be a remnant of believers who get saved in the Middle East and North Africa before the return of Jesus. Our task is to pray and partner with the Lord as He brings His purposes for this region to pass.

8

UNDERSTANDING THE TIME OF JACOB'S TROUBLE

“Classical Jewish texts depict a Messiah who will come to redeem the Jewish people” and “gather the exiled to the Land of Israel [...].”

—DR. DAVID ARIEL, FORMER PRESIDENT, OXFORD CENTRE FOR
HEBREW AND JEWISH STUDIES

WHEN I FIRST BEGAN to explain to my wife what I was learning about Passover, the last days, and Jesus coming out of Egypt with Israel at the time of His Second Coming, one of her first questions was, “but wait, I thought all the Jewish people who formerly lived in the Middle East have already returned to Israel. How then could there be another exodus of Jewish people out of Egypt and the Middle East when Jesus returns?”

As many of you are probably aware, prior to the reestablishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and shortly thereafter, the large majority of Jewish people living in North Africa and the Middle East emigrated to Israel in massive numbers. Today, the Jewish population in countries such as Egypt, Libya, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, etc. is almost zero. Modern Turkey and Iran are the only remaining Muslim-majority nations in the Middle East with somewhat sizable Jewish populations (15,000–20,000 in Turkey and roughly 10,000 in Iran). However, the Turkish Jewish population is shrinking as anti-Semitism and Muslim extremism

continues to grow in the country,¹ and the Iranian Jewish population can hardly be considered substantial.

In short, based on current population statistics, it is hard to imagine how Jesus could lead a mass exodus of Jewish people out of Egypt and the Middle Eastern nations at the time of His Second Coming, as Numbers 24:3-8, and many other passages in the Hebrew Bible, certainly predict He will (Isa. 27:12-13). The geopolitical reality as it stands today makes the likelihood of such an event seem almost impossible.

THE FINAL EXODUS

Nevertheless, if we take a look at the Biblical data, Scripture is clear that there will in fact be a large-scale eschatological exodus of Jewish people out of North Africa and the Middle Eastern nations at the time of Jesus' return to this earth. In addition to Numbers 24:8 and Isaiah 27:12-13, one passage that further elaborates on this last-days exodus in unequivocal terms is Isaiah 11:11-16:

Then it will happen on that day that the LORD will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, **from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros [southern Egypt], Cush [Sudan], Elam [Iran], Shinar [Iraq], Hamath [Syria], and from the islands of the sea.** And He will lift up a standard for the nations and assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. Then the jealousy of Ephraim will depart, and **those who harass Judah will be cut off;** Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, and Judah will not be jealous of Ephraim.

1 Kristina Jovanovski, "Is Turkey Safe for Israelis and Jews?", *Jerusalem Post*, June 16, 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/Is-Turkey-safe-for-Israelis-and-Jews-560112>. See also Iris Georlette, "Jews of Turkey Fear Growing Antisemitism," *Jerusalem Post*, July 5, 2018, <https://www.jpost.com/Diaspora/A-Jew-means-liar-Jews-of-Turkey-fear-growing-antisemitism-561680>.

They will swoop down on the slopes of the Philistines on the west; together they will plunder the sons of the east; They will possess Edom and Moab, and the sons of Ammon will be subject to them.

And the LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt; and He will wave His hand over the River with His scorching wind; and **He will strike it into seven streams and make men walk over dry-shod.** And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant of His people who will be left, just as there was for Israel in the day that they came up out of the land of Egypt.

Functioning as a sort of expanded commentary on Numbers 24, these verses in Isaiah speak of the Lord rescuing Jewish people from across the entire Middle East, North Africa, and even from the “four corners of the earth” at a predetermined time in the future. In a direct parallel to the original exodus account, Isaiah 11:15 also indicates that the Lord, who in this text should be understood as the Divine Messiah coming “out of Egypt” (Num. 24:8), will perform supernatural signs and wonders over the Red Sea (the Sea of Egypt) and the Euphrates River (the River), which will miraculously enable Israel to return to the Promised Land in the Messianic Age.

THIS IS NOT ABOUT THE MODERN STATE OF ISRAEL

Over the years, many conservative evangelicals have taught that passages such as Isaiah 11:11-16, and especially verses 11-12, were completely fulfilled with the reestablishment of the modern State of Israel in 1948, as well as the mass migration waves of Jewish people to the Land since then. However, this interpretation of the passage is not accurate.

In Isaiah 11, Isaiah is speaking of eschatological events that will only take place at the dawn of the Age to Come. He is not merely speaking of an ancient historical event in Bible times, nor is He speaking of the history of the modern State of Israel.

To be clear, this does not imply that the modern State of Israel is not of extremely important prophetic significance, because it most

certainly is. I am simply saying that to view the current State of Israel as the ultimate fulfillment of the multitude of passages in the Hebrew Bible that speak of a restoration of the Jews to their ancestral homeland in the last days, completely misses the critical point that nearly all of these passages are about events that will only occur *after* the Messiah returns to this earth, not before (cf. Ezek. 37; Zech. 8:1-13). This will be explained in more detail in this chapter, and in later ones as well.

There are a couple of reasons we can be certain that in Isaiah 11:1-16, Isaiah is speaking of the same last-days exodus as Balaam in Numbers 24:8, which we also know is connected to the return of the Messiah. First, the entire context of Isaiah 11 speaks of the arrival of the Messianic Kingdom in the future. We read in this passage of how the Messiah, the “stem of Jesse,” will judge the world in righteousness, “strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked” (Isa. 11:1-5). We also read in this passage of how there will be peace on earth, so much so that “the wolf will dwell with the lamb,” and the “lion will eat straw like the ox” (Isa. 11:6-8). Then, Isaiah speaks of the Messianic Age as a time when “the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea,” and as a time when all the nations will worship the King of the Jews (Isa. 11:9-11).

This entire picture of the Messianic Age in Isaiah 11:1-10 sets the stage for Isaiah’s statement in Isaiah 11:11: “Then it will happen *on that day* that the LORD will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath [...]” (i.e. from the Middle East and North Africa). In other words, “on that day,” as in, at the time when the Messiah appears, at the time when there is peace on earth, at the time when the animals of nature are in harmony with one another, and at the time when all the nations know the truth of who Jesus really is, only at that time will the Lord regather a “second time” the remnant of His people from across the Middle East and North Africa. The entire context of Isaiah 11 disproves the idea that Isaiah 11:11-16 could be referring to events that have already occurred and been completely

fulfilled in the 20th and 21st centuries. This passage outlines the final regathering of the Jewish people to their land in the Age to Come, not the restoration of the modern State of Israel.

The second reason we can be absolutely certain that Isaiah 11:11-16 is about events connected to the arrival of the Messianic Kingdom, is because these verses also mention the time when Israel will expand her borders, and anti-Semitism will come to an end. Notice how Isaiah says in verse 13 that “those who harass Judah will be cut off,” and then in verse 14 that Israel will “swoop down on the slopes of the Philistines on the west,” “possess Edom and Moab,” as well as “Ammon.” This is almost identical to what Balaam predicted will happen when Jesus comes back to judge Moab, Edom, and Israel’s antagonistic neighbors (Numbers 24:15-25).

Currently, part of the western coast of Israel is controlled by Palestinians in Gaza (where the Philistines used to live). In addition, the nations of Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Syria, which constitute the ancient lands of Edom, Moab, and Ammon, are in no way under the control of Israel. Today, these nations are controlled by Muslim governments that are hostile to Israel. They are also the home base of many terrorist organizations.

In light of these modern realities, again, there is no contextual support for the view that Isaiah 11 refers directly to the restoration of the modern State of Israel. Just like we saw in Numbers 24, Isaiah is speaking in this passage of a future time when Israel will be rescued from across the Middle East, possess, subjugate, and plunder (Isa. 11:14) these bordering Middle Eastern nations, and finally live in peace and total security within her own land. As of yet, none of these things have happened.

Below is a comparison chart of Numbers 24, Isaiah 11, and Isaiah 27 that demonstrates how all of these texts are telling the same story. Namely, how events will unfold when Jesus returns and inaugurates the kingdom of God on this earth.

Numbers 24:17-19	Isaiah 11:14
A scepter shall rise from Israel, and shall crush through the forehead of Moab, and tear down all the sons of Sheth [or “of the east”]. Edom shall be a possession, while Israel performs valiantly. One from Jacob shall have dominion and will destroy the remnant from the city.	They will swoop down on the slopes of the Philistines on the west; together they will plunder the sons of the east; They will possess Edom and Moab, and the sons of Ammon will be subject to them.
Isaiah 11:11-12	Isaiah 27:12-13
Then it will happen on that day that the LORD will again recover the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He will lift up a standard for the nations and assemble the banished ones of Israel, and will gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.	In that day the LORD will start His threshing from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt, and you will be gathered up one by one, O sons of Israel. It will come about also in that day that a great trumpet will be blown, and those who were perishing in the land of Assyria and who were scattered in the land of Egypt will come and worship the LORD in the holy mountain at Jerusalem.

RESPONDING TO THE MAINSTREAM EVANGELICAL VIEW

One of the reasons some people teach that Isaiah 11:11-16 must be referring to the reestablishment of the modern State of Israel, is because Isaiah says in verse 11 that Israel will be brought back to the Land from the nations of the Middle East “a second time.” It is often argued based on this verse that there could only be two major regatherings of Jewish people back to Israel from the countries mentioned in this passage. The first time the Jews were brought back to the Land was after the Babylonian exile, in the 500s and 400s BC. Then, in the 20th century,

the second regathering occurred, and in reality, continues to this day, as Israel continues to absorb more Jewish immigrants from all over the world. Because there have already been two major Jewish returns to Israel from exile, many people view this as proof that Isaiah 11:11 has already been fulfilled. If this were the case, it would also imply that there could never be another exile of Jewish people from their land, or another major Jewish regathering to Israel from the nations of the Middle East.

Ultimately however, Isaiah 11 does not teach that there could only ever be two major exiles, and two major Jewish returns to the Land of Israel from the Middle East. The word used for “second” (*shenit*) in Isaiah 11:11 does often mean “second” in the Hebrew Bible. At the same time, *shenit* also quite frequently means “other, another, or again.” For example, the KJV translates *shenit* as “again” in Malachi 2:13: “And this have ye done again (*shenit*), covering the altar of the LORD with tears [...]” Likewise, in 2 Samuel 16:19 we read, “And again (*shenit*), whom should I serve?” (KJV).

There are dozens of other examples that could be cited from the Hebrew Bible that prove that *shenit* does not always have to mean the literal second time something was done. The word is often used in more of a general and fluid manner to imply the repetition of an action. For this reason, Isaiah 11:11 can just as accurately be translated as, “And it will happen on that day that the Lord will stretch out His hand *again* to recover the remnant of His people, who will remain, from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the islands of the sea” (*my translation*).

Furthermore, and even if someone did want to argue that *shenit* in Isaiah 11:11 should be translated as “second,” and not as “again” (which is certainly possible), this still would not justify the view that Isaiah 11:11-12 is about the return from Babylonian exile, and the return of the Jews to Israel in the modern day. The reason I say this is because Isaiah wrote this prophecy in the 700s BC, nearly two hundred years *before* the Babylonian exile and subsequent return of the Jews to Israel even took place.

What this means is that when Isaiah says that the Lord will “again” recover the remnant of His people with “His hand,” He is not saying that the first time this happened was when the Jews came back from Babylon, because during Isaiah’s lifetime, this hadn’t even happened yet! In reality, Isaiah is comparing the final regathering of the Jewish people to their land in the Messianic Age to the original exodus that took place before he lived. The first event that Isaiah has in his mind, the event that he is looking back to, which he is likening to what will take place in the days of the Messiah, is the Lord’s deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt (see Isa. 11:16). Isaiah is looking back to the original Passover story.

This was the time when God originally said, “I will stretch out My hand [...]” (Ex. 3:20), which explains why Isaiah says in Isaiah 11:11 that God will again rescue Israel with “His hand” in the Messianic Age. What the Lord did through Moses in Egypt, He will also do through the Messiah “again,” a “second time” (*shenit*), when Jesus returns.

The idea that Isaiah 11:11-12 is comparing Israel’s End-Times Exodus to their first exodus from Egypt becomes even more obvious if we analyze the preceding context of this passage. For example, in Isaiah 10:26 Isaiah says that when the Messiah appears, His “staff will be over the sea and He will lift it up the way He did in Egypt.” Yes, it was Jesus who parted the sea through Moses the first time, and He will do it again in a much more dramatic way when He returns (cf. Zech. 10:11).

This verse justifies the view that Isaiah also wants us to read Isaiah 11:11-12 as a continuation of the End-Times Exodus theme he first began to develop in Isaiah 10. These passages are all about how Jesus will act as Israel’s miracle-working New Moses and Deliverer when He returns, which is an idea we will explore even further in chapters 11-15. Isaiah understood the eschatology of the Torah very well, and more particularly, how the Torah presents Israel’s historic exodus as a prophetic picture of what will take place when the Messiah appears in glory at the end of the age (i.e. Num. 24).

In Isaiah 11:11-12, Isaiah elaborates on this earlier idea from the

Torah. He expounds upon how the regathering of the Jewish people to their Land in the Messianic Age will represent a prophetic replay of their original exodus from Egypt. At the same time however, Isaiah also wants us to see that this final exodus, which was first mentioned in Numbers 24:8, will be much larger and will involve the regathering of Jewish people from many other places besides Egypt as well (cf. Jer. 23:5-8). The return of the Jews from Babylon and the return of the Jews to modern Israel, are not even mentioned anywhere in this passage.

If we miss these critical points, we will end up distorting the teaching of the Biblical prophets and missing out on some of the most important lessons related to Biblical eschatology in all of Scripture. We should indeed emphasize that God still has a plan for Israel, and that the restoration of the modern State of Israel is a sign of God's faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant. However, we should not quote passages that refer to the Messianic Age as though they refer primarily to modern Israel.

SO WHY ANOTHER MIDDLE EASTERN EXODUS?

Once we understand that the Biblical prophets taught that there will be a final exodus of Jewish people out of North Africa and the Middle East at the time of the Messiah's Second Coming, we are again confronted with my wife's original question. How could this possibly happen? And why? What geopolitical events must occur in the near future in order for the words of Isaiah to be fulfilled? Why will there be, according to Isaiah 11:12 and Isaiah 27:13, Jewish people who are "banished," "dispersed," "scattered," and "perishing" throughout the Middle East at the time of Jesus' Second Coming, when today there are almost no Jewish people living in these regions at all?

The answer to this question is not an easy one to accept. Throughout the process of writing this book, I have continually felt the burden and sobering reality that comes with understanding how the Lord will deal with Israel in the last days. However, at the same time, I have also realized that we must fully grasp how God's covenant with Israel will actually play

out before the return of Jesus, because understanding this is precisely what will enable us to discern the signs of the times and minister most effectively to Israel prior to the Second Coming. If we want to be well-equipped ministers of God's word to the Jewish people, both now and in the future, we need to fully comprehend the totality of God's plan for Israel, not just the parts that are popular and easy to talk about.

All this to say, everything I will share with you in the rest of this book is simply a part of a broader burden I have to help the Church and the Messianic community fulfill our prophetic calling to Israel and the Jewish people in the days ahead. When I first realized that the Lord was leading me to help His people gain a more complete picture of how His relationship with Israel will unfold during the end times, I initially had the concern that some people might think that I am not supportive of Israel, or that I have some sort of antagonistic attitude towards the Jewish people. Please know that nothing could be further from the truth.

Though I was not personally raised in a Jewish home, my wife is Jewish, and we are part of a Messianic Jewish family. My step-dad is also Jewish, as are many of my closest friends and extended family members. When I have children, they will be Jewish. I do love and support the modern State of Israel, and recognize that it is the only true democracy and beacon of freedom in the entire Middle East. When I was in my early 20s, I had the privilege of studying abroad in Jerusalem for nine months. I truly admire many Israelis for their perseverance and resolve, and I personally feel a deep connection to the Land. If the Lord ever called me to move back to Israel, I would be there in a heartbeat, even in spite of everything we will cover in the rest of this book about Israel's time of trial in the last days.

So again, to be clear, yes, we do need to move beyond a lot of the prevailing evangelical misconceptions when it comes to the modern State of Israel and the fulfillment of Bible prophecy. However, the reason we need to do this is not because Israel is irrelevant or unimportant. It is because Israel will continue to be at the center of unfolding prophetic events in the future, and we need to know as much as we can about

how these prophetic events are actually going to unfold, possibly even before our very own eyes. The Lord tells us things in advance, even difficult things, so that we will be prepared, sober-minded, and ready to act when it matters most.

THE TIME OF JACOB'S TROUBLE

In simple terms, the reason there will be a need for a final exodus of Jewish people out of the Middle East in the days of the Messiah, is because prior to the return of Jesus, Israel will be invaded and captured by her Middle Eastern and North African neighbors. Many Israelis and Jews, along with those who are sympathetic to the Jewish people, will be sent into exile and captivity throughout the Middle East and North Africa, only to be set free by Jesus when He appears to fulfill the prophecies of Numbers 24, Isaiah 11:11-16, and Isaiah 27:12-13. This invasion will be carried out by the Antichrist (Gog) himself, who will lead a coalition of Middle Eastern nations against Israel, which will consequently begin the time many prophecy teachers refer to as “the Great Tribulation,” or, “the Time of Jacob’s Trouble.”

I know these claims might sound like a shock to some, so I will do my best to flesh all of this out very carefully in the remaining chapters of this book. Please just bear with me, keep an open mind, and remember that God has written what He has in His word for our benefit and instruction. We do not do ourselves or anyone else any favors by ignoring large portions of the Bible.

THE SCANDAL AND DILEMMA OF JEWISH UNBELIEF

To begin understanding the events that will take place during the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, we must first set these events within the larger context of God’s more often than not strained relationship with the Jewish people. Israel’s rebellion against God, whether in the Torah when they rebelled against Moses, or in the time of the monarchy when they rebelled against the prophets, or even in the first century when the majority of Jewish people rejected the Messiah Himself, is arguably the

greatest scandal in the entire Bible. The privileged and chosen people of God pretty much want nothing to do with God most of the time.

This is even a problem that persists in the modern day. Apart from a very small minority of practicing religious Jews, a large percentage of Jewish people and Israelis in the world today identify as either agnostic, atheist, or as proponents of New Age and eastern religions. Many will say they believe in God in some sense, and observe Jewish practices as part of their cultural identity. However, very few Jewish people believe in God as He is defined in the Bible, let alone the validity and inspiration of Scripture. I have personally even spoken to a devout Orthodox Jew who does not even believe in God at all, and this is a reality that is much more common than you might think.

Furthermore, to the shock of many Christians, the modern State of Israel, the Promised Land of the Bible, is also one of the most secular countries in the entire world, with sky-high abortion rates, and regular “gay-pride” parades hosted in its cities on an annual basis. In 2018, Tel Aviv hosted a gay-pride parade with upwards of 250,000 people in attendance, and is now considered one of the most “gay-friendly” cities in the world.

Yes, there is still a Judeo-Biblical framework that undergirds the ethics and worldview of many Jewish people, as well as the political structures of the State of Israel. Yet tragically, the large majority of Jewish people living today are not walking in a mutual covenant relationship with the God of their fathers, or in adoration of their Messiah Yeshua (Jesus). Spiritually speaking, Israel today is a very dark country, and sadly, most Jewish people are completely lost.

This scandal of Jewish rebellion against the Lord is a big deal. It breaks His heart, and He takes it very seriously. Israel was chosen to bear God’s light to the nations. Yet for the most part, all they do is profane His name among the Gentiles (Rom. 2:24).

RESPONDING TO JEWISH UNBELIEF

Throughout most of Church history, the Christian response to this scandal of Jewish unbelief has been to develop and preach various forms of replacement theology, which is also sometimes called “super-sessionism” or “fulfillment theology.” In short, replacement theology teaches that because Israel has for the most part rejected God and His Messiah, God has rejected Israel.

As the argument usually goes, through its union with Jesus the Church is now the “new Israel” or the “true Israel,” and all the benefits of being God’s covenant and chosen people now belong only to the followers of Jesus, not ethnic Israel. Although not as prominent today as in times past, some forms of replacement theology have also upheld the idea that God only preserves Israel in the present to serve as an example of His punishment and judgment upon those who disobey the Gospel. Not surprisingly, replacement theology has often led to more extreme forms of Christian anti-Semitism and violent persecution of the Jewish people. For example, Adolf Hitler was partly inspired by the anti-Semitic writings of Martin Luther.

In combatting replacement theology, many Christians have rightly pointed to passages such as Romans 11:28, where Paul so appropriately states, “From the standpoint of the gospel they [the Jewish people] are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God’s choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers; for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.” Here, Paul says that although the majority of Jewish people are not in an eternally-saving relationship with God through faith in Jesus, they are still His chosen and beloved people in a certain sense, precisely because of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In other words, Jewish rejection of the Gospel does not imply God’s total rejection of the Jews.

God still loves, preserves, and protects Israel. This is why they still exist as a people to this day, against all odds. God also still honors Israel’s right to their Promised Land, which is why the modern State of Israel, which should have been destroyed a thousand times over, is still intact,

prosperous, and growing. And most importantly, God still remains faithful to His original promise that the Messiah will one day return to Israel and administer His kingdom from Jerusalem in the future. These promises of national protection, preservation, and a privileged place in the Messianic Kingdom are the basic components of what it means that the Jewish people are still God's Chosen People. This is the essential outline of blessings included in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-19; 17:1-27). Again, the Jewish people do not possess eternal salvation on the basis of their ethnicity as Jews. However, they do possess certain *national and ethnic* blessings and privileges that do not belong to any other people group on earth (Rom. 11:28-29).

Israel of course does not deserve any of these "gifts." Yet, based on God's covenant with Abraham, the "gifts and the calling of God" to Israel, are in Paul's words, "irrevocable." To call God's covenant faithfulness to Israel into question would be to call God's covenant faithfulness to all of us into question. For this reason, it is better that we don't shoot ourselves in the foot by supporting replacement theology. Instead, we should recognize that God's faithfulness still extends with abundant grace to Israel, even though they are like a wayward son and a "stiff-necked people" (Ex. 32:9). Even as God showed mercy to those of us who believe in Jesus, when we were previously rebellious and antagonistic to His Word, He also continues to do the same for disobedient Israel in the present, and will do so to an even greater extent in the future. This is Paul's whole point in Romans 11:

For just as you [followers of Jesus] once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also [i.e. Israel] now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy (Rom. 11: 31).

God's drama with Israel, though it has taken the path of a long and arduous journey, is not over yet. Israel will be saved. Israel will become what she was always meant to be. When Jesus returns, Israel will finally become a kingdom of priests and a nation of righteousness. As Paul says,

“The Deliverer will come from Zion, He will remove ungodliness from Jacob” (Rom. 11:26). Replacement theology is not endorsed by the New Testament authors. The Apostles saw redemption history as moving towards the final vindication and salvation of the nation of Israel. That’s why already in the first century Paul was warning the Gentiles in Rome, “do not be conceited” and “do not be arrogant” towards Israel (Rom. 11:17-21). There is much more going on than meets the eye.

THE PURPOSE OF THE TIME OF JACOB’S TROUBLE

Upon hearing this defense of Israel’s ongoing place in the plan of God, I am sure many of you will find yourselves in hearty agreement. However, what I also want to point out, is that among those of us who reject replacement theology, there is still often a blind spot when it comes to our understanding of God’s ultimate purposes for Israel. We tend to focus on *what* God will do (i.e. save Israel and be faithful to her), without giving enough attention to *how* these things will come to pass. I say this not to be critical of anyone who teaches on God’s ongoing covenants with Israel, but simply out of my own experience. For many years, my theology of Israel was also shortsighted and overly simplistic and did not adequately take into account the way in which God’s relationship with Israel is going to unfold in the near future.

Scripture specifies that it will be through the discipline and hardships Israel will experience during the end times that they will be purged, refined, and prepared to be ambassadors of God’s kingdom in the Messianic Age. It will be through the trials of the last days that the Jewish people will finally become what God always intended them to be when He first brought them out of Egypt thousands of years ago. Israel’s experience of tribulation will cause her to lose trust in all her idols, and to look with eyes of faith to Jesus alone for salvation. Although the end times do of course have great relevance to all followers of Jesus and the broader Church, the end times are also more fundamentally about God and His will for Israel. It will only be through experiencing the Time of Jacob’s Trouble that the scandal and mystery of Jewish unbelief will

finally be resolved. Order comes from chaos. Obedience from despair. Salvation from suffering. God's loving discipline will save Israel in the end.

PLAYING YOUR PART

All theology is practical, and in many cases, at a much deeper level than we even realize. What we believe affects how we live in dramatic ways. One of the reasons I have such a burden to share with others the fullness of God's plan concerning Israel, is because it is this knowledge that will allow the followers of Jesus to fulfill our prophetic commission to Israel in the days to come. Though much of what I will share on this topic is not popular, even among those who rightly "stand with Israel" as I do, it is vital to understand nonetheless.

We cannot ignore the difficult aspects of how God's story with Israel will play out, in large part because it will be people like us who will be called to minister to Israel in her darkest hour. We will be the ones called to courageously hold a candle in the darkness for Israel and the Jewish community when most of the world has turned against her. Our mission will be to counsel Jewish people from the Word of God, and thereby help bring a surviving Jewish remnant into the Messianic Kingdom.

Never underestimate the power of being able to help someone else make sense of their suffering. When the events connected to the Time of Jacob's Trouble do take place, many Jewish people will be so broken and in such a state of shock that they will say, "you see, the God of Israel doesn't exist! We told you the Bible is just a bunch of myths and stories and fairy tales! If there was a God, He would never allow this to happen to us!"

However, when Jews who live during the last days say such things, it will only be the followers of Jesus who know their Bibles well who will be in a position to help them understand what is really going on. Our ministry to the Jewish people at this time will literally save lives, and it will also save a multitude of souls from falling off the precipice into complete and utter darkness and despair.

We are going to be the ones who will have to say to Israel, “the God of your fathers is real, and yes, you are His Chosen People, but these catastrophes have come upon you because He is trying to get your attention, and point you towards His Son Yeshua. This is exactly what the prophets said would happen before His Second Coming. There is still hope. Look, it’s right here in your Bible...”

In Daniel 11:33 and 12:3, Daniel predicted exactly what the ministry of God’s people to Israel will look like in the last days:

Those who have insight among the people will give understanding to the many; yet they will fall by sword and by flame, by captivity and by plunder for many days (Dan. 11:33).

Those who have insight will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever (Dan. 12:3).

I am utterly convinced that it will be precisely this sort of prophetic ministry that will pave the way for the greatest revival among the Jewish people the world has ever seen, both in the last days, and when Jesus returns. It will be the Church, and the broader Messianic Jewish community, that will help Israel understand the signs of the times, and prepare her for the days of her salvation. Israel will not be saved in the last days in a vacuum. This will happen through the crucible of suffering and through the prophetic ministry of believers.

As a result, understanding how the end times will affect Israel is of the utmost importance and practical significance. We are not called to be mere political cheerleaders for the modern State of Israel. We are called to be ambassadors of the Lord and intercessors who stand in the gap.

Another reason it is so important to understand the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, is because when Israel does experience her final period of testing before the return of Jesus, things will look so bad, and will seem so hopeless for Israel from a human perspective, that many of the nations of the world, and even many who identify as Christians, will completely

turn against her. People in each of these groups will find it far more expedient and comfortable (politically, economically, socially, etc.) to side with those who are antagonistic to Israel, and many will reason to themselves that Israel and the Jews are on the losing side of history.

Ironically, it will be these types of misconceptions that will actually cause these very same people to be on the wrong side of the fence when Jesus returns to repay Israel's enemies with judgment. In contrast, those of us who understand the teaching of the Biblical prophets will be able to see through the lies and understand what the will of the Lord truly is, even in the midst of the chaos and widespread betrayal of Israel that will sweep through the nations like a plague in the last days.

In light of these very practical realities, now is the time to strengthen our resolve to reach Jewish people with the Gospel. Now is also the time to objectively and thoroughly study everything the Scriptures teach regarding what Israel will experience in the last days, without bias or any sort of doctrinal agenda. Now is the time to commit to standing with Israel and the Jewish people, even as the tides of anti-Semitism continue to rise. We must be equipped to play our part. We must prepare ourselves, and we must prepare God's people.

Of course, we do not know exactly when the Time of Jacob's Trouble will occur. Maybe in our own lifetime, or maybe in hundreds of years. Nevertheless, it is still our responsibility to help the Body of Messiah develop a more Biblically well-rounded perspective on how God's purposes for Israel will play out in the days to come.

Discipline will lead to desperation. Desperation will lead to salvation.

9

ISRAEL & THE END TIMES IN DEUTERONOMY

“There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.”

—ROMANS 2:9

IN ORDER TO CONTINUE DEVELOPING a complete Biblical theology of how God’s covenant with Israel will play out in the last days, we have now come to the point where we need to take a look at a handful of passages in the book of Deuteronomy: Deuteronomy 4:25-31, 31:29, 32:1-43, and 33:1-29. These are the particular texts in which Moses set up the prophetic framework many of the later prophets would eventually build upon when discussing the Time of Jacob’s Trouble. It is virtually impossible to understand eschatology, including how the Lord’s plan for Israel will unfold in the near future, without first grasping some of the central truths Moses communicates in these critical portions of Deuteronomy.

Before beginning to examine these specific texts however, it is always important to remember when reading the book of Deuteronomy, that as we saw in our earlier examination of the Messianic theology of Genesis and Numbers, the entire Torah itself is built around the idea of heralding the coming Messianic Redeemer. When Moses wrote the

Torah, one of his primary purposes was to expand on the identity, life, work, and ministry of the Messiah, and to inspire hope in the coming kingdom of God. Nothing in the Torah is arbitrary or random. Instead, it is an ingeniously constructed piece of narrative literature that focuses on God's ultimate redemption of His world in the Messianic Age.

Given the Messianic nature of the Torah, when we come to its final book, the book of Deuteronomy, and especially the final chapters in Deuteronomy (i.e. 31-34), we should expect that Moses probably has some important things to say to us about the Messiah, the end times, and the Age to Come in this pivotal portion of his text. Or, stated somewhat differently, instead of reading Deuteronomy and its final chapters in an isolated fashion, we need to understand that it is specifically here, at the end of the Torah, that Moses is completing his discourse on the Messianic redemption he first introduced us to in the book of Genesis. This is where Moses is going to tell us with even greater detail than he did in the other Messianic passages of the Torah, how God is finally going to reverse the effects of the original fall of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3. This is the climax of the story. It is the grand finale in the symphony of Messianic expectation Moses has thus far orchestrated for us with such attention to detail and theological skill.

As we begin our examination of these key texts in Deuteronomy, I will quote an abbreviated portion of the most relevant passages from Deuteronomy 4, 31, and 32. Then, in chapters 11-12 we will examine Deuteronomy 33 in more detail. As always, I would also highly recommend that before we begin you go ahead and read these passages in their entirety in your own Bible, so that you will have even more context for what we will cover in the next four chapters.

THE DAYS OF ISRAEL'S DISCIPLINE

It is in Deuteronomy 4:25-31 that Moses first hints at the idea that the last days will be a unique time of Jewish rebellion against the Lord, which will consequently lead to a significant season of suffering and

divine discipline in Israel before the start of the Messianic Age. In this passage, Moses writes the following to Israel:

When you become the father of children and children's children and have remained long in the land, and act corruptly, and make an idol in the form of anything, and do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD your God so as to provoke Him to anger, I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will surely perish quickly from the land where you are going over the Jordan to possess it. You shall not live long on it, but will be utterly destroyed. The LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD drives you. There you will serve gods, the work of man's hands, wood and stone, which neither see nor hear nor eat nor smell. But from there you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. **When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you, in the latter days** you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice. For the LORD your God is a compassionate God; He will not fail you nor destroy you nor forget the covenant with your fathers which He swore to them (Deuteronomy 4:25-31).

At the end of Deuteronomy 31, Moses again speaks of how Israel's rebellion will elicit severe divine discipline in the last days, and states:

For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and **evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD**, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands (Deuteronomy 31:29).

Then, in Deuteronomy 32, Moses fully elaborates on Israel's history of unfaithfulness to the Lord, as well as on what the consequences of such unfaithfulness will be for God's Chosen People in the future. Below are some of the key verses from Deuteronomy 32 that describe

the lack of reciprocity God has continually experienced in His relationship with Israel:

When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance, when He separated the sons of man, He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the sons of Israel [or, “the sons of God” ESV]. For the LORD’s portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of a wilderness; He encircled him, He cared for him, He guarded him as the pupil of His eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that hovers over its young, He spread His wings and caught them. He carried them on His pinions. The Lord alone guided him, and there was no foreign god with him. He made him ride on the high places of the earth, and he ate the produce of the field; and He made him suck honey from the rock, and oil from the flinty rock, curds of cows, and milk of the flock, with the fat of lambs, and rams, the breed of Bashan, and goats, with the finest of the wheat- and of the blood of grapes you drank wine (Deuteronomy 32:8-14).

But Jeshurun [Israel] grew fat and kicked- you are grown fat, thick, and sleek- Then he forsook God who made him, and scorned the Rock of his salvation. They made Him jealous with strange gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods whom they have not known, new gods who came lately, whom your fathers did not dread. You neglected the Rock who begot you, and forgot the God who gave you birth (Deuteronomy 32:15-18).

The LORD saw this, and spurned them [...]. Then He said, “I will hide my face from them, I will see what their end shall be; for they are a perverse generation, sons in whom is no faithfulness. [...] I will heap misfortunes on them; I will use my arrows on them. They will be wasted by famine, and consumed by plague and bitter destruction; and the teeth of beasts I will send upon them. Outside the sword will bereave, and inside terror, both young man and virgin, the nursing

with the man of gray hair. [...] For they are a nation lacking in counsel, and there is no understanding in them.” [...] (Deuteronomy 32:19-30).

As we begin trying to wrap our heads around these texts in Deuteronomy, it is critical to realize that Moses has strategically framed his entire discussion in these texts by twice repeating the phrase “in the latter days” (*acharit (ha)yawmim*), which appears in both Deuteronomy 4:30 and Deuteronomy 31:29. This is the exact same phrase that was used in Genesis 49:1, before Jacob spoke of the Messianic King coming from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:8-10). It is also the same phrase Balaam used in Numbers 24:14 to speak of Israel’s victory over their enemies in the days of the Messiah.

Unfortunately, the NASB translates *acharit (ha)yawmim* as “the days to come” in Genesis 49:1 and Numbers 24:14, whereas in Deuteronomy 4:30 and 31:29 the NASB translation team chose to render this same phrase differently in English (i.e. as “the latter days”). I am not sure why this translation team chose different translations of the exact same words in each of these four passages, because in so doing, they have obscured the English reader’s ability to see how Moses is strategically using this “signpost phrase” to link Deuteronomy 4:30 and 31:29 back to Genesis 49 and Numbers 24. In other words, by using the phrase *acharit (ha)yawmim* (“latter days” or “days to come”) in Deuteronomy 4:30 and Deuteronomy 31:29, Moses was alerting his readers that the events he is speaking of in relation to Israel’s rebellion against God and subsequent chastisement in Deuteronomy, are directly connected to the other events he also discussed in the earlier eschatological passages of the Torah. In addition to the NASB, nearly all other modern English translations (KJV, NIV, ESV) also translate *acharit (ha)yawmim* as different English phrases in Genesis 49:1, Numbers 24:14, and Deuteronomy 4:30 and 31:29, which again, hinders the English reader from being able to discern the basic eschatological framework of the Torah.

Moses wants us to understand that his words in Deuteronomy have eschatological significance, and that they are directly connected to the

end times and the coming Messianic Age. In essence, the phrase *acharit (ha)yawmim* functions as a literary thread throughout the Torah narrative. It allows us to trace out a more complete picture of key end-time events from Genesis to Deuteronomy.

Given the presence of the phrase *acharit (ha)yawmim* in Deuteronomy, it is logical to conclude that when Moses discusses Israel's rebellion against the Lord, and subsequent experience of suffering and discipline in these passages, he is not exclusively discussing the historical realities of disobedience, exile, and restoration that characterized the history of *ancient Israel* in Bible times. Instead, Moses is saying that even as Israel's history with God was characterized by disobedience from the time they left Egypt, so too it will also be characterized by extreme disobedience and rebellion until the time right before the Messiah returns.

What was true of Israel throughout their history, in the sense that they often "forsook God," "scorned the Rock" of their salvation, "made Him jealous with strange gods," "sacrificed to demons who were not God," and forgot the God who gave them birth (Deut. 32:15-17), will also be true of Israel during the end times. Because of this, Moses told Israel in Deuteronomy 31:29, "evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands." As I mentioned in the last chapter, the current spiritual climate in the nation of Israel, and among the Jewish people worldwide, does in fact fit this prediction of widespread Jewish resistance to the Lord and His Messiah in the last days.

Towards the end of Deuteronomy 32, Moses then begins to expound on what the consequences of Israel's last-days rebellion will be. He tells Israel that God will hide His face from them, "heap misfortunes on them," and use His arrows against them (32:19-23). Moses prophesied of "bitter destruction" for the Jewish people in the latter days, bereavement by the sword, and terror that would effect "both young man and virgin," "the nursing" and "the man with grey hair," all because Israel is, to use the language of Moses, a "nation lacking in counsel" (Deut. 32:23-32).

Israel and the Jewish people have received God's blessings of

deliverance, protection, favor, and abundance more than any other people group throughout human history. But in the process, they have also grown “fat” and spiritually complacent (32:15). According to Moses, only God’s harsh intervention will heal the hardness of their hearts, and bring them back to Him.

OUR POSTURE TOWARDS ISRAEL

When some people hear this exposition of Deuteronomy 32 they might immediately ask, “how can you say these things about God’s beloved Chosen People? Aren’t you using the same type of language against Israel that many Christian anti-Semites have used throughout history to disparage Israel, and justify all sorts of violence and persecution against the Jewish people? Or at the very least, isn’t all of this talk about Israel being punished by God in the last days in poor taste? Shouldn’t we just be supportive of Israel?”

In response to these objections, I would say we need to keep in mind that there is one major difference between what Moses says to Israel in Deuteronomy 32, and what many Christian anti-Semites have said throughout the course of history. In Deuteronomy 32, Moses is speaking of discipline that will come upon Israel in the last days precisely *because of* God’s covenant with Israel and faithfulness to the Jews as a people. As we will see, Moses is speaking here of restorative and fatherly discipline of the most loving nature. Yes, this passage does highlight God’s tough love towards Israel, but it is His true love for Israel that is on display in Deuteronomy nonetheless.

In contrast, most Christian anti-Semites who have said horrific things about the Jewish people, and who have also often taken passages like Deuteronomy 32 out of context, have said that Israel is deserving of God’s punishment because God has rejected them, not because God is still faithful to them. This is a major distinction to keep in mind. There is a huge difference between Moses speaking prophetically to the Jewish people about the discipline that will result in their ultimate restoration to the Lord in the days of the Messiah, versus a Christian anti-Semite

or replacement theologian speaking vindictively and arrogantly of God's discipline on the Jewish people, which they believe is rooted in God's rejection of Israel.

To "support Israel" does not mean we turn a blind eye to her sins. Nor does it mean we ignore and brush under the rug large portions of Biblical teaching related to what Israel will go through during the end times. God is jealous for Israel, and He is jealous for His own glory. He will not let His Chosen People live in rebellion forever. He will do whatever is necessary to save Israel and to sanctify His holy name through the Jewish people in the end. That's the basic point Moses is beginning to make in Deuteronomy.

COVENANT DISCIPLINE, COVENANT RESTORATION

If we look more closely at Deuteronomy 4:29-31, it is easy to see that Moses' entire discussion of God's discipline upon Israel in the latter days is set within the larger context of covenant faithfulness and ultimate restoration. This is why Moses says to Israel in verses 29-30, but "from there," that is, from the place of humility and chastisement during the end times:

you will seek the LORD your God, and you will find Him if you search for Him with all your heart and all your soul. When you are in distress and all these things have come upon you **in the latter days** [*acharit (ha)yawmim*] **you will return to the LORD your God and listen to His voice.**

In a parallel passage, the prophet Hosea also wrote in Hosea 3:5:

Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king [i.e the Messiah]; **and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days** [*acharit (ha)yawmim*].

Although what Israel will suffer in the last days will be extremely difficult, their time of tribulation before the return of Jesus will be the soil out of which will spring the greatest Jewish revival the world has ever seen.

When pressed into a corner, Israel will finally seek the Lord and listen to His voice. As Moses said, God is a “compassionate God” who will not fail Israel or let them be destroyed, precisely because of His “covenant” with their “fathers which He swore to them” (Deut. 4:31). Yes, it is a trying task to be in such a covenant relationship with the Lord. There is a lot of responsibility involved, and Israel has so far not lived up to her end of the bargain. However, God deals with Israel on the basis of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, just like Paul said in Romans 11:28-29. Therefore, God will never reject Israel or completely turn them over to their own devices. He will stay faithful to them, discipline them, save them, and make them into what He always knew they could be.

At a practical level, this theology of Israel’s restoration in the book of Deuteronomy should also offer great encouragement to those of us who are currently involved in sharing the Gospel with the Jewish people. Deuteronomy tells us that the Lord places an extremely high priority on bringing the Jewish people back to Himself. He wants His Chosen People to know who He is, and what He has done for them in the Messiah.

As a result, when we make sharing the message of Jesus with the Jewish people a priority, we are directly aligning ourselves with God’s deepest purposes for the nation of Israel. By sowing the seeds of the Gospel in Israel, and within the worldwide Jewish community, we are cooperating with the Holy Spirit, and setting the pieces in place that will eventually lead to a great Jewish revival in the last days.

JESUS THE WARRIOR KING IN DEUTERONOMY 32

After Deuteronomy 4:29-31, this theme of latter-days discipline that will result in Israel’s ultimate restoration is also taken up by Moses at the end of Deuteronomy 32. Following his harsh indictment of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:1-30, in Deuteronomy 32:31-43 Moses then pivots to speak of Israel’s final vindication, as well as the judgment that will fall upon their enemies when Jesus returns:

For the LORD will vindicate His people, and will have compassion on His servants, when He sees that their strength is gone, and there is none remaining bond or free. And He will say, “Where are their gods, the rock in which they sought refuge? Who ate the fat of their sacrifices, and drank the wine of their drink offering? Let them rise up and help you, let them be your hiding place! See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand” (Deuteronomy 32:39).

In these texts at the end of Deuteronomy 32, we read that in the latter days God will see that Israel’s “strength is gone,” and that they will be greatly reduced in number, so much so that it will be said, “there is none remaining bond or free” (v. 36). Now certainly, this statement does not imply that Israel will be completely annihilated as a people in the days to come. However, it does indicate that they will face heavy losses as a result of God’s discipline upon them.

On the whole, the lesson of verses 36-37 is that after this period of heavy discipline Israel will have absolutely nothing left to trust in except God alone. They will lose all confidence in their military, their ingenuity, their advanced technologies, and their prosperity. They will be completely broken. God will look at them and say, “where are their gods, the rock in which they sought refuge?” (Deut. 32:37). When this happens Israel will finally know the truth of God’s statement, “See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal” (Deut. 32:39).

One final aspect of the suffering Israel will face during this time is also alluded to in Deuteronomy 32:43, which says, the LORD will “atone for *His land* and His people.” This idea of God atoning for “His land” indicates that the Land of Israel itself will be defiled by Israel’s enemies in the last days. In short, this language implies that there will be some type of invasion and occupation of Israel by the Gentile powers before the return of Jesus. God Himself will have to atone for, purify,

and restore the central piece of real estate He has chosen as the nucleus and capital of His kingdom (more on this later).

If all of this sounds too depressing and heavy, we can take heart in the fact that these harsh realities related to Israel's suffering in the latter days will lead to the most glorious display of God's power and salvation the world has ever seen. Though Israel's enemies may triumph for a brief period as this age draws to a close, God nevertheless promises in Deuteronomy 32:35:

in due time their foot will slip; for the day of their [Israel's enemies'] calamity is near, and the impending things are hastening upon them. For the LORD will vindicate His people, and will have compassion on His servants [...].

Israel's enemies will fall into their own pit, and they will eventually realize that their harsh treatment of the Jewish people has led them down a path of destruction.

At the end of Deuteronomy 32, Moses then describes the Lord's vengeance on Israel's adversaries in the last days as a time when He will "sharpen" His "flashing sword," take "hold of justice," and make His "arrows drunk with blood," as well as a time when His "sword will devour flesh" (Deut. 32:39-43). The final call in Deuteronomy 32 is for the nations to rejoice with Israel because of what the Lord will accomplish on their behalf at the start of the Messianic Age:

See now that I, I am He, and there is no god besides Me; It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, and there is no one who can deliver from My hand. Indeed, I lift up My hand to heaven, and say, as I live forever, if I sharpen My flashing sword, and My hand takes hold on justice, I will render vengeance on My adversaries, and I will repay those who hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood, and my sword will devour flesh, with the blood of the slain and the captives, from the long-haired leaders of the enemy. Rejoice, O nations, with His people [Israel]; for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance on His adversaries, and will atone for His land and His people (Deuteronomy 32:39-43).

THE CONNECTION TO NUMBERS 24

When many people read the language of Deuteronomy 32:40-43, they may be tempted to interpret these verses in a strictly symbolic and metaphorical sense. They might reason, “surely God doesn’t actually have a sword that He will sharpen, or a bow and arrow that He will use against His enemies. This is just poetic language describing God’s wrath and judgement.”

I would suggest to you that a merely symbolic interpretation of the judgement language in Deuteronomy 32:39-43 misses the critical point that the Holy Spirit has carefully selected this language, primarily in order to link these verses back to the Messianic Balaam Oracles in Numbers 24. As we saw earlier, Numbers 24:8-9 speaks of the Messiah coming out of Egypt, devouring “the nations who are His adversaries,” crushing “their bones in pieces,” and shattering “them with His arrows.” In Deuteronomy 32:39-43, in the same “latter-days” context, Moses also uses very similar language.

In light of the similarities between the judgment language in Numbers 24 and Deuteronomy 32, we can conclude that when Moses speaks of God rendering “vengeance” on His “adversaries,” and making His “arrows drunk with blood,” he is simply elaborating on the same theme of Messianic deliverance for Israel that was previously spoken of in Numbers 24. This is the same story being told and expounded upon from different angles.

Without a doubt, the Messianic language used in Deuteronomy 32:39-43 is more subtle than what is used in Numbers 24. However, this passage should still be read as a future Messianic prophecy about the end times and the return of Jesus. When we understand the big picture of what the Torah teaches about the Second Coming of the Messiah, especially in Numbers 24, we can confidently say that it will be Jesus Himself who will repay Israel’s enemies in the last days and carry out the prophetic judgments of Deuteronomy 32:39-43.

Again, Deuteronomy 32 cannot be isolated from the broader Messianic storyline of the Torah as a whole. By the time we get to

Deuteronomy 32, Moses expects that we already understand what Balaam said about the Messianic deliverance in Numbers 24. He expects that we understand that it will be God yes, but more specifically God through the person of the Messiah who will crush Israel's enemies and rescue the Jewish people at the end of the age. It is not simply God in a generic sense who possesses the sword of the Lord and His divine arrows of vengeance. It is Israel's King and Seed, the Offspring of Eve, the Messiah, the One who will defeat the Antichrist (i.e. Gog), who wields these instruments of judgment on the Lord's behalf.

Numbers 24:8-9	Deuteronomy 32:41-42
<p>God brings Him [the Messiah] out of Egypt, He is for Him like the horns of the wild ox. He will devour the nations who are His adversaries, and will crush their bones in pieces, and shatter them with His arrows. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him?</p>	<p>Indeed, I lift up My hand to heaven, and say, as I live forever, if I sharpen my flashing sword, and My hand takes hold of justice, I will render vengeance on My adversaries, and I will also repay those who hate Me. I will make My arrows drunk with blood, and My sword will devour flesh [...].</p>

Once we are able to read these verses in Deuteronomy in light of Numbers 24, we can also begin to develop an even clearer picture of why Jesus will be coming out of Egypt at the time of His Second Coming, which the text of Numbers 24:8 does not explain for us. The reason Jesus will have to go down into Egypt when He returns, is because Israel's unfaithfulness, and the judgements this will bring upon them, will result in them being scattered into the surrounding Gentile nations during the end times. Just as Deuteronomy 4 says, one of the consequences of Jewish rebellion against God is exile and captivity. Isaiah assumed this as well, which is why we saw in the last chapter that he predicted before the Second Coming the Jewish people would be

“banished,” “dispersed,” “scattered,” and “perishing” throughout the Middle East and North Africa (See Isa. 11:12 & 27:13).

Though this is an intensely sobering and difficult fact to reckon with, part of the “misfortunes” God will allow Israel to experience in the latter days will include a loss of national sovereignty and the temporary triumph of their enemies. It is only when Jesus returns that the scattered and surviving Jewish remnant will be regathered to Israel, during the final last-days exodus and eschatological fulfillment of Passover (Lk. 22:15-16). When the Messiah appears He will save Israel, set them free, regather them, and repay their Middle Eastern and North African enemies with a terrifying display of eschatological judgment (Num. 24; Deut. 32; Isa. 11; 27).

10

THE DAYS OF PURGING AND REDEMPTION IN THE HEBREW PROPHETS

“God’s vengeance is the action that naturally flows from his jealousy. He is an avenging God whose judgments remove all that hinders love.”

—MIKE BICKLE

THE BIBLICAL PROPHETS knew the Torah well, and as a result, they were all familiar with the idea that Israel will experience a time of divine discipline right before the Messianic Age begins. In this chapter, we will cover the key texts in the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel that further illustrate how the Bible’s three “major” prophets picked up on the latter-days theology first introduced by Moses in Deuteronomy (4:25-31; 31:29; 32:1-43). We will also analyze a few critical passages in the book of Daniel, which give us an even more detailed picture of what will take place in Israel during the end times.

ISAIAH, ISRAEL, AND THE END TIMES

Like his predecessor Moses, Isaiah also foresaw that Israel’s wayward rebellion against the Lord would bring strict covenant discipline upon the nation in the last days. One of the best examples of this idea can be found in Isaiah 4:2-5:

In that day the Branch of the Lord will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the earth will be the pride and the adornment of the survivors of Israel. It will come about that he who is left in Zion and remains in Jerusalem will be called holy—everyone who is recorded for life in Jerusalem. **When the LORD has washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion and purged the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning,** then the LORD will create over the whole area of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud by day, even smoke, and the brightness of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy. There will be a shelter to give shade from the heat by day, and refuge and protection from the storm and the rain.

The “Branch of the Lord” in this passage is an intentional reference to the Messiah. In general terms, Isaiah 4:2-5 speaks of how the Lord will manifest His glory in the midst of Israel in the Messianic Age, just as He did at Sinai in the book of Exodus (Ex. 19). The Lord’s presence will be like a pillar of fire and a cloud over Mount Zion. At this time, Jesus will be seen as “beautiful and glorious” throughout the entire earth, and Israel will rule over the nations as ambassadors of His kingdom (v. 2).

However, notice as well that Isaiah says before these events associated with the final redemption take place, the Lord will first wash away “the filth of the daughters of Zion” and purge “the bloodshed of Jerusalem from her midst, *by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning*” (Isa. 4:4). This language implies that before the Messianic Age Israel will go through the refining fire of the Lord, and it will only be through the intense hardships of the last days that the Jewish “survivors” in Israel and Jerusalem “will be called holy” (Isa. 4:3). Suffering will be the catalyst that creates consecration. God loves us too much to not discipline us for our sins, because He knows it is only His discipline that will allow us to bear “the peaceful fruit of righteousness” (Heb. 12:11). Isaiah echoed this exact sentiment when he wrote the following about what Israel will experience during the end times in Isaiah 10:22:

For though your people, O Israel, may be like the sand of the sea, **only a remnant within them will return; A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness.**

THE TIME OF JACOB'S DISTRESS IN JEREMIAH 30:4-11

After the ministry of Isaiah, the prophet Jeremiah also framed Israel's experience in the last days in terms drawn directly from the book of Deuteronomy. One key text in the book of Jeremiah related to Israel's time of tribulation before the return of Jesus can be found in Jeremiah 30:4-11. This passage reads:

The word which came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying, thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, "Write all the words which I have spoken to you in a book. For behold, days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will restore the fortunes of Judah." The Lord says, "I will also bring them back to the land that I gave to their forefathers and they shall possess it." Now these are the words which the Lord spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah: For thus says the Lord, "I have heard a sound of terror, of dread, and there is no peace. Ask now, and see if a male can give birth. Why do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in childbirth? And why have all faces turned pale? **Alas! For that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob's distress, but he will be saved from it.**"

"It shall come about on that day," declares the Lord of hosts, "that I will break the yoke from off their neck and will tear off their bonds; and strangers will no longer make them their slaves, **but they shall serve the Lord their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.** Fear not, O Jacob My servant," declares the Lord, "and do not be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from afar and your offspring from captivity. And Jacob will return and will be quiet and at ease, and **no one will make him afraid.** For I am with you," declares the Lord, "to save you; for I will destroy completely all the nations where I have scattered you, only I will not destroy you

completely. **But I will chasten you justly and will by no means leave you unpunished.**"

As we might expect, there are numerous commentators who view this prophecy in Jeremiah as having only a historic fulfillment after the Jewish return from Babylonian exile in the 5th century BC. There are also some who try to connect the events described in this text to the restoration of modern Israel.

However, upon closer inspection, the contents of the text itself do not support either one of these interpretations. For one, Jeremiah mentions that the deliverance described in verses 8-9 will be followed by a time when Israel will "serve the Lord their God and David their King." The proper name David is used here as an epithet for the Messiah. This prophecy refers not to any ancient or modern events, but instead, to the future time in the Age to Come when Israel will serve the Lord faithfully and live under the reign of their Davidic King, Jesus. Even after Israel returned from Babylonian exile in the 500s and 400s BC, the entire nation was never characterized by a walk of obedience to the Lord, which is even more true of modern Israel. As a corporate nation, Israel has not yet truly served "the Lord their God and David their king." For this reason, we must understand that this prediction in Jeremiah 31:9 concerns a time yet to come.

A futurist reading of this text is also supported by verse 10, which notes that after the exile and captivity mentioned in this verse, Israel "will be quiet and at ease" with no one to make them afraid. At no point in the past, or in the present, have these verses come to pass.

After Israel returned from Babylonian exile, they were immediately oppressed and afflicted by their neighbors (Ezra 4-5; Neh. 4; 6), and then eventually subjugated by the Greeks, the Seleucids, and the Romans. Furthermore, throughout the last 2,000 years anti-Semitism has run rampant, and even to this day the modern State of Israel is surrounded by enemies, and has endured a constant state of warfare since its government was established in 1948.

A simple reading of Jeremiah 30:4-11 in light of the realities of both ancient and modern history precludes us from being able to say that the predictions made in this prophecy have already been fulfilled. Israel has not yet served their Messiah as a corporate nation, nor have they experienced deliverance from their enemies.

According to Jeremiah, these things will not happen until “the time of Jacob’s distress,” or “the time of Jacob’s trouble,” happens first. This will be a time when grown men will writhe in fear and panic. They will grab their loins like a woman in childbirth. Faces will turn pale and people will say, “Alas! The day is great, there is none like it.” Tragically, what Israel will experience in the last days will catch them completely off guard, and many will be utterly shocked by the events that will befall the Jewish nation. Furthermore, just as Moses hints at in Deuteronomy 4 and Deuteronomy 31, Jeremiah also describes Israel’s experience during the latter days as a time when they will experience captivity and subjugation at the hands of the Gentile nations.

Ultimately, Jeremiah also saw that God’s faithfulness to Israel will win the day in the end. Indeed, God does say to Israel here, “I will chasten you justly and will by no means leave you unpunished” (Jer. 30:11). Yet, He also promised that He will “restore the fortunes of Judah,” “break the yoke from off their neck,” “tear off their bonds,” save them from “afar,” and deliver their “offspring from captivity.”

THE DAYS OF PUNISHMENT AND RESTORATION IN EZEKIEL 34-37

In addition to what we find in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, these same themes of covenant discipline, exile, and captivity, which will then be followed by Israel’s restoration in the Messianic Age, are also present in the book of Ezekiel. Some of the best examples of these themes can be found in Ezekiel chapters 34-39. Though somewhat lengthy and full of interesting details, the general idea of these chapters is that in the last days God will use the surrounding Gentile nations to punish Israel for her sins, but will then in turn judge the nations that harm Israel, which will result in the physical and spiritual restoration

of Israel and the nations when Jesus returns.

Of course, we cannot cover every detail of Ezekiel 34-39 at this time, and we will look more closely at Ezekiel 38-39 beginning in chapter 14. However, what I want to illustrate now is how the primary theme of discipline leading to restoration in the Messianic Age is strategically woven into the entire fabric of Ezekiel 34-37.

EZEKIEL 34

Ezekiel 34 is a prophecy “against the shepherds of Israel,” who are meant to be understood as the spiritual and political leaders who lead the nation astray and take advantage of God’s flock (34:1-9). In response to this situation, God promises Israel in this passage that He will “judge between one sheep and another,” and “deliver” His flock from those who oppress them (34:10, 22). This promise then culminates with the announcement that God will send the Messiah Himself to shepherd Israel, deliver them from slavery, and establish them peacefully in their land. Thus, we read in Ezekiel 34:23-30:

Then I will set over them one shepherd, **My servant David**, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and **My servant David will be prince among them**; I the Lord have spoken. **I will make a covenant of peace with them** and eliminate harmful beasts from the land so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing. Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit and the earth will yield its increase, and they will be secure in their land. **Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them.** They will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; **but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid.** I will establish for them a renowned planting place, and they will not again be victims of famine in the

land, **and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore.**

Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and they, the house of Israel, are My people.

In this passage we see all of the typical blessings associated with the Messianic Age that were first introduced in the Torah. These include 1) Israel living securely in the Land (Gen. 49), 2) agricultural abundance (Gen. 49:11-12), 3) deliverance from slavery (Deut. 32:36-43), 4) the presence of the Davidic King ruling over His people (Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:7-9), and 5) the nation of Israel walking in the ways of God (Deut. 33).

Not surprisingly, and just like Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, Ezekiel says that the Lord will deliver Israel “from the hand of those who enslaved them” (34:27). In this verse, Ezekiel is harmonizing his prophecy with the core eschatological message articulated by Israel’s earlier prophets. Ezekiel 34 indicates that the nation will endure one final period of exile and slavery before they experience God’s ultimate blessings of spiritual, physical, and national restoration in the Age to Come.

When we compare some of the key language used in both Jeremiah 30:1-8 and Ezekiel 34:23-30, it is easy to see that Ezekiel is speaking here of the same events as Jeremiah, when he too expounded upon the circumstances that will follow “the time of Jacob’s distress.”

The Messianic Age in Jeremiah 30:1-8	The Messianic Age in Ezekiel 34:23-30
But they shall serve the LORD their God and David their king , whom I will raise up for them (30:9).	Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David , and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them (34:23-24).

<p>I will break the yoke from off their neck and will tear off their bonds; and strangers will no longer make them their slaves (30:8).</p>	<p>Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them (34:27).</p>
<p>And Jacob will return and will be quiet and at ease, and no one will make him afraid. “For I am with you,” declares the LORD, to save you (30:10).</p>	<p>They will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid [...] and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore (34:28-29).</p>

EZEKIEL 35

After Ezekiel 34, in Ezekiel 35, Ezekiel continues to elaborate on how God will discipline Israel in the last days, and then finally vindicate them and judge their enemies in the days of the Messiah:

Moreover, the word of the LORD came to me saying, “Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir, and prophesy against it and say to it, ‘Thus says the LORD God, ‘Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out My hand against you and make you a desolation and a waste. I will lay waste your cities and you will become a desolation. Then you will know that I am the LORD’” (Ezek. 35:1-4).

“Because you have had everlasting enmity and have **delivered the sons of Israel to the power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of the punishment of the end**, therefore as I live,” declares the LORD, “I will give you over to bloodshed and bloodshed will pursue you; since you have not hated bloodshed, therefore bloodshed will pursue you” (Ezek. 35:5-6).

“I will deal with you [Mount Seir] according to your anger and according to your envy which you showed because of your hatred against them [Israel and Judah]; so I will make myself known among

them when I judge you. Then you will know that I, the LORD, have heard all your revilings which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying; **‘They are laid desolate; they are given to us for food.’** And you have spoken arrogantly against Me and have multiplied your words against Me; I have heard it.” Thus says the LORD God, **“As all the earth rejoices, I will make you a desolation.** As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so I will do to you” [...] (Ezek. 35:11-15).

In this passage Ezekiel uses two phrases, “the time of their calamity” and “the time of the punishment of the end,” to once again notify his readers that he is focusing here of Israel’s final period of tribulation during the latter days (35:5). I do concede that this prophecy likely also has some ancient historical meaning connected to Israel’s strained relationship with Edom at the time of the Babylonian exile. However, I am not convinced Ezekiel 35 is purely historical. As is common in the Hebrew prophets, it appears that Ezekiel is also peering through Israel’s past history, and using it as a template for still future events as well. The phrase the “time of the end” (and its derivatives) is a common feature in other eschatological prophecies, especially in the book of Daniel (see Daniel 8:17; 11:35, 40; 12:4, 9, 13).

During this time, Ezekiel says that the nation of Edom (i.e. Mount Seir) will deliver the sons of Israel to the “power of the sword.” Just like in times past, they will see that the Land of Israel has been “laid desolate,” and will try to possess it for themselves (35:12). Eventually however, Ezekiel also predicted that when the Messiah returns to the Middle East (when “all the earth rejoices,” v. 14) He will deal with Israel’s neighbors according to their envy and hatred, and make Mount Seir and “all of Edom, all of it” a desolation (35:14-15).

If we compare what Ezekiel says here to what we learned about Edom in our earlier study of the Torah, Ezekiel 35 begins to fit even more harmoniously into the paradigm of end-time events presented by Moses and the other prophets. Just like Numbers 24:18 says, Ezekiel 35 is giving

us a more detailed explanation of why Jesus will concentrate some of his most powerful judgments against Edom at the time of His Second Coming. Those who occupy the ancient geographical land holdings of Edom, which would include the nations of modern Jordan and Saudi Arabia, as well as nearly two million Palestinians who live as “refugees” in Jordan, will play a central part in Israel’s time of tribulation during the end times. For a time, these nations will actually believe they have gotten away with murder and taken control of Israel for themselves. However, when Jesus returns to save Israel, bloodshed will pursue Israel’s enemies (35:6), and the Lord will make “Mount Seir a waste and a desolation,” and will fill “its mountains with its slain” (35:8). Israel’s oppressive neighbors, and particularly Edom, will be uniquely singled out for judgment when Israel’s King and Shepherd arrives (see also Isa. 63:1-15).

EZEKIEL 36

In Ezekiel 36, Ezekiel doubles back over the same themes of captivity, desolation, and restoration, as well as God’s judgment on Israel’s eschatological enemies, which he had first touched upon in the two previous chapters. These theological motifs are present in the following abbreviated portions of Ezekiel 36:5-32:

Surely in the fire of My jealousy I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, **who appropriated My land for themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and with scorn of soul, to drive it out for a prey.** [...]

But you, O mountains of Israel, you will put forth your branches and bear your fruit for My people Israel; for they will soon come. [...] **I will not let you hear insults from the nations anymore, nor will you bear disgrace from the peoples any longer** [...]. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD, [...] when I prove Myself holy among you [Israel] in their sight.

For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on

you, and you will be clean; **I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.** Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances. You will live in the land that I gave to your forefathers so you will be My people, and I will be your God. [...] I am not doing this for your sake, declares the LORD, let it be known to you. **Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel.**

In these verses Ezekiel mentions many of the same eschatological themes from previous chapters, while also expounding on the work of spiritual renewal the Lord will accomplish in the hearts of the Jewish people in the Messianic Age. God will not only judge Israel's enemies (36:5), bring Israel back from captivity (36:8-12), and make the Land prosperous again (36:29), but He will also place His Spirit within Israel, and cause them to turn away from their idols and rebellious ways. God will renew Israel's heart of stone and turn it into a heart of flesh, not because they are special or deserving in and of themselves, but because He has connected the sanctity of His name directly to the conduct of His Chosen People. For all the nations to experience God's blessings in the Messianic Age, Israel must not only be restored to their Land, but they must also be renewed and empowered to walk in full covenant obedience with her God. As Ezekiel tells us, this will in fact happen through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the surviving Jewish remnant when Jesus returns. Every Israeli and Jew alive at the time of the Second Coming will be born again and baptized in the Holy Spirit by Jesus Himself. Then they will serve among the primary ambassadors of God's kingdom in the Age to Come.

EZEKIEL 37 AND THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

This prophecy concerning Israel's two-fold physical and spiritual

restoration at the time of Jesus' Second Coming reaches its climax in Ezekiel 37, with Ezekiel's famous vision of the valley of dry bones. In this passage, Ezekiel is placed by the Spirit in "the middle of a valley" that is "full of bones" that were "very dry" (37:2-3). Ezekiel is then told by the Spirit to prophesy over the bones and to tell them that God will bring them back to life:

Prophesy over these bones and say to them, "O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD." Thus says the LORD God to these bones, "Behold I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin and put breath in you that you may come alive, and you will know that I am the LORD" (Ezek. 37:3-6).

Ezekiel does as he is told, and miraculously, he sees a mass of rattling bones come together with sinews, flesh, and skin covering them. However, he also notes in verse 8, "but there was no breath in them."

Then, Ezekiel is instructed by the Spirit, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, thus says the LORD God, 'Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain that they come to life.'" (37:9).

Ezekiel again does as he is told, and then observes that "breath came into them, and they came to life and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army" (37:10).

In the rest of Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel is then given the interpretation of the vision. It is revealed to him that the bones represent "the whole house of Israel" who have said, "Our bones are dried up and our hope has perished" (37:11). Through this vision, God was reassuring Israel that He will not let them be annihilated during the end times, but instead, will deliver them from circumstances that from a human perspective will seem utterly hopeless. God will restore the Jewish nation both physically and spiritually in the Messianic Age. This vision communicates the exact same point as the earlier prophecy in Ezekiel 36:24-28.

IT HASN'T HAPPENED YET

Understandably, when interpreting Ezekiel 37, many conservative Christians and Bible teachers have taught that this passage speaks of the physical restoration of the modern State of Israel, as well as the subsequent spiritual revival that has been taking place among the Jewish people over the last 100 years or so. Those who hold to this view say we are now living in the days when Ezekiel 37 is being fulfilled. God has restored the Jewish nation to her homeland (the physical side of the vision), and begun to pour out His Spirit on more and more Jewish people now than at any other time since the first century (the spiritual side of the vision).

While God's present-day work among the Jewish people is noteworthy, and something we should all celebrate, no modern-day events represent the true fulfillment of what Ezekiel predicts will happen to the Jewish nation in Ezekiel 37. As we have seen throughout this chapter, Ezekiel 37 is set within a larger literary context in which his primary focus is on Israel's final experience of captivity and suffering before her King, the Davidic Messiah, arrives to save her. When Ezekiel 37 is understood as part of this larger context, and not carelessly separated from it, it is quite apparent that Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones is nothing more than an elaboration on the same topic he has been speaking on at length for the past three chapters. Namely, the events that will occur before, during, and after the Time of Jacob's Trouble, or in Ezekiel's words, "the time of the punishment of the end" (35:5). All of Ezekiel 34-37 must be read as a unit, and as a collective set of texts about Israel's experience during the end times. I encourage you to read through Ezekiel 34-37 in one sitting. As you do, circle or underline all of the intertextual links, repeated language, and reoccurring theological themes in each of these chapters, and you will begin to see how they are meant to be read together, as one expanded commentary on the end times (this will be explained more in chs. 14-17).

What Ezekiel 37 contributes to this broader discussion on the end times, is the idea that right before the return of Jesus the nation of Israel will think they have come to an end. Metaphorically speaking they will

be like a disconnected heap of dry bones. Israel's enemies will see that she has become "desolate" (35:12). They will take "possession" of the mountains of Israel (36:2), and send large portions of the nation into captivity. Many will wonder, "can these bones live?" (37:3), "can the nation of Israel ever come back from this?"

As hopeless as things may seem however, Ezekiel is adamant that Israel's desolation in the last days will eventually lead to the greatest national, physical, and spiritual revival the Jewish people have ever experienced. He tells us that God will reconstitute the Jewish nation, rescue Israel from the depths of despair, place them in their own land, and pour out His Spirit upon them. The vision of the dry bones that are regathered and then empowered by the Spirit, is a symbolic representation of ethnic Israel's complete restoration in the Messianic Age, which will only occur after "the time of the punishment of the end" (Ezek. 35:5).

Just as Ezekiel already told us in Ezekiel 36:25-32, he is telling us again in Ezekiel 37 that God's purposes for the world in the Messianic Age will be directly connected to both the physical and spiritual restoration of Israel. From Israel's vantage point, all will seem lost during the end times. However, God's Spirit will still be present in the darkness of Israel's experience, molding and shaping the Jewish remnant for their ultimate destiny and purpose in the kingdom of God. Like a phoenix out of the ashes, Israel will reemerge victorious with her Messiah in the end.

THE END-TIMES CLUES IN EZEKIEL 37

As we look closer at some of the closing words in Ezekiel 37 (Ezek. 37:15-28), it becomes even more evident that this vision is about events that will take place when the Messianic Kingdom is established. Here, Ezekiel speaks of how in the Messianic Age all the people of Israel will be at peace and unity with one another in the Land. Then, in Ezekiel 37:20-28 Ezekiel writes this conclusion to his vision of the dry bones:

Thus says the LORD God, "Behold, **I will take the sons of Israel from among the nations where they have gone, and I will gather**

them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; **and one king will be king for all of them;** and they will no longer be two nations and no longer be divided into two kingdoms. **They will no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions;** but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. And they will be My people, and I will be their God.”

“My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them. They will live on the land that I gave to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they will live on it, they and their sons and their sons’ sons, forever, and **David My servant will be their prince forever.** I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant with them. And I will place them and multiply them, and **will set My sanctuary in their midst forever.** My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people. **And the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.”**

These verses are a perfect example of how Ezekiel is intentionally tying his vision of the dry bones into his earlier prophecies from Ezekiel 34-36. Most notably, just like in Ezekiel 34:23-25, Ezekiel also tells us in 37:24 about God’s “servant David,” the Messiah, as well as the “covenant of peace” God will make with Israel in the Messianic Age (37:26; 34:25). Ezekiel also speaks of how his vision in chapter 37 relates to the time when Israel will “no longer defile themselves with their idols, or with their detestable things,” when the nation will walk in God’s ordinances (37:24), and when God’s sanctuary will be in the midst of Israel forever (37:28).

To this day, none of the events outlined in Ezekiel 37 have come to pass. Israel has not been cleansed from her idols. The large majority

of the nation does not walk with the Lord. Israel is ruled by a secular government, not the Messiah, and God's dwelling place is not currently located in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel did in fact see a glorious future for Israel when all of these events will take place. However, based on the wider context of this prophecy, as well as its specific language, there is no evidence within the text itself that Ezekiel is speaking here of a long-term period of fulfillment starting in the 1900s with the reestablishment of modern Israel. Instead, Ezekiel is telling us that when the Davidic Messiah appears, Israel will be physically and spiritually restored as a nation. That's the large-scale macro point of Ezekiel 34-37, which Ezekiel reiterates at the end of Ezekiel 37. Each of these chapters covers the same material from a slightly different angle. The Holy Spirit is using strategic repetition in Ezekiel 34-37 to highlight some of the most important events that will take place during the end times, and when Jesus establishes His kingdom on this earth. Ezekiel 37 only describes events that will take place after the Time of Jacob's Trouble (i.e. "the time of the punishment of the end" Ezek. 35:5).

The primary reason most prophecy teachers do not see what Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones is about, is because they believe that the modern State of Israel represents the *final* Jewish return to their ancestral homeland. The reason this view is untenable however, is because it completely fails to take into account what the prophets wrote about Israel's time of suffering and exile *during* the end times. If we don't understand the prophetic testimony regarding Israel's experience in the last days, then we are automatically forced to read all of the prophecies in the Hebrew Bible that speak of Israel being regathered to their land in the Messianic Age, as though they are primarily concerned with Israel's modern history over the last 100 years. However, when these prophecies are looked at objectively, the modern State of Israel does not meet the criteria necessary to actually fulfill these prophecies.

Although this is a sobering Biblical truth to have to reckon with, all of the prophets are clear. Jesus does not come back to the currently

reestablished modern State of Israel. He comes back to a land that has been made desolate, and to a people that has been scattered, broken, and subjugated by their enemies. These ideas were first articulated by Moses in the book of Deuteronomy, and then picked up and elaborated upon by Israel's three major prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Difficult as they may be, it is precisely these events associated with Israel's suffering and captivity in the last days that will set the stage for their final Passover deliverance and ultimate restoration when Jesus returns (Lk. 22:15-16; Num. 24:3-9; Isa. 27:12-13; cf. Isa. 19:1).

I emphasize this point not because I have some sort of conceited preoccupation with saying things that are politically incorrect. My only purpose is to make sure that the Lord's people understand the testimony of the Biblical prophets, including what the prophets said will be happening in Israel before the return of our Messiah. I fear that many Christians will be confused and have their faith seriously challenged in the last days, only because they have an overly simplistic view of God's relationship with Israel. When the days of distress do come upon us, only the full prophetic testimony of Scripture will be able to guide us into the Lord's most perfect will.

THE TIME OF DISTRESS IN THE BOOK OF DANIEL

In addition to the writings of Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, the book of Daniel also gives some of the most important and specific information regarding the Time of Jacob's Trouble in all of Scripture. In Daniel's famous prophecy of the "70 weeks" in Daniel 9:24-27, Daniel spoke of a final seven-year period of time, known as the "70th week" (v. 27). Halfway through this 70th week Daniel also predicted that the Antichrist will break a covenant with Israel, and then unleash a time of unparalleled destruction in the Land.

And he [the Antichrist] will make a firm covenant with the many for one week [i.e. seven years], but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction,

one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate (Dan. 9:27).

This portion of Daniel is often said to be one of the most controversial and complicated passages in the entire Bible. Many people do not even believe Daniel 9:27 is about the end times at all.

At this time, we cannot cover all of the details that prove why this view is mistaken. However, what I can highlight is that I have recently been conducting extensive research on Daniel 9 for another book our ministry plans on publishing soon. Based on this research, I have no doubt that the traditional and literal interpretation of this passage, which views it as a Messianic/end-times prophecy, is the best interpretation. Daniel 9:27 speaks of Israel's experience during the end times and the reign of the Antichrist.

Notably, in this verse, Daniel calls the Antichrist "one who makes desolate," implying that He will desolate the Land of Israel. This notion in Daniel 9 that Israel will experience a time of desolation before the reign of the Messiah is undoubtedly linked to the theology of the other Hebrew prophets (Ezek. 35:12). Yet, Daniel was also given deeper revelation concerning some of the specific events that will take place during the Time of Jacob's Trouble, as well as how long this period of discipline will last.

According to Daniel, there will have to be some sort of Jewish Temple rebuilt during the end times, and the Antichrist will eventually forbid Jewish worship to take place at this Temple. In addition, Daniel also tells us that the Time of Jacob's Trouble will last for roughly 3 ½ years (i.e. half of the 70th week). This idea is also reiterated in Daniel 12:7, where Daniel was told that the time allotted for the "shattering of the holy people" will last for "time, times, and half a time," which is said to consist of somewhere between 1,290 to 1,335 days in Daniel 12:11-12. Just like in Daniel 9:27, we are also told in Daniel 12:11 that this final 3 ½ years of the 70th week will begin when "the regular sacrifice is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up," which again, refers to some action the Antichrist will take in the Jewish Temple.

Many prophecy teachers refer to the final seven years before the return of Jesus, which represent Daniel's entire 70th week, as "the Tribulation." It is also common to hear prophecy teachers refer to the last 3 ½ years of the 70th week, which will begin when the Antichrist turns against Israel, as "the Great Tribulation." Though I understand why people use this terminology, it would be more accurate to simply refer to the final seven years as Daniel's 70th week, and the final 3 ½ years of the 70th week as The Time of Jacob's Trouble, which is the pattern I will mostly follow in the rest of this book.

HOW SHALL WE THEN LIVE?

Coming to grips with what the Hebrew prophets taught about Israel, the end times, and the Time of Jacob's Trouble is going to be a paradigm shifting and sobering experience for many people. Because of this, as we conclude this chapter, I also want to say a few brief words about how I believe this material can be most properly and constructively applied by God's people today, as well as how it should impact our relationship with the Lord and ministry to others.

First, we do need to refine our perspective and our teaching on the modern State of Israel. Many people are under the mistaken impression that God's drama with Israel in these last days is essentially like a two-act play. They believe that now that Israel is back in their Land (act one) they could never experience any truly devastating defeat, and are thus, more or less safe and secure, and simply waiting for Jesus to return (act two).

In reality however, God's drama with Israel in these last days is actually more like a three-act play. Act one involves the regathering of the Jewish people to their homeland, which has been happening over the last 150 years. This is paving the way for act two, which will include the defeat of the modern State of Israel at the hands of her Middle Eastern neighbors. Then finally, act three will begin when Jesus returns, defeats Israel's enemies, and restores the nation both physically and spiritually (Deut. 32; Ezek. 37).

To truly understand Bible prophecy, it is vital to see that the modern State of Israel is not so much *the fulfillment* of prophecy as it is *the precursor* to the fulfillment of prophecy. The modern State of Israel reveals to us that the return of Jesus is close at hand, and that God's faithful purposes for Israel are still on track. But there are still other events related to God's drama with modern Israel that are hovering on the horizon. The modern State sets the pieces in place for these other events to occur in the near future, but in and of itself, the modern State is not what the Hebrew prophets were referring to when they spoke of the final restoration of Israel in the last days. The prophets were always focused primarily on what the Messiah will do for Israel in the Age to Come, not merely on what modern Israelis and Zionists would do for themselves. This does not mean we cannot celebrate the accomplishments of modern Israel and Zionism in any sense whatsoever, because the Lord has been involved in Israel's modern history, protecting and preserving the nation against all odds. Yet, we must remember that as we celebrate what the Lord has accomplished in and through modern Israel, we simultaneously need to maintain a realistic view about the limitations and ultimate destiny of the modern Jewish State.

Prophecy teacher Dalton Thomas has summarized how we should view modern Israel in light of the teachings of the Biblical prophets:

Scripture is quite clear that the final hour of tribulation, judgment, and refining of the Jewish people occurs *in the Land of Israel*. [...] The fact that this season of unequaled violence and purgation will befall the Jewish people *in their ancient homeland* requires that we view the establishment of the current State as but *one of the stages* in the order of a relatively complex drama. **We cannot view the modern State as permanent, unchallengeable, inviolable, and invincible (the way many Christian Zionists now view it) until it passes through the different stages of the restoration of Israel described in the Scriptures, stages that we have yet to witness.** A mistaken view of the order of the return of the Jews to the Land of Israel predisposes

us toward unrealistic expectations concerning the fate of the State. Unrealistic expectation will not serve the Church or the Jews as the coming storm approaches.

The present-day State is not intended to satisfy the ultimate intentions of God for national Israel; **it is a preliminary provision that sets the stage for future crisis and greater glory.** [...] The fact that Israel's restoration and Jerusalem's final vindication at the end of the Age is said to follow a season of unequaled suffering stands to contradict the common belief that the present-day State is relatively invincible. The prophetic Scriptures are consistent in showing Israel suffering the fury of foreign enemies and the fierce wrath of God in their own Land before the Jewish people can rest secure in a restored Nation free from future oppression. The prospect of the political death of the State as we now know it isn't a popular idea among Christian Zionists (and understandably so). However, it is clearly established in Scripture.¹

To some, insisting on this more nuanced explanation of God's purposes for Israel in the last days might appear to be in poor taste. However, having the most accurate understanding of how God's purposes for Israel are going to unfold in the future will make an enormous difference, especially when it comes to our ability to properly discern the signs of the times, and minister most effectively to Israelis and Jews in the latter days.

The reason many people are not able to see the full picture of what the Hebrew prophets teach with respect to Israel, is because the idea that modern Israel is the absolute fulfillment of prophecy became firmly entrenched in many sectors of evangelicalism in the 20th century. As a result, many well-meaning scholars, pastors, and ministry leaders now unconsciously read the prophets through the lens of their own inherited traditions. The closer we get to the return of Jesus however, the more

¹ Dalton Lifsey, *The Controversy of Zion and the Time of Jacob's Trouble: The Final Suffering and Salvation of the Jewish People* (Maskilim Publishing: 2011), 113-115.

important it will become to set our traditions aside, so that we can hear the Word of the Lord in this critical hour of history. Those of us who teach on God's plan for Israel, and on Bible prophecy in general, need to help people understand all that the prophets taught regarding how the Lord will refine and purify Israel before the return of Jesus. Many people will not want to hear it, but this teaching will save Jewish lives in the future and help bring the surviving Jewish remnant into the kingdom of God.

THE DIVINE INVITATION OF BIBLICAL ESCHATOLOGY

Besides expanding our perspective on God's prophetic purposes for Israel, the Biblical material related to the Time of Jacob's Trouble should also lead us to become more involved with what God is doing in Israel and among the Jewish people in the 21st century. In no way should this material lead us to adopt a cold and stoic fatalism, which might cause us to say, "well, Israel is rebellious and destined to be judged anyways, so why even bother with her...?"

Instead, our understanding of God's prophetic plan for Israel should create an urgency in our hearts to partner with Him all the more as He works to bring His purposes for His Chosen People to pass. We should be willing to give our lives for the well-being of Israel, and in order that the name of the Lord might be glorified among the Jewish people, just like the Biblical prophets were. In the near future, God will be calling more Christian leaders to take a public stance against anti-Semitism. He will be calling more of His servants to take the Gospel back to the Jewish people. He will be drawing more of a line in the sand to separate those who stand with Israel, and those who side with her enemies.

Understanding Bible prophecy, and more particularly how Bible prophecy relates to God's epic drama with the Jewish people, is an invitation to get involved, and to be on the right side of history when things go down. Yes, we do have to bear the heartbreaking burden of knowing what Israel's sins will ultimately cost her in the last days. However, this burden should motivate us to serve our Jewish brothers and sisters more

faithfully in the here and now. We are still called to seek the good of Israel no matter what the future may hold. This is not an invitation to retreat into hiding or pessimism. This is an invitation to have our hearts set on fire, to cry out to God, and to proclaim God's purposes for Israel to the nations, just as the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah said we should:

You who remind the LORD, take no rest for yourselves; and give Him no rest until He establishes and makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth (Isa. 62:7).

Proclaim, give praise and say, "O LORD, save Your people, the remnant of Israel" (Jer. 31:7).

Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare in the coastlands afar off, and say, "He who scattered Israel will gather them and keep him as a shepherd keeps his flock" (Jer. 31:10).

Your prayers will make a difference in how things play out among the Jewish people in the future. Your support of Gospel ministries in Israel will play a role in the salvation of the Jewish remnant. One of the reasons God has put so much in His Word about the Jewish people's final period of suffering and restoration, is because it is precisely this information that He will use to mobilize His people "for Zion's sake" in the last days (Isa. 62:1). Israel will continue to be at the center of unfolding prophetic events in the days ahead, and the closer we move towards the return of Jesus, the more the Holy Spirit will continue to draw the Jewish people to Himself. What are we going to do with what we have learned, and whose side will we be on when it matters most?

11

THE FORGOTTEN PROPHECY IN DEUTERONOMY 33

“As in the days when you came out from the land of Egypt, I will show you miracles.”

—MICAH 7:15

IN THE LAST THREE CHAPTERS, we saw how Moses and the later Hebrew prophets established the Biblical framework for both the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, and Israel’s glorious restoration in the Messianic Age. What I want to explore in the next couple of chapters, is how the final prophecy in the Torah found in Deuteronomy 33, continues to expound on what will take place immediately after Jesus returns and delivers Israel at the end of the 70th week (i.e. after the Messianic deliverance of Deut. 32).

In Deuteronomy 33, Moses leaves behind the topic of Israel’s chastisement by God in the last days and elaborates with full prophetic force on how the Jewish nation will be saved and blessed when the Messiah appears in glory. As we will see, Deuteronomy 33 gives us an even more detailed description of the events that will transpire after the Messiah leads Israel “out of Egypt” at the time of their End-Times Exodus, and then into the Promised Land in the Age to Come. Furthermore, this

passage also reinforces the idea that the entire theological framework of the Torah was intentionally constructed to help the Lord's people look forward to the Second Coming and the kingdom of God.

Below is a full quote of the introduction and conclusion of Deuteronomy 33, which are found in Deuteronomy 33:1-5 and Deuteronomy 33:26-29. The middle portion of this text, Deuteronomy 33:6-25, has been summarized to save space and facilitate a more streamlined reader experience, although I do recommend reading this part of the prophecy in your own Bible as well.

THE FINAL VISION OF MOSES

The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir, He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them;

Indeed He loves the people; All your holy ones are in Your hand, and they followed in Your steps.

Everyone receives of Your words, Moses charged us with a law, a possession for the assembly of Jacob. And he [Moses or God?] was king in Jeshurun [Israel], when the heads of the people were gathered, the tribes of Israel together (Deuteronomy 33:1-5).

Intermission (Deuteronomy 33:6-25): Blessings on Each of the Twelve Tribes

There is no God like the God of Jeshurun [Israel], who rides the heavens to your help, and through the skies in His majesty. The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and He drove out the enemy from before you, and said, 'Destroy!' So Israel dwells in security, the fountain of Jacob secluded, in a land of grain and new wine; His heavens also drip dew. Blessed are you, O Israel; who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, Who is the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! So your

enemies will cringe before you, and you will tread upon their high places (Deuteronomy 33:26-29).

THE TRADITIONAL VIEW OF DEUTERONOMY 33

If we were to survey the various Bible commentaries that have been written on Deuteronomy, and then look up Deuteronomy 33, we would inevitably encounter one central idea regarding this text over and over. Namely, that Deuteronomy 33 is nothing more than a poetic rehashing of Israel's history after they left Egypt, as well as a blessing upon the twelve tribes as they prepared to conquer the land of Canaan. After all, the language in this passage seems clear enough.

In verses 2-5 we read how Israel experienced the glory of God in the wilderness, and received the Law from Moses at Sinai. In verses 6-25 we read the extended blessings on the twelve tribes. Then at the end of the passage, in verses 26-29, we read of Israel destroying her enemies and dwelling safely in their land, "a land of grain and new wine," a land of abundance.

By all accounts, this looks like a simple history of events that either took place during the life of Moses, or, shortly after his death (i.e. Israel's conquest of Canaan). As a result, most commentators only connect this passage to ancient Israel's history, and the idea that Moses was blessing Israel before his death, and then they move on.

HISTORY AS PROPHECY, HISTORY AS TYPOLOGY

Without a doubt, there are historical overtones and themes present in Deuteronomy 33. I am not suggesting this passage has no connection to ancient Israel's past history. However, my central thesis related to Deuteronomy 33 is that at the most fundamental level, this text is supposed to be read as a future prophecy about the latter days and the coming Messianic Kingdom. It is not merely a retroactive look back at events that occurred in Bible times long ago. It is a prophetic look forward, to the time when the Messiah will appear in glory. In Deuteronomy 33, Moses uses Israel's past history as a kind of typological

framework and template to describe what will take place at the start of the Messianic Age, just like Balaam did in Numbers 24, when he too spoke of Israel's End-Times Exodus.

THE SIMPLE "EYE TEST"

There are many pieces of evidence both within the Torah itself, and in the writings of the later Biblical prophets, that confirm that Deuteronomy 33 is meant to be read as a future eschatological prophecy. We will cover many of these pieces of evidence in the next chapter. However, as we begin to analyze this passage in a deeper way, I do want to point out a few key elements of the text, which immediately signal to us that it is more than just a simple history.

The first and most obvious indication that Deuteronomy 33 is a prophecy, is that many of the events it speaks of have never actually happened. If we subject this passage to a simple "eye test," we will find that it does not harmonize precisely with Israel's past history as recorded in the Torah.

For example, in Deuteronomy 33:2 Moses speaks of "flashing lightning" coming from God's "right hand." Some translations also speak of "flaming fire" (ESV) coming from God's hand.

Where in the Torah were we ever told that Moses saw "flashing lightning" or "flaming fire" coming directly out of God's hand? Nowhere.

In addition, Deuteronomy 33:26 says that God "rides the heavens" and "through the skies in His majesty" to help Israel. Where in the Torah were we ever told that God literally rode through the heavens and through the sky in His majesty to save Israel? Again, nowhere. This never happened anywhere in Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, or Deuteronomy.

Of course, some will still argue that all of this language in Deuteronomy 33:2 and 33:26 is just an example of poetic overstatement, and that it only describes how God revealed Himself to Israel at Sinai. Most commentators do in fact follow this trajectory of interpretation. However, as we will continue to see, reading Deuteronomy 33 as

nothing more than a stylized and poetic account of the historic exodus is precisely what hinders so many commentators from being able to see the full depth and richness of what Moses is saying in this passage.

Spoiler alert, when Moses speaks of flaming fire and lightning coming forth from God's right hand, as well as God riding through the skies "in His majesty," He is speaking about the Messiah, and what He will do at the time of Israel's End-Times Exodus. This will be proven further in the next chapter, especially when we compare Deuteronomy 33 to Habakkuk 3.

CONTEXT IS KING

Besides the simple eye test, the next piece of evidence that proves that Deuteronomy 33 is a future prophecy, pertains to the wider context of this passage within the book of Deuteronomy itself. As we saw in chapter 9 when we analyzed Deuteronomy 4:25-31, 31:29, and 32:1-43, by the time Moses gets to the end of the Torah his primary emphasis is on what Israel's experience will be in the "the latter days" (Deut. 31:29), which will include the time when they are finally delivered and redeemed by Jesus at the start of the Messianic Age (Deut. 32:40-43).

Because Deuteronomy 33 is placed within this same "latter-days" context as the chapters that come right before it, it is not at all a stretch to say that in this chapter Moses is moving forward with the same theme of Messianic redemption he initially started talking about a few verses earlier, in Deuteronomy 32:40-43. As a matter of fact, this preceding passage is so clearly Messianic and related to the end times, that I believe it would be quite bizarre if all of a sudden in Deuteronomy 33 Moses completely shifted gears and began to merely recount the events of Israel's prior history, without attaching any eschatological significance to these events whatsoever.

By this point, the primary focus of the Torah narrative is the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. Therefore, when read in light of Deuteronomy 4, 31, and 32, a Messianic reading of Deuteronomy 33 is not only perfectly warranted, but also fits better with the broader

eschatological message that Moses has begun to emphasize at the end of the Torah. The traditional and merely historical interpretation of Deuteronomy 33 commits the very serious error of reading this passage in isolation, and divorcing it from its wider context. The prior context of this passage moves us away from history and more towards eschatology.

THE STRATEGIC MESSIANIC LANGUAGE

In addition to the future events that are spoken of in Deuteronomy 33, as well as the eschatological context of this passage within the Torah as a whole, the third reason we can be sure that Deuteronomy 33 is a future prophecy, is because Moses purposefully highlights the relationship between this passage and the earlier end-time prophecies in Genesis 49, Numbers 24, and Deuteronomy 32. The way Moses does this is through the use of strategic language and repeated theological themes in Deuteronomy 33, all of which were meant to link this prophecy back to the other end-time prophecies in the Torah.

For example, we saw in chapter 7 when we analyzed Numbers 24:18-19 how Israel will perform “valiantly” when the Messiah returns, and how “One from Jacob shall have dominion, and **will destroy** the remnant from the city.” Then, here in Deuteronomy 33:27 we read, “God drove out the enemy from before you [Israel] and said, ‘**Destroy!**’”¹ The parallels between Numbers 24:18 and Deuteronomy 33:27 reveal that both passages are in fact describing the same thing. Namely, not simply Israel’s past conquest of the land of Canaan, but instead, their conquest of the Promised Land and destruction of their enemies in the Messianic Age. Just like Numbers 24, Deuteronomy 33:27 is about Israel being led in victorious battle by their Warrior Messiah. In typical fashion, Moses develops an identical Messianic theme in two separate passages, in order to more fully elaborate on his Messianic eschatology throughout the entirety of the Torah.

1 A different Hebrew word for “destroy” is used in Numbers 24:19 and Deuteronomy 33:27, but conceptually, both passages are describing the same events.

Similarly, in Deuteronomy 32:41 we read of how the Messiah will sharpen His “**flashing sword**,” take hold of justice, and render vengeance on His adversaries. Then, here at the end of Deuteronomy 33 we read in verse 29, “Blessed are you, O Israel; Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, who is the shield of your help and **the sword of your majesty!** So your enemies will cringe before you, and you will tread upon their high places.”

Again, the language used in the concluding verses of Deuteronomy 33 links the entire passage to the eschatological deliverance of Israel that was previously introduced in Numbers 24 and Deuteronomy 32. In all of these passages we see the Lord wielding His sword of vengeance and instruments of judgment in defense of Israel. The idea of Israel being “**blessed**” in Deuteronomy 33:29, while her enemies are judged, is also directly linked back to Balaam’s words in Numbers 24:9: “**Blessed** is everyone who blesses you, and cursed is everyone who curses you.”

Another textual link between Deuteronomy 33 and a prior end-times prophecy can be seen if we once again consider Genesis 49:10-11. In this passage we discovered that an abundant harvest of grapes and natural produce will be characteristic of the Messianic Age. Thus, in Genesis 49:11 we read that the Messiah will tie “His foal to the vine, and His donkey’s colt to the choice vine.” In Deuteronomy 33:28, the same theme of Israel being blessed with abundance from the earth in the Messianic Age is also described in similar terms: “So Israel dwells in security, the fountain of Jacob secluded, **in a land of grain and new wine**; His heavens also drop dew.” Furthermore, when speaking of the blessings on the tribe of Joseph in the Messianic Age, we see that Moses blesses Joseph in Deuteronomy 33:14-16 with, the “choice yield of the sun,” “the choice produce of the months,” the “choice things of the earth and its fullness,” etc. (Deut. 33:14-16).

The language describing the earth’s abundance and bounty in the Messianic Age, which appears again in Deuteronomy 33, is nothing more than an elaboration on Genesis 49:11. Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 are like two bookends, one at the beginning, and one at the end of

the Torah, which reveal how the earth will be blessed in the “latter days” (Gen. 49:1), when the King from Judah reigns in Israel.

Genesis 49:10 is also invoked in Deuteronomy 33:7, when Moses blesses Judah, saying, “Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him to his people. [...] May you be a help against his adversaries.” Building on the earlier prophecy in Genesis, Moses appears to be using the name Judah as a description for the Messiah in this verse, and confirming that He will come to His people and help them conquer when the other prophetic events of Deuteronomy 33 take place in the future.

One final linguistic link between Deuteronomy 33 and the earlier Messianic prophecies in the Torah can also be found in Deuteronomy 33:17, when Moses again speaks about the tribe of Joseph, saying, **“his horns are the horns of the wild ox; with them he will push the peoples, all at once, to the ends of the earth.”** This language represents an almost verbatim quotation of Numbers 24:8, which says this about Israel and the Messiah at the time of the Second Coming: “God brings him out of Egypt, He is for him **like the horns of the wild ox.**”

The “wild ox” language used in Deuteronomy 33:17 correlates with the same “wild ox” language used in an end-times context in Numbers 24:8. This is Moses telling us that he is speaking in both passages about how Israel, the Messiah, and in the case of Deuteronomy 33, the tribe of Joseph, will participate together in pushing back their enemies when the kingdom of God arrives.

Nothing is coincidental here. The strategic language used in Deuteronomy 33 proves that Moses was linking this entire prophecy to the earlier Messianic prophecies in the Torah. By the time we get to Deuteronomy 33, Moses has repeated the same Messianic and eschatological themes so many times, that he expects us, as attentive readers, to be able to keep up with him. This is precisely why it is not a far-fetched idea to say that Deuteronomy 33 is a future prophecy. By using carefully selected language throughout this text, Moses has confirmed for us that there is a prophetic slant to the entire passage.

One of the reasons this eschatological interpretation of Deuteronomy

33 does not come naturally to us modern readers, is because we tend to read the Bible in a mostly devotional and piece-meal manner. Even many brilliant scholars often get so bogged down in the minutia of one Biblical text that they end up missing the forest for the trees. However, the Torah also needs to be read as a piece of literature, as a story, with one unifying message from Genesis to Deuteronomy. This message centers around God's redemption of His creation in the Messianic Age, which Moses has taken pains to highlight throughout the Torah, in large part by repeating certain key words, phrases, concepts, and themes over and over.

Scholars often describe the type of literary strategy employed by Moses in the Torah as the use of "intertextuality." Intertextuality refers to the way authors intentionally develop literary relationships between different sections of their work, primarily as a way to give their readers clear signposts when it comes to their intended meaning. Moses was an intertextualist *par excellence*. He used intertextual language throughout the Torah to shape the meaning of later texts in the light of what he had already written in earlier texts.

We cannot interpret Deuteronomy 33 accurately until we recognize this. If we miss the intertextual references in this passage to the other Messianic prophecies in the Torah, it can end up reading like a simple history. However, once Deuteronomy 33 is read alongside Genesis 3:15, Genesis 49, Numbers 24, and Deuteronomy 32, then the bigger picture of what Moses was trying to say in this passage begins to emerge. He saw Israel's history as a template that outlines what will happen when the Messiah appears in glory at the end of this age.

THE HISTORICAL THEMES IN DEUTERONOMY 33

Up to this point in this chapter, I have mostly been concerned with putting us on the right track so that we can properly interpret Deuteronomy 33 as a prophecy. Before we dive into an even deeper analysis of the full prophetic significance of this passage however, I do also want to spend some time exploring how this text is related to Israel's past history.

The primary reason it is so important to understand the relationship

between Deuteronomy 33 and Israel's prior history (even though this text is not a mere history), is because as I mentioned earlier, Moses does use Israel's history in this passage as a typological framework for future prophetic events. Thus, the better we understand the historical overtones and themes that are present in Deuteronomy 33, the better we will be able to understand how these historical themes are simultaneously used as a springboard by Moses to communicate an even deeper message about the latter days and the Messianic Kingdom.

HISTORICAL THEME #1: ISRAEL'S JOURNEY IN THE WILDERNESS

In general, there are four historical themes that are given some sort of deeper prophetic significance in Deuteronomy 33. The first one pertains to how God's glory was revealed to Israel at various locations in the wilderness. This idea is summarized in Deuteronomy 33:2a, which reads, "the LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran."

Unfortunately, some interpreters have argued this portion of verse 2 indicates the route God took when He originally descended upon Mt. Sinai in the book of Exodus. They believe this verse says that God came *to* Mt. Sinai from Paran and Seir, and as a result, they read all of verse 2 as though it is simply about Israel receiving the Law at Sinai.

However, it is important to note that this beginning portion of verse 2 says nothing about God coming *to* Sinai from Seir and Paran (which were north of Sinai). Instead, this verse describes three distinct places where God revealed Himself to the Israelites in the wilderness. Namely, Sinai, Seir, and Mount Paran. This verse describes a geographical progression in which the Lord is pictured as dawning and shining forth like the sun upon Israel, *from* Sinai, and then *from* Seir, and finally *from* Mount Paran.

The reason these geographic locations are mentioned in verse 2 is easy to understand once the precise details of Israel's journey through the wilderness after they left Sinai are considered. Both Numbers and Deuteronomy emphasize that Seir (i.e. Edom) and Paran were key

destinations connected to Israel's original journey through the wilderness after they left Mt. Sinai.

For example, immediately after leaving Mt. Sinai, Israel first traveled due north into the wilderness of Paran, stopping at Kadesh Barnea, in "the hill country of the Amorites" (Deut. 1:19-21; Num. 13:25-26). We do not know exactly where Kadesh was. Many Bible atlases place it about 50 miles south of Beersheba, in what is now the southern portion of modern Israel. However, there are some problems with this hypothetical location.

In any case, after Israel traveled to Kadesh Barnea in the wilderness of Paran, they also would have inevitably passed through Edom as well (i.e. the region of Seir). Though it is not easy to pinpoint its exact boundaries with 100% accuracy, the wilderness of Paran was a large area of desert that covered portions of what is now known as the Sinai Peninsula, southern Israel, and the western border region of Jordan (Edom). The wilderness of Paran was supposed to be the central staging ground for Israel as they prepared to conquer the land of Canaan from the south.

Numbers 10:11-12 records Israel's original trek from Sinai in the south, up towards Paran in the north:

Now in the second year in the second month, on the twentieth of the month, the cloud was lifted from over the tabernacle of the testimony; and the sons of Israel set out on their journeys **from the wilderness of Sinai. Then the cloud settled down in the wilderness of Paran.**

As we see in this passage, Israel traveled from Sinai, "through all that vast and dreadful wilderness (Deut. 1:19)," and finally reached Kadesh Barnea in the wilderness of Paran. Deuteronomy 1:2 indicates that this journey from Mt. Sinai to Kadesh Barnea in Paran took 11 days.

Instead of conquering the Promised Land from the wilderness of Paran however, it was here that things took a turn for the worse. Israel rebelled against God, refused to conquer the Land, and as a result was sentenced to wander in the desert for 40 long years (Num. 13-14; Deut. 1:19-46).

Notably, Deuteronomy 2:1 tells us that one of the first places Israel

went after leaving the wilderness of Paran was Edom, which is also called Seir in the Bible. Thus we read in Deuteronomy 2:1:

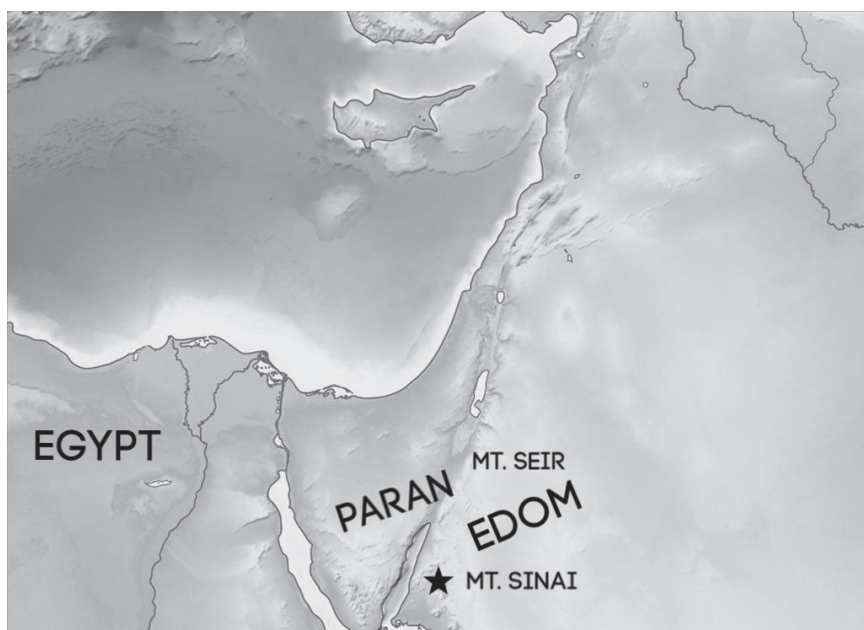
Then we turned and set out for the wilderness by the way to the Red Sea, as the Lord spoke to me, and circled Mount Seir [in Edom] for many days.

Roughly 38 years later (Deut. 2:4-15), when Israel's period of wandering was coming to an end, and the original exodus generation had mostly died (Deut. 2:16), Deuteronomy 2:2-7 records how Israel again traveled from the wilderness in the south, up towards the lands of Edom and Moab, to conquer the land of Canaan from the east:

And the Lord spoke to me, saying, "You have circled this mountain long enough. Now turn north, and command the people saying, 'You will pass through the territory of your brothers the sons of Esau who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful; do not provoke them, for I will not give you any of their land, even as little as a footstep because I have given Mount Seir to Esau as a possession'" (cf. Deut. 2-3; Num. 21).

Once the geographic details of Israel's original journey through the wilderness are considered alongside Moses' statement in Deuteronomy 33:2a, why he said what he did in this verse is easy to understand. In simple terms, Moses was looking forward to how God will reveal Himself to Israel at these three key locations in the wilderness in the Messianic Age, just as He did in the past.

It is vital to see that in Deuteronomy 33:2a, Moses is not only referring to the time when Israel received the Law at Sinai. Instead, it is the totality of Israel's experience with God in the wilderness, at Sinai, but also beyond, that is in view here, which in turn gives us even more insight into what will take place during Israel's End-Times Exodus. Deuteronomy 33:2a uses large portions of Israel's past history as recorded in Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, as the prophetic scaffolding for future end-time events.



In the next chapter I will talk more about the specific verb tenses and grammar used in Deuteronomy 33. But for now, it is important to realize that Deuteronomy 33:2a could just as accurately be translated as, “the Lord comes from Sinai, and dawns on them from Seir, He shines forth from Mount Paran [...]”

This translation of verse 2a is much better than most English translations, because the Hebrew in Deuteronomy 33 does not actually use what we would consider in English to be strict “past-tense” verbs. The verb form used can indicate past, present, or future action depending on context. Because most commentators and translators view this passage as only an account of Israel’s past history, they almost always translate Deuteronomy 33:2a with the English past-tense. Such translations are misleading however, because Deuteronomy 33 is a future prophetic vision of how God will reveal Himself to Israel in the wilderness in the Age to Come. Jesus will come from Sinai, He will dawn on Israel from Seir, and shine forth like the sun from Mount Paran.

**THE 2ND HISTORICAL THEME: ISRAEL RECEIVING
THE LAW AT SINAI (DEUT. 33:2B-5)**

With all of this emphasis so far on Israel's time of traveling in the wilderness, it is important to note that Deuteronomy 33:2-5 does also reference Israel receiving the Law at Mount Sinai as a prophetic harbinger of events that will take place when Jesus returns. The language in these verses related to Israel's experience in the book of Exodus could hardly be more unambiguous:

And He comes from the midst of ten thousand holy ones, at his right hand there is flashing lightning [or a flaming law] for them. Indeed, He loves the people; All your holy ones are in Your hand, and they follow in your steps. Everyone receives of Your words. Moses charged us with a law, a possession for the assembly of Jacob. He was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, the tribes of Israel (Deut. 33:2b-5; *author's translation*).

There are some interpretive difficulties when it comes to the proper translation of this text. However, without going into too much of the minutia, the general idea of these verses centers around how Jesus will appear with His mighty angels at Sinai in the Messianic Age, just as God appeared with His mighty angels at Sinai in the book of Exodus.

The statement that the Lord comes from the midst of "ten thousand holy ones" harkens back to the angelic beings who were witnesses to the original covenant between God and Israel. This idea is confirmed in Acts 7:53, which speaks of the Law being "ordained by angels" (cf. Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2).

Besides the reference to the thousands of holy angels who will appear again with the Messiah in the Age to Come, these verses also highlight how Israel will receive the words of God with a willing and obedient heart, as they assemble before the Messiah as their leader and "king," just as they assembled before Moses. There is some disagreement among scholars as to whether God or Moses should be identified as the "king" in this passage. I personally hold to the minority position on this issue,

and believe that both grammatically and theologically, reading Moses as the “king” described here makes the most sense. The reason I adopt this view is because in this verse the name Moses is used in a typological sense to refer to the Messiah, who will function as Israel’s New Moses when He returns (more on this in the next chapter).

Regardless of the view you take on this matter, the overall message of this passage remains the same. In general terms, Deuteronomy 33:2-5 evokes the prior account in Exodus 24:7, where we read that Moses “took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.’” In the presence of thousands of angels, Israel assembled before God and Moses at Sinai, and received His words with delight. Just like the historical exodus theme of Deuteronomy 33:2a, the way in which verses 2-5 develop the theme of Israel receiving the Law through Moses is also meant to give us a foretaste of what will happen when the Messiah returns. The Messiah will be the final eschatological Lawgiver and Judge in Israel, who will model His kingdom ministry after the ministry of Moses.²

THE 3RD & 4TH HISTORICAL THEMES: ISRAEL’S CONQUEST AND SETTLEMENT OF THEIR LAND (DEUT. 33:6-29)

After the introductory recounting of Israel’s journey through the wilderness and reception of the Law in verses 2-5, the rest of Deuteronomy 33 then transitions to focus on Israel’s conquest of the land of Canaan, as well as their experience of blessing and abundance within the Land itself. Both of these themes are intermingled throughout verses 6-29, which begin with the actual blessings Moses pronounced on the 12 tribes before his death.

2 Please note I do not believe this verse is saying that Jesus will simply reinstate the Mosaic Covenant when He returns. The idea of the Messiah as a new Lawgiver refers to how He will function as a Just Judge, and as One who will lead us into the deepest understanding of the commandments of God in the Age to Come (cf. Isa. 2:1-4).

Within the blessings themselves, we see this conquest and settlement theme most clearly in the blessing upon Joseph, which is the longest blessing in Deuteronomy 33. Moses blessed Joseph with the “choice yield of the sun, and with the choice produce of the months, and with the best things of the mountains, and with the choice things of the everlasting hills, and with the choice things of the earth and its fullness.” However, Moses also described the tribe of Joseph as a warrior tribe, saying, “and his horns are the horns of the wild ox; with them he will push the peoples, all at once to the ends of the earth” (Deut. 33:13-17).

The idea that these blessings predict what Israel’s experience will be after the conquest of their Promised Land is confirmed at the end of Deuteronomy 33, especially in verses 26-29. Here, Moses speaks of God driving out Israel’s enemies from before her (v. 27), and acting as a shield and sword for His people (v. 29). Then, Moses envisioned a time when Israel, “a people saved by the LORD,” would finally leave the wilderness behind and dwell “in security,” “in a land of grain and new wine” (33:28-29).

We already saw earlier in this chapter how certain portions of the conquest and settlement language in Deuteronomy 33:6-29 are directly connected to the Messianic conquest and blessing language in many of the other end-time prophecies in the Torah. This is yet another indication that we are supposed to view Israel’s historic conquest of Canaan as a prophetic foreshadowing of their conquest of the Land in the Messianic Age, which Moses specifically highlights at the end of Deuteronomy 33.

THE 4 HISTORICAL THEMES OF DEUTERONOMY 33

To briefly review what we have covered so far in our analysis of Deuteronomy 33, there are four primary historical themes that are emphasized in this passage. The first is God’s revelation of Himself to Israel in the wilderness. The second is the giving of the Law through Moses at Sinai (33:2-5). The third is Israel’s military conquest of the land of Canaan. And the fourth is Israel’s experience of blessing, abundance, and prosperity within their Promised Land (33:6-29).

Even though most commentators throughout history have believed that these four primary themes in Deuteronomy 33 are only related to Israel's historic exodus 3,500 years ago, in this chapter we have looked at many reasons why this cannot be the case. We have seen why at the most fundamental level, Deuteronomy 33 must be read as a future prophecy, albeit one that does use Israel's past history as a typological backdrop for what will take place when the Messiah returns. Just as the exodus was used in a typological-prophetic sense by Balaam in Numbers 24, Moses uses Israel's post-exodus experience in a very similar way in Deuteronomy 33.

In the next chapter we will move into an even deeper analysis of how Moses presented ancient Israel's history in Deuteronomy 33 as a prophetic framework for what will take place when the Messiah appears in glory. We will also look at a couple of other key texts in the writings of the later Biblical prophets, which elaborate on the vision of the End-Times Exodus that Moses gives us in Deuteronomy 33.

12

THE END-TIMES EXODUS IN DEUTERONOMY 33

“Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him!”

—ZECHARIAH 14:5

IN THIS CHAPTER, I first want to give what I believe is the most accurate Messianic interpretation of Deuteronomy 33. Then, I will explain how this future prophetic reading of Deuteronomy 33 is supported in the writings of the later Hebrew prophets.

A MESSIANIC READING OF DEUTERONOMY 33

What was Moses actually saying before his death, and how did he want us to understand his final words through a typological and prophetic lens? As we saw in the last chapter, there are essentially four main historical themes in Deuteronomy 33, which collectively form the backdrop to the future prophecy Moses delivers in this passage. These historical themes include:

1. Israel’s encounter with the Glory of the Lord in the wilderness (33:2).

2. The giving of the Law through Moses (33:2-5).
3. Israel's conquest of the Promised Land (33:6-29).
4. Israel's experience of divine blessing within the Land itself (33:6-29).

Given these four primary themes, it is important to recognize that in Deuteronomy 33 Moses was leaving us with one parting word about the coming Messianic Kingdom, which should be interpreted as follows:

In the days of the Messiah, when Jesus initiates the End-Times Exodus and last-days fulfillment of Passover (Num. 24:8), He will first ride through the heavens and be visibly manifest in "the skies in His majesty" (Deut. 33:26). As a matter of fact, Deuteronomy 33:26 is the first place in Scripture where we see that the Messiah will emerge in glory from the sky, riding on the clouds of heaven, which is an idea that was subsequently picked up by the later prophets and New Testament authors:

As lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in His day (Lk. 17:24, ESV; cf. Dan. 7:13-14).

There is none like the God of Jeshurun, Who rides the heavens to your help, and through the skies in His majesty (Deut. 33:26).

After Jesus appears in the sky, He will retrace with Israel the path of their original exodus. He will touch down in the Middle East, come out of Egypt, and march with Israel on a war path through the wilderness, due north into the Land of Israel, via Edom (i.e. Saudi Arabia and Jordan) and the surrounding Middle Eastern nations (Deut. 33:2a; cf. Isa. 27:12-13). At this time, Jesus will be revealed to the Jewish people in glory in the wilderness, and as Deuteronomy 33:2 says, He will come from Sinai, dawn on them from Seir, and shine forth like the sun from Mount Paran.

This idea of the Messiah appearing to Israel in the wilderness in the Age to Come is also a prominent theme in the writings of the later prophets. Thus, when speaking of Israel's redemption in the days of the Messiah, Hosea says:

Therefore, behold, I will allure her [Israel], **bring her into the wilderness and speak kindly to her.** Then I will give her her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor [i.e. trouble] as a door of hope. And she will sing there as in the days of her youth, **as in the day when she came up from the land of Egypt** (Hos. 2:14-15).

Similarly, Micah writes:

As in the days when you came out from the land of Egypt, I will show you miracles. Nations will see and be ashamed of all their might. They will put their hand on their mouth, their ears will be deaf. They will lick the dust like a serpent, like reptiles of the earth. They will come trembling out of their fortresses; to the LORD our God they will come in dread and they will be afraid before You” (Mic. 7:15-17).

All of the Hebrew prophets were aware of Israel’s End-Times Exodus and final encounter with the Messiah in the wilderness, which is an idea they discovered in the writings of Moses, especially Numbers 24 and Deuteronomy 33. Deuteronomy 33:2 in particular is meant to be read as a simple elaboration on the End-Times Exodus motif first introduced in Numbers 24:3-9. This is why the first prophetic theme set within an eschatological context in Deuteronomy 33 is Israel’s journey through the wilderness with God. This is also why the geography of the Middle East is so prominent in Deuteronomy 33:2, just like in Numbers 24. Both passages reveal to us how Israel’s past is a window into the future.

In light of the next three historical themes covered in Deuteronomy 33, we can also deduce that after Jesus travels through the wilderness and regathers His Jewish remnant, He will then lead them in a military conquest to recapture the Land of Israel itself from the armies of the Antichrist, and from those who oppress Israel in the last days. This is why there is so much emphasis on Israel’s conquest of Canaan in Deuteronomy 33. The original conquest of the Land was a precursor to what will take place when Jesus returns. Israel’s history will repeat again in a much more climactic and dramatic fashion in the Age to Come. As

Numbers 24:18 says, when Jesus comes back Israel will “perform valiantly,” and as Deuteronomy 33:27 says, God will drive out the enemy from before Israel and say, “destroy!” The Messiah will be Israel’s shield and the sword of her majesty, and as a result, Israel’s enemies will “cringe” before her (Deut. 33:29).

When this happens, Israel and her King will be “higher than Gog,” and their “kingdom shall be exalted” (Num. 24:7). The Jewish people will see their Messiah Jesus as a destroying lion and a wild ox (Num. 24:8), shattering His enemies and making His “arrows drunk” with the blood of those who oppressed them. Jesus will sharpen His flashing sword, take hold of justice, “render vengeance” on Israel’s adversaries, and His sword “will devour flesh” (Deut. 32:41-42). Furthermore, not only will Israel retake the portions of the Promised Land they currently occupy, but Edom will also be “a possession, Seir, its enemies, also will be a possession,” and Israel will significantly expand her borders to an unprecedented degree. The forehead of Moab (modern Jordan) will be crushed, and those who are in league with the Serpent will be torn down (Num. 24:17).

Jewish people and Israelis who survive until the time of Jesus’ Second Coming will be with Him as He delivers them from captivity and exile in Egypt and from across the entire Middle East (cf. Isa. 11:11-16; 27:12-13). At the right hand of Jesus there will be miraculous displays of power, because as Moses says, “He loves the people” (Deut. 33:3) and will not allow Israel to be defeated. Angels and men will follow in His steps and submit to the authority of Israel’s Royal Messiah (Deut. 33:3). The Messiah will appear with a host of “holy ones” (v. 3), and flashing lightning and flaming fire will go forth from His hands (v. 2). Furthermore, it was definitely Deuteronomy 33:3 that Zechariah had in mind when he spoke of the coming of the Messiah and said, “then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him” (Zech. 14:5).

THE NEW MOSES IN DEUTERONOMY 33

After Israel’s final conquest of their land in the Messianic Age, Jesus will then function as a New Moses in the midst of Israel. This is why after

the eschatological exodus theme in Deuteronomy 33:2a, Deuteronomy 33:2b-5 places so much emphasis on the historic ministry of Moses as Israel's original lawgiver, judge, and "king." The ministry of Moses is being used typologically here, to portray what the ministry of Jesus will be like after He returns. Jesus will be the king, prophet, priest, and miracle-worker in Israel just like Moses. He will reign over Israel and the nations and mediate God's blessings of shalom to the entire world. In the Messianic Age, we will gather together and sit at the feet of our New Moses. We will be discipled directly by Jesus Himself and hear Him expound on the Word of God. Can you imagine hearing Jesus preach a sermon?! In due time you will! Israel will receive His words with gladness and for the first time in their history actually respond in full covenant obedience to their God (Deut. 33:3).

Deuteronomy 33 is telling us what Israel's relationship with the Messiah will look like when the Time of Jacob's Trouble, their time of distress in the latter days, comes to an end. That's why this text is positioned right after the covenant discipline and restoration prophecy in Deuteronomy 32.

When interpreting Deuteronomy 33:4-5, I give the following expanded translation to highlight the Messianic significance of this passage:

Moses charged us with a law, a possession for the assembly of Jacob, [i.e. the Messiah will charge us with a law, a possession for the assembly of Jacob in the Messianic Age, just like Moses did.] And he [Moses] was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered together [just like the Messiah will be the true King of Israel, who will gather the heads of the tribes together when they are restored in the last days.]

THE NEW MOSES IN DEUTERONOMY 18 AND 34

One of the other reasons we can be certain that the reference to Moses in Deuteronomy 33:4-5 has typological significance, is because in both Deuteronomy 18 and 34, the Messiah is presented as a prophet and

deliverer for Israel “like Moses.” For example, in Deuteronomy 18:15-18 Moses speaks of himself as a prophetic type and foreshadowing of the coming Messiah:

The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your countrymen, you shall listen to him. This is according to all that you asked of the LORD your God in Horeb on the day of the assembly saying, “Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, let me not see this great fire anymore, or I will die.” The LORD said to me, “They have spoken well. **I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you,** and I will put My words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. It shall come about that whoever will not listen to My words which he shall speak in My name, I Myself will require it of him.”

In this text we see that out of all of the Biblical prophets, it was specifically the prophetic ministry of Moses that most clearly foreshadowed the prophetic ministry of Jesus. Now certainly, this prophecy was partially fulfilled in the first century through the teaching and outreach ministry of Jesus in the Land of Israel.

However, there is also a lot more to this prediction than simply the idea that the Messiah would be a great and anointed teacher like Moses, with a direct revelation from God. In short, this passage implies that the Messiah will be a new Lawgiver and Judge in Israel, who will rule over the twelve tribes as Moses did. Deuteronomy 18 is not just saying that the Messiah will be a prophet. It is saying that He will be a prophet in all of the unique ways Moses was. In Deuteronomy 33:4-5, Moses is expanding on Deuteronomy 18 and revealing how the ministry of the Messiah will be patterned after his own personal ministry to Israel.

Out of all of Israel’s prophets, it was only Moses who had a unique face-to-face relationship with God, delivered Israel from slavery, gave them the Law, performed an abundance of miracles, and led them in military conquest. Thus, when we say that the Messiah is a “prophet like Moses,” we should understand that all of these aspects of Moses’ life and

ministry will also be present in the life of Jesus when He returns, albeit to an even greater degree. Jesus will share with us the words He has received directly from God the Father. Jesus will be the greatest Deliverer of Israel and the Jewish people in all of history. He will come back as the greatest military leader and miracle worker the world has ever seen. And, He will rule and reign over the earth as a Moses-like Lawgiver, Judge, and King. That's what Moses is hinting at in Deuteronomy 33:4-5. He is not just talking about himself. At a deeper level he is also talking about the New Moses.

When Moses gets to the end of Deuteronomy, and then starts speaking about his own historical ministry (Deut. 33:4), he is expecting that we will read this as a development of the earlier Messianic typology he introduced in Deuteronomy 18. As a matter of fact, I even believe the proper name Moses is being used as a code-word for the Messiah in Deuteronomy 33:4, just like the name David is used as a code-word for the Messiah in many other passages in the Hebrew prophets (Jer. 30:9; Ezek. 37:24).

LOOKING FOR THE NEW MOSES IN DEUTERONOMY 34

This idea that both Deuteronomy 18:15-19 and 33:4-5 are meant to inspire hope in the coming Messiah, who will model His ministry after the ministry of Moses, is confirmed in the final words of the Torah, which are found in Deuteronomy 34:10-12. These verses read:

Since that time **no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses**, whom the LORD knew face to face, **for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh**, all his servants, and all his land, and **for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed** in the sight of all Israel.

Biblical scholars generally agree that Deuteronomy 34:10-12 was added to the Torah by an editor sometime long after the death of Moses. After all, there is no way Moses could have written about a period of "time" after his own death.

The reason these verses are so significant, is because they end the book of Deuteronomy on a note of expectation and hope for the prophet “like Moses” who was first introduced in Deuteronomy 18 and 33. They signal to the reader that one of the primary purposes of the Torah is to lead us to look for the New Moses who will perform “signs and wonders” in the “sight of Israel,” and act as the final eschatological Deliverer, Judge, King, and Lawgiver of Israel and the nations.

These verses are yet another piece of evidence within the book of Deuteronomy that both Moses, and those inspired authors of Scripture who came after him, looked at his life and ministry as a prophetic foreshadowing of the life and ministry of the Messiah. This in turn justifies the position that a future prophetic reading of Deuteronomy 33 is completely appropriate.

Throughout the Torah, all of the major themes covered in Deuteronomy 33 are given typological and prophetic significance. Moses understood that his own life, as well as Israel’s original exodus, wilderness journey, conquest of Canaan, and experience of blessing within the Land after his death, were all prophetic harbingers of what will take place in the days of the Messiah. Springboarding off of the end-times prophecy in Deuteronomy 33, Deuteronomy 34:10-12 then ends the Torah by saying in effect, “we’re still waiting for it all to happen. We’re still waiting for the New Moses.”

In addition, as we will see more in chapter 15, this idea that the Messiah will be a prophet “like Moses” also explains why the other Hebrew prophets connected the future Messianic deliverance of Israel to Passover. They understood that the Messiah will be Israel’s eschatological Passover deliverer, who will bring down plagues of judgment against the powers of darkness, just like Moses did in Egypt.

ABUNDANCE AND BLESSING IN THE MESSIANIC AGE

After the final conquest of the Promised Land led by the New Moses, the fourth prophetic theme in Deuteronomy 33 emphasizes Israel’s experience of divine blessing within the Land itself. Deuteronomy 33:28 speaks of

how Israel will dwell “in security” in her own land, the “fountain of Jacob secluded.” They will have no more enemies, and anti-Semitism will finally be a thing of the long-lost past. Though God will discipline Israel in the latter days and send them into captivity (Deut. 31:29), their suffering will be redeemed, and eventually culminate in the greatest experience of divine blessing since before the fall of Adam and Eve. Israel will be “a people saved by the LORD,” living “in a land of grain and new wine,” (Deut. 33:28-29), experiencing God’s abundance in the Land, and feasting on the “choice yield of the sun,” “the choice produce of the months,” and the “choice things of the earth and its fullness” (Deut. 33:14-16). When Jesus returns, God’s favor towards Israel and the nations will be endless. Creation will be restored as in the garden of Eden, and God will once again dwell among men.

DEUTERONOMY 33 AS CAPSTONE, CRESCENDO, AND CROWNING JEWEL

In summary, Deuteronomy 33 should not be read as a mere rehashing of events connected to the history of ancient Israel. Instead, based on the way this passage is situated within the larger Messianic narrative of the Torah, we should also understand that Moses is using the four historical themes in this passage to give us a forward-looking glimpse into what will take place in the Messianic Age. Deuteronomy 33 pulls together all of the prior Messianic threads in Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, and unites them into one final picture of how God will finally reign victorious over the powers of darkness in the Age to Come.

In his final words before death, Moses once again answers for us the original question he first began addressing in Genesis 3:15: “How will the effects of the Fall be reversed and how will creation ultimately be restored?” His answer to this question at the end of Deuteronomy is, “through the glorious appearance of Israel’s Messiah, the salvation of the Jewish people in the last days, and the reestablishment of the kingdom of Israel in the Messianic Age.” Deuteronomy 33 is a full prophetic expansion of Genesis 3:15. It is the capstone, crescendo, and crowning jewel in the Torah’s

broader storyline of Messianic redemption in the Age to Come.

Although Deuteronomy 33 is definitely one of the most subtle Messianic and eschatological prophecies in the Torah, and perhaps even in the entire Bible, we must still recognize that it is a Messianic prophecy nonetheless. It is history being used as typology; as a symbolic representation of what will take place when the Seed of Eve, the Offspring of Abraham, and the Lion from the Tribe of Judah finally appears on the scene of history with a vengeance. Moses died with the Messianic Kingdom in his heart. He was looking forward to the days of the Messiah, and with his final words, he was leading us to do the same as well.

A VOICE IN THE WILDERNESS

As I mentioned in the last chapter, there are of course very few scholars who recognize how the history of Israel is used in Deuteronomy 33 as a prophetic framework for what will eventually take place in the Messianic Age. However, this view still has a few supporters in the halls of academia. One scholar who has begun to recognize the Messianic significance of Deuteronomy 33 is John H. Sailhamer. Although Sailhamer does not expound on the full eschatological meaning of this prophecy, in his book, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, he does highlight its underlying prophetic message:

Along with the other [Messianic] poems in the Pentateuch, **Deuteronomy 33 looks forward to a future king** who, like Moses (Deut. 33:4), will, with God's help (Deut. 33:26-29), unite the tribes of Israel (Deut. 33:4-5, 7) and bring peace, safety (Deut. 33:28a), great abundance (Deut. 33:28b), salvation (Deut. 33:29) and blessing (Deut. 33:29).¹

Furthermore, in his earlier book, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, Sailhamer has also written:

¹ John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic: 2009), 331-332.

The final words of the blessing [Deut. 33:26-29] speak of the nation as a whole and of its enjoyment of God's good gift of the Land. **As we might expect, here at the end of the book, Moses pictures Israel dwelling in the Land as a reversal of the events of the early chapters in Genesis, when Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden.** Just as God had once "driven" [...] the man and woman from his "good land" (Gen. 3:23) and "stationed" [...] cherubim to guard its entry, so he will again "drive" (Dt. 33:27) the enemy from the "good land" and "station" (v. 27) Israel there to enjoy its blessings. In other words, the future that Moses envisions for the people of Israel is like that which God intended in the beginning.²

The reason Sailhamer's comments are so helpful, is because he explains perfectly how we are supposed to read Deuteronomy 33, not in an isolated fashion, but instead, as the climax and conclusion of the original promise of redemption in the book of Genesis. Though Genesis opens with the tragedy of the Fall, Deuteronomy concludes with a glorious vision of restoration in the Messianic Age.

The End-Times Exodus will lead to the reestablishment of Paradise on earth. Deuteronomy 33:26-29 is a vision of a restored garden of Eden. Just as God blessed Adam and Eve in Genesis (Gen. 1:28), He will again restore His blessing to humanity by making Israel "blessed" in the Age to Come (v. 29). Furthermore, just as God caused the garden of Eden to be fruitful and abundant, He will again "drop down dew" (v. 28) upon Israel in the kingdom of God, and the Land will yield its increase. Once restored, Israel will "call the peoples to the mountain" of the Lord in Jerusalem (v. 19), and all the earth will know the King of Creation as their refuge and dwelling place forevermore (v. 27).

THE SUPPORTING EVIDENCE IN HABAKKUK 3

Apart from all of the evidence within the Torah itself, one final reason we can be even more confident that the Messianic and eschatological

2 John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 478.

interpretation of Deuteronomy 33 is accurate, is because there are also a number of other passages outside of the Torah that confirm this reading. One of the most important can be found in Habakkuk 3:3-15, which reads:

God comes from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His splendor covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise. His radiance is like the sunlight, He has rays flashing from His hand, and there is the hiding of His power. **Before Him goes pestilence, and plague comes after Him.** He stood and surveyed the earth; He looked and startled the nations, yes the perpetual mountains were shattered, the ancient hills collapsed. His ways are everlasting. I saw the tents of Cushan under distress, the tent curtains of Midian were trembling. Did the LORD rage against the rivers, or was your anger against the rivers, or was your wrath against the sea, that You rode on Your horses, on Your chariots of salvation? **Your bow was made bare, the rods of chastisement were sworn.** You cleaved the earth with rivers, the mountains saw you and quaked; the downpour of waters swept by, the deep uttered its voice, it lifted high its hands.

Sun and moon stood in their places, **they went away at the light of your arrows, at the radiance of Your gleaming spear. In indignation You marched through the earth; In anger You trampled the nations. You went forth for the salvation of Your people.** For the salvation of Your anointed. You struck the head of the house of evil, to lay him open from thigh to neck. You pierced with his own spears the head of his throngs, they stormed in to scatter us; Their exultation was like those who devour the oppressed in secret. You trampled on the sea with your horses, on the surge of many waters.

The reason Habakkuk 3 is so significant, is because this passage is in essence an expanded prophetic commentary on the Second Coming prophecies in the Torah, especially Numbers 24, Deuteronomy 32, and Deuteronomy 33. The general idea portrayed here revolves around

God's final judgment of evil at the dawn of the Age to Come. Quite notably however, just like in Deuteronomy 33 and Numbers 24, God is presented in this passage as being visibly manifest in the sky (v. 3; Deut. 33:26), and marching through the wilderness and the Middle Eastern nations on a war path of judgment and vengeance (v. 3, 7; Num. 24:8; Deut. 33:2), before saving His people Israel and entering the Promised Land (v. 13; Deut. 33:27-29).

Space does not permit an extensive treatment of all of the parallels between Habakkuk 3 and the pivotal eschatological texts in the Torah. However, one such connection that is worth mentioning is how Habakkuk describes God coming from "Teman" and "Mount Paran" in verse 3, and then in verse 7, mentions the "tents of Cushan under distress" and the "tent curtains of Midian" trembling. In other words, Habakkuk does not just depict God's appearance on the earth in abstract terms. Instead, he describes the events that will take place at this time with an astounding degree of geographic specificity as well.

Not surprisingly, Teman was in Edom, which includes the region that is also called "Seir" in Deuteronomy 33:2. And Mount Paran was, well, obviously in the wilderness of Paran, which we also looked at when analyzing Deuteronomy 33:2 (see map in ch. 11). Strikingly, Habakkuk uses two of the exact same geographic indicators as Moses in Deuteronomy 33:2 to describe God descending upon this earth to defeat the powers of evil in the last days. Habakkuk saw God marching on a war path through the wilderness, shining like the sun through Paran and through Edom, just as Moses predicted He will in Deuteronomy 33:2.

The mention of Cushan and Midian are also noteworthy in this context. Cushan was possibly in southern Saudi Arabia. And the Midianites were nomads who lived in many of the regions surrounding Israel, including what is now Saudi Arabia and Jordan, near Mt. Sinai.

Based on these geographic details, we can be confident that Habakkuk 3 records a collaborating vision based on Deuteronomy 33, especially verse 2 and verses 26-29. Habakkuk saw not merely God in a general sense, but God in the person of the Messiah, marching through

the wilderness with His weapons of vengeance, through the Middle East and North Africa, up through the wilderness south of Israel (Teman, Mount Paran), to save Israel in the last days, and bring them into the Promised Land. He saw the splendor of the Messiah covering the heavens, and His “radiance” like the sunlight, as lightning flashed forth from His hands, with plague and pestilence going before Him. He saw the end-times fulfillment of Passover and the exodus first introduced in Numbers 24, when it will be said that the Messiah “went forth for the salvation” of His people Israel (v. 13), to deliver them out of the turmoil and affliction they will experience during the latter days. In a direct parallel to Numbers 24:8 and Deuteronomy 32:42, Habakkuk saw the Lord’s bow being made “bare,” and the “light” of His “arrows” and the “radiance” of His “gleaming spear” going forth to judge the nations. Habakkuk wrapped up everything Moses had written in Numbers 24, Deuteronomy 32, and Deuteronomy 33 about the Second Coming of Jesus, into one awe-inspiring prophecy of the Warrior Messiah and Passover King, arriving once again on the scene of history not as a Lamb, but as a force of terror to be reckoned with.

This is a vision of Jesus returning in glory, decked out in battle array with His weapons of war, riding through the clouds on his chariots of salvation, and preparing to establish His kingdom at the start of the Messianic Age.³ And most importantly in terms of our current discussion, this is a vision that Habakkuk was able to receive specifically because he understood the Messianic and eschatological significance of Deuteronomy 33.

3 As usual, there are many scholars who interpret Habakkuk 3 as only a poetic summary of ancient historical events that took place after Israel left Egypt. However, in addition to the numerous connections between this passage and the earlier end-time prophecies in the Torah, the eschatological reading of Habakkuk 3 is also supported by the cataclysmic natural disaster language that appears throughout this text (see verses 6 & 9-10). In other words, Habakkuk 3 describes natural disasters and plagues that are often associated with the end times and the return of Jesus in other prophetic texts such as Ezekiel 38:19-20 and Revelation 19:17-21. This is because it is a future prophecy about the Second Coming, not merely a stylized account of the past. I am especially grateful to Joel Richardson and his YouTube teaching, including the video, “The Untold Story of the Triumphant Return of Jesus,” for helping me understand the full prophetic meaning of Deuteronomy 33 and Habakkuk 3.

FUTURE PROPHECIES AND “PAST-TENSE” VERBS

In response to a future prophetic interpretation of both Deuteronomy 33 and Habakkuk 3, some people might still want to ask why both of these passages use a number of past-tense verbs. After all, based on the way these texts are translated in English, they do appear as though they could be about events that have already taken place.

While I understand why someone might want to make this argument, it is not airtight because the predominant verb form used in both Deuteronomy 33 and Habakkuk 3 is the Hebrew Perfect tense. Though the Hebrew Perfect tense can be translated as equivalent to our English past tense, the Perfect tense does not technically or exclusively refer to past events. Instead, the Perfect tense describes a “completed action” from the vantage point of the speaker.

As further explained by Hebrew grammar experts Gary Pratico and Miles Van Pelt:

It must be emphasized that **the Hebrew Perfect does not have tense (time of action) apart from context and issues of syntax**. Rather, it primarily signifies aspect (type of action). The Perfect designates a verbal action with its conclusion envisioned in the mind of the speaker or writer. **To state it differently, the Perfect aspect denotes completed action, whether in the past, present, or future.**⁴

This means that when the Hebrew prophets saw a vision, they would often use the Perfect tense, because from their vantage point, they saw the events of the vision as though they had already happened, or been completed, even though technically, from our vantage point, the vision still pertains to events that will actually occur in real time in the future. This is similar to how we might speak of something we saw in a dream. The prophets are giving us a retrospective account of their visionary experience, but we have to be very careful not to correlate what they saw only with past events, especially when the context of any given prophecy

4 Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew: Grammar, Second Edition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 130.

suggests that it still has future implications.

Most translators mistakenly translate the Hebrew Perfect verbs in Deuteronomy 33 and Habakkuk 3 with the English past tense (i.e. Deut. 33:2; Hab. 3:6-7) because they have defective theology that does not allow them to understand that these texts are actually future prophecies. The use of the English past tense in these passages is based on a faulty presupposition that is being read into the text. The Hebrew text itself requires no such translation. Furthermore, even if the English past tense does help these passages flow better and reflect the way Moses and Habakkuk would have wanted their words to be rendered, it is still vital to see that the past tense should only be read as an indication that the actions were seen in a vision, and thus completed from the vantage point of the speakers, not from the vantage point of everyone else.

Another great example of how the Hebrew Perfect can be used in a future prophecy is found in Isaiah 53. In this prophecy Isaiah speaks of many of the events in the life of the coming Messianic Servant using the Perfect tense, because again, from the perspective of his visionary experience, Isaiah saw these events as though they had already taken place (see Isa. 53:1-10). However, we know that Isaiah 53 was not fulfilled in real time until almost 800 years *after* Isaiah lived.

Many people have no problem accepting that the English past-tense (i.e. Hebrew Perfect) verbs in Isaiah 53 are depicting a future prophecy. Thus, we should also have no problem accepting the same when it comes to Deuteronomy 33 and Habakkuk 3. As a matter of fact, the combination of different verb forms in both of these passages harmonizes perfectly with the delivery method of many other future prophetic revelations throughout Scripture.⁵

5 In the words of Biblical scholar John Harrigan, Hebrew and Greek verbs “generally do not communicate the time of the action, but rather describe ‘the way the user of the verb subjectively views the action.’ The time of the action is chiefly determined by its context, including adverbs, genre, and historical references.” Quote from, *The Gospel of Christ Crucified: A Theology of Suffering Before Glory* (Columbia: Paroikos Publishing, 2015), 295. Also note that in Revelation 13:1-10, John uses a combination of past, present, and future-tense Greek verbs to refer to events connected to the rise of the Antichrist. In other words, just like the Hebrew prophets, John used what we might consider the past tense to refer to future events.

ZECHARIAH 9:13-17

In addition to Habakkuk 3, there is another important text in the Hebrew Bible that builds on Deuteronomy 33 and reinforces the idea that the Messiah will march on a war path from the south, due north into the Land of Israel when He returns. This text can be found in Zechariah 9:13-17:

For I will bend Judah as My bow, I will fill the bow with Ephraim. And I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece [Javan]. And I will make you like a warrior's sword. **Then the LORD will appear over them, and His arrow will go forth like lightning;** and the LORD God will blow the trumpet, and **will march in the storm winds of the south.**

Zechariah 9 is a Messianic prophecy that predicts the coming of the Messiah to Israel. Invoking both Genesis 49:11 and Numbers 24:7, this text speaks of the Messiah riding on a “donkey’s colt” and establishing His dominion from “sea to sea” (see Zech. 9:10). In verses 13-17 however, Zechariah also picks up the idea from Numbers 24:18 that Israel will “perform valiantly” against their enemies at the time of the Second Coming. Thus, Zechariah says the Messiah will “bend Judah” as His bow, “fill the bow with Ephraim,” make Israel His “warrior’s sword,” and lead them in triumph against the “sons of Javan.”

Most English versions translate the Hebrew term Javan in verse 13 as “Greece.” However, it is also important to note that Javan, who was one of Japheth’s sons, is more generally associated with the western coast of Turkey in many Bible atlases.⁶ As a result, the term Javan in Zechariah 9:13 should at the very least be interpreted as including Turkey. The reasons for this will become even more apparent in chapter 17.

In any case, notice how at the same time Zechariah tells Israel that they will be used as the Messiah’s weapon of war when He returns,

6 Thomas Brisco, *Holman Bible Atlas: A Complete Guide to the Expansive Geography of Biblical History* (Nashvilled: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1998), 36.

Zechariah also says that the Messiah will “appear over them,” send forth His “arrow like lightning,” blow His war trumpet, and “march in the storm winds of the south” (Zech. 9:14). This imagery expands on the picture of the Messiah in Deuteronomy 33:26 and Habakkuk 3:3, where it was said that He will ride through the heavens and “through the skies in His majesty,” and that “His splendor” will cover the heavens (Hab. 3:3). Furthermore, Zechariah 9:14 also expands on the notion in Deuteronomy 33:1-2 and Habakkuk 3:4 that before the Messiah enters the Land of Israel, He will first march through the southern wilderness in the splendor and glory of His might, with “lightning” and “rays flashing from His hands.”

This is certainly going to be a sight to behold!

DEUTERONOMY 33 AS A LEGITIMATE PROPHECY

One of the primary ways we can confirm that it is appropriate to interpret a passage in the Torah prophetically, is if there is evidence that a later Biblical author also saw prophetic significance in an earlier Biblical text or series of events. Both Habakkuk 3:3-15 and Zechariah 9:13-17 show us that apart from Moses, the Holy Spirit was also revealing to the other Biblical writers later in history that Deuteronomy 33 has a deeper meaning related not only to Israel’s historic past, but also to the Second Coming of the Messiah. The later prophets also saw the Messiah marching up towards the Promised Land from the south, and fighting a series of battles on Israel’s behalf along the way.

Scripture often builds on Scripture. Certainly, a Messianic/eschatological reading of Deuteronomy 33 may not immediately jump out to someone who reads this text in an isolated fashion. However, this is the interpretation that fits in best with all of the Biblical data, both within the Torah itself (Num. 24:3-9; 24:15-25; Deut. 18:15-19; 34:10-12) and beyond (Hab. 3:3-15; Zech. 9:13-17; cf. Isa. 27; 63:1-4). In short, a prophetic and futurist reading of Deuteronomy 33 is the only viable interpretation of this passage when all of the relevant Biblical data is weighed.

BACK TO THE FUTURE

As modern westerners, we tend to think in very compartmentalized, binary, “either/or” terms. We like to put things into nice neat categories. We like reason. We like order. And we abhor contradictions.

As a result, when we approach Deuteronomy 33, one of the first things we are prone to do is classify this text as a simple account of Israel’s history after they left Egypt. We see Sinai in this passage, we see Israel receiving the Law, we see Moses mentioned, we see the conquest language, and it all seems simple enough. “Category: history. Related to the past, not the future.”

However, as we have seen, one of the most important things we need to do when we approach Deuteronomy 33 is not merely ask, “what is the history being recounted here?” but also, “how is this history being used typologically, and as the foundation of a future prophecy about the Age to Come?”

Of course, this way of reading Deuteronomy 33 will seem quite counterintuitive to us rationally-minded westerners at first. However, this is only because we need to have our mental paradigms shifted to align more with the worldview of the Biblical writers themselves, instead of trying to impose our own intellectual presuppositions onto them.

The Biblical writers, beginning with Moses, viewed history through a sort of “back to the future” type of lens. They understood that what was in the past, will be again in the days of the Messiah. This is precisely why Moses ended the Torah with an account of the End-Times Exodus. He was holding up the past as a window into the future. He was saying, “look through this window of history to see what will take place in the Age to Come.” For Moses, the past was not simply the past. The past was also typological and prophetic.

At the end of the Torah, Moses again tells us that in the Age to Come, after the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, the Messiah will be revealed to Israel in the wilderness. He will then lead Israel to conquer and defeat her Middle Eastern enemies, and settle the Jewish people peacefully in their own land. This will mark the eschatological fulfillment of Passover and

the exodus that was first introduced in Numbers 24 (cf. Lk. 22:15-16). After this, Jesus will reign as a New Moses, Lawgiver, Judge, Miracle Worker, and King over all the earth.

Put your hope in the coming Messiah, and look forward to His kingdom. That's the point of Deuteronomy 33, and that's what Moses was telling Israel right before he died:

The King Messiah will come from Sinai. He will dawn on Israel from Seir. He will shine like the sun in its brilliance from Mount Paran, and come from the midst of ten thousand holy angels. From His right hand will go forth miraculous displays of lightning, power, flaming fire, and plague.

He will gather Israel together and teach them His righteous ways.

The tribes will be settled peacefully and prosperously in their own land. Israel's enemies will be destroyed, and the Land will yield its abundance in the Messianic Age (Deut. 33:1-29; *Author's Messianic paraphrase*).

THE MINISTRY OF THE MESSIAH AND THE END-TIMES EXODUS

	The Messiah's March from the South	The Messiah's Glory	The Messiah's Vengeance
Numbers 24	"God brings Him out of Egypt" (v. 8).	The Messiah's glorious presence in the tents of Jacob is compared to an expansive valley, a lush garden beside a river, and a host of majestic cedar trees.	The Messiah crushes and destroys His enemies with His arrows. He consumes them like a lion (vv. 8-9, 17).

<p>Deuteronomy 32</p>			<p>The Messiah sharpens His flashing sword, makes His arrows drunk with blood, and devours flesh with His sword (vv. 41-42).</p>
<p>Deuteronomy 33</p>	<p>The Messiah comes from Sinai (Saudi Arabia), Seir (Jordan), and Mount Paran (Jordan/ southern Israel) (v. 2).</p>	<p>The Messiah rides the heavens to help Israel. His majesty is seen in the sky (v. 26). He appears with His “holy ones” (i.e. angels, v. 3; cf. Zech. 14:5).</p>	<p>The Messiah is the shield of Israel’s help and the sword of her majesty (v. 29).</p>

Habakkuk 3	The Messiah comes from Teman (Jordan, Saudi Arabia), Mount Paran (Jordan/southern Israel), Cushan, and Midian (Saudi Arabia). He marches through the earth in His indignation (v. 3, 12, 7).	The Messiah rides on His chariots of salvation, and His splendor covers the heavens. His radiance shines like the sunlight (vv. 3-4, 8).	Plague and pestilence go before the Messiah. He uses His arrows and His gleaming spear to destroy Israel's enemies (v. 5, 11).
Zechariah 9	The Messiah marches in the "storm winds of the south" (v. 14).	The Messiah will appear over Israel, and they will sparkle as the gem-stones of His crown (vv. 14-17).	The Messiah's arrow will go forth like lightning (v. 14).

13

THE END TIMES ACCORDING TO MOSES

“All the prophets prophesied only of the days of the Messiah.”

—BABYLONIAN TALMUD, SANHEDRIN 99A

RECENTLY MY WIFE AND I attended a large Messianic Jewish Bible conference in the States. In general, it was a great experience. We met some great people, went to a concert by one of our favorite worship bands, and received some extremely valuable teaching on topics related to our ministry.

With all of this said however, I did also have a disappointing experience at this conference, which confirmed to me why there is still so much confusion within the Body of Messiah when it comes to Biblical eschatology and the return of Jesus.

One afternoon I attended a lecture by a prominent Old Testament scholar. Although his talk had nothing to do with the end times, in a roundabout way he ended up referencing a few prophecies from the book of Daniel. This then got a small group of people, myself included, talking about prophecy.

In essence, this scholar was saying that the book of Daniel does not

refer directly to the end times at all, but instead, merely to historical events during and shortly after the life of Daniel himself. He was defending a form of what I referred to in an earlier chapter as “preterism,” and arguing in favor of a preterist and strictly historical reading of Daniel, as well as all of the Biblical prophets.

As we chatted briefly after his lecture, I made sure to be respectable and cordial, but I also asked how he could justify the view that the Biblical prophets were not concerned with eschatology, or the distant future. I mentioned the numerous times Moses wrote of the “latter days” (*acharit (ha)yawmim*) in the Torah. He casually shrugged this off and said, “well, there’s debate on what that phrase means.”

He knew I disagreed, and that I was making a case that the Biblical prophets, starting with Moses, all looked forward to the last days and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. I’ll never forget his next words. He looked right at me and said, “there is no eschatological horizon in the prophets.” In other words, for him, there is nothing about the end times or the return of Jesus in the Hebrew Bible at all! The prophets only prophesied about events in their own day, or events related to Israel’s historic past.

THE NEED TO RESTORE THE FOUNDATIONS

The reason I shared this story is because it perfectly illustrates the type of mistaken approach to the Biblical prophets that is currently affecting, and also misleading, an untold number of God’s people on the earth today. The scholar I spoke to at this conference is no intellectual slouch. He has a PhD from one of the most prominent Ivy League schools in the country and teaches Old Testament at a prestigious university. I am not being pretentious when I say I am sure I could learn a lot from him.

However, sadly, once we understand how deeply entrenched ideas such as his actually are within the world of academia, we will then also be able to grasp why it is that so many pastors and ministry leaders today feel ill-equipped to deal with and teach on eschatology, not to mention the average person in the pew. Many, and perhaps even a majority, of

the prime influencers in the world of Biblical scholarship and theology are teaching our next generation of leaders some very serious errors when it comes to the topic of Bible prophecy. They are marginalizing eschatology and its importance at best, and at worst, dismantling its Biblical foundations altogether. They are completely hindering God's people from being able to correctly discern what the Hebrew prophets said about the end times.

This is a very serious problem, not least because in the near future, the pressing demands for God's people to be able to make sense of Bible prophecy are only going to increase, not decrease. If we dismiss what the prophets teach about the end times, or get lost in the world of intellectual skepticism, we will not be able to appropriately shepherd people through the days ahead. This will then leave the door even more wide open for the wolves in sheep's clothing to come in and take full advantage of the ignorant and unsuspecting.

As much as it pains me to say it, I have a strong sense that in the next 20 years we will see even more outlandish, sensational, and absolutely horrific teaching on the end times than ever before. In preparation for this, we must be ready to offer people a more Biblically-grounded and logical approach to eschatology; one that will both give them insight into the times in a way that preterism and historicism cannot, and protect them from the false prophets who will arise in the last days to try and take advantage of the Lord's beloved sheep.

SO HOW SHOULD WE READ THE HEBREW PROPHETS?

In contrast to the view of preterists and historicists, we must recognize that all of the later prophets who lived after Moses simply built upon the end-times foundation that is first laid out in the Torah. Therefore, the proper way to read the Biblical prophets is to read them in light of everything Moses tells us about the latter days and the coming Messianic Kingdom from Genesis to Deuteronomy. Preterism is an abysmal theological system because it does not allow people to understand even some of the most basic lessons of Biblical theology.

This important connection between the writings of the later prophets and the five books of Moses has been aptly summarized by John Sailhamer:

The words of the prophets are words of explanation and commentary. [...] The aim of the biblical authors of the Prophets and the Writings was to provide a full and detailed textual commentary on the messianic vision that begins in the Pentateuch [Torah] and is carried along through the rest of the Bible.¹

One of the reasons I spent so much time covering the Torah at the beginning of this book, is because it is only after we understand the eschatology of Moses that we can truly begin to appreciate the eschatology of the later prophets. Many people make serious mistakes in their eschatology, primarily because they do not see how much foundational information Moses himself actually gives us in the Torah on the end times, the Antichrist, and the return of Jesus.

The best place to start when studying eschatology is not Daniel, Zechariah, or Revelation. It is Genesis, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. We must start with the basic framework of eschatology in the Torah, and then build our theology from there. When we do, everything else we encounter in the later Biblical prophets has a way of falling into place, and making a lot more sense.

THE END TIMES ACCORDING TO MOSES

To briefly review, the basic eschatology of Moses in the Torah can be outlined as follows:

1. As a consequence of her rebellion against the Lord, Israel will experience a time of suffering, exile, and captivity in the latter days. This will break Israel's strength, and prepare a Jewish remnant to look to Jesus alone for salvation and mercy. (Key texts: Deuteronomy 4:27-31; 31:29; 32:1-33)

¹ John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic: 2009), 239.

2. Some of the primary enemies of Israel in the last days, who will also be used as God's instruments of judgment against the Jewish people, will be the nations of the Middle East and North Africa. (Key texts: Numbers 24:8; 24:17-24)
3. One primary political leader, who is identified as Gog, will arise in the last days to stand against Israel, the Messiah, and the people of God. Gog is undoubtedly the prototype for the Biblical Antichrist figure, whose life and career are discussed further later in Scripture. In Numbers 24, Gog is linked to the nations of the Middle East and North Africa. (Key texts: Numbers 24:7; 24:17-24)
4. At the dawn of the Messianic Age, Jesus will return to save Israel from captivity and utter annihilation. He will defeat Gog (the Antichrist) and subjugate the nations that have formed an alliance against Israel. (Key texts: Numbers 24:7-9; 24:17-24; Deuteronomy 32:39-43; 33:27-29)
5. As He begins the process of inaugurating His kingdom on the earth, Jesus will ride on the clouds of heaven, go down into Egypt, and march with Israel in a victorious procession through the Middle Eastern and Arabian desert, before finally entering the Promised Land. In the Torah, Israel's eschatological journey through the wilderness is presented as an End-Times Exodus, and prophetic replay of the original Passover story. (Key texts: Numbers 24:8; 24:18-19; Deuteronomy 33:2; 33:26; see also Exodus 15:1-21, which most likely has a future prophetic and eschatological slant as well)
6. After He defeats Israel's enemies and the armies of the Antichrist, Jesus will then reestablish the people of Israel in their own land, and reign as the King of Judah in the midst of the twelve tribes, in the "tents of Shem." (Key texts: Genesis 9:25-27; 49:10; Deuteronomy 33:6-25; 33:28)

7. In the Messianic Age, creation will be restored and experience days of abundance, peace, and prosperity not seen since the original garden of Eden. (Key texts: Genesis 49:11-12; Deuteronomy 33:27-28)
8. At long last, all the nations will walk in the light and knowledge of God, as Jesus fulfills His ministry as the New Moses, Miracle Worker, Lawgiver, and Judge over all the earth. (Key texts: Deuteronomy 33:3-5; 18:15-19; 34:10-12; Genesis 49:10)

This is the basic eschatology of Moses. It is woven into the narrative fabric of the Torah through a series of strategically placed prophetic poems, which in turn give the entire Bible its fundamental Messianic and eschatological character. Genesis 3:15 → Genesis 9:25-27 → Genesis 49:10-12 → Numbers 24 → Deuteronomy 32 → Deuteronomy 33.

We have already seen in previous chapters how many of the later Biblical prophets expanded upon the eschatology of Moses that is first articulated in the Torah, especially when they discussed the Time of Jacob's Trouble and the return of Jesus to the Middle East. In the next four chapters, we will explore how this is also the case in one of the most important prophetic passages in the entire Bible, namely, Ezekiel 38-39. In addition, we will not only see how Ezekiel's famous vision of the last days is rooted in the theology of the Torah. But even more importantly, we will also discover how Ezekiel connects the return of Jesus to Israel's End-Times Exodus and the eschatological fulfillment of Passover, which Jesus Himself spoke of in Luke 22:15-16.

14

WHEN DOES THE BATTLE OF GOG OF MAGOG TAKE PLACE?

“If you can’t explain it simply, you don’t understand it well enough.”

—ALBERT EINSTEIN

EZEKIEL 38-39 IS WIDELY REGARDED as one of the most important, yet also most controversial, prophecies on the end times in the entire Bible. Over the last 50 years in particular, these two concise chapters towards the end of Ezekiel have produced an unprecedented amount of geopolitical speculation and news commentary on current events, as well as literally thousands of different books and online articles related to eschatology and the nature of future prophetic events.

To briefly summarize, the beginning portion of Ezekiel 38 describes a military invasion of Israel, led by Gog and a number of other nations in alliance with him. Then, the rest of Ezekiel 38-39 covers Gog’s defeat and the Lord’s ultimate victory.

Given the undeniable real-world implications of this passage, it is only right that those of us with an interest in Bible prophecy give Ezekiel 38-39 our full attention. We cannot afford to miss out on the critical information about the last days found in this text. In this chapter, our

primary focus will be on trying to determine the most likely time when the “battle” of Gog of Magog will take place.

THE POPULAR VIEW OF EZEKIEL 38-39

It is true that in terms of specifics, there have been many different interpretations of Ezekiel 38-39 among conservative Bible teachers over the years. However, there is still one common thread that is almost always present when evangelicals teach on this passage today. Namely, the idea that the events recorded in Ezekiel 38-39 take place *before* the reign of the Antichrist, and *before* the return of Jesus.

One of the most popular forms of this view centers around the idea that Ezekiel 38-39 describes a “Russian-led” Middle Eastern and North African invasion of Israel, that will in turn lead to the defeat of these nations prior to the rise of the Antichrist. Some who hold to this view believe the events of Ezekiel 38-39 take place before the 70th week, and some believe these events take place during the 70th week itself, most likely by the midpoint. But in any case, all of its proponents essentially end up in the same place. They predict that there will be an *unsuccessful* Middle Eastern and/or Russian invasion of Israel that will be a prelude to the rise of the Antichrist, and a prelude to the more cataclysmic events of the Time of Jacob’s Trouble (i.e. the last 3 ½ years before Jesus returns). Proponents of this view also tend to believe that the battle spoken of in Ezekiel 38-39 occurs over a relatively short period of time, perhaps even in one or two days.

Below are some examples that illustrate how popular this “Unsuccessful Military Invasion” theory of Ezekiel 38-39 has become among conservative, evangelical, and Messianic Jewish Bible teachers in the last 50 years:

- Prophecy teacher Ron Rhodes writes, “the invasion will likely take place sometime after the rapture but **prior to the beginning of the tribulation period**—perhaps even three and a half years prior to the beginning of the tribulation period [i.e. Daniel’s 70th week] [...]”¹

1 Ron Rhodes, *The End Times in Chronological Order: A Complete Overview to Understanding Bible Prophecy* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2002), 78.

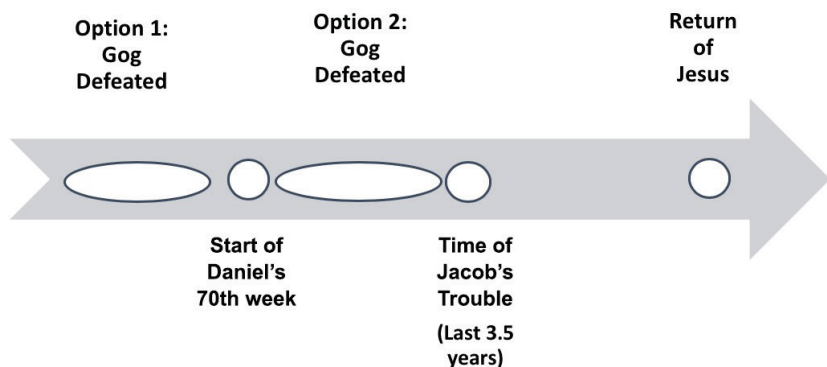
- In his book, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, Messianic Jewish Bible scholar Arnold Fruchtenbaum says this about Ezekiel 38-39: The “Russian invasion will occur **before the Tribulation** [i.e. Daniel’s 70th week] actually begins. From the text of Ezekiel 38:1-39:16, this view arrives at certain conclusions. *First*, Israel is established before the Tribulation and is dwelling securely. *Second*, the Russian confederacy invades Israel during this time of security before the Tribulation. *Third*, **the confederacy is destroyed in Israel before the Tribulation** [and before the rise of the Antichrist].”²
- Similarly, Pastor Mark Hitchcock states, the “only time period in the future that fits the scenario described in Ezekiel 38 is **the first half of the tribulation period** after the church has been raptured to heaven and when Israel is living in peace and protection of her covenant with Antichrist.”³

As we can see, many prophecy teachers essentially hold to the same interpretation of Ezekiel 38-39 with only minor differences among them. Rhodes and Fruchtenbaum typify the pre-Tribulation perspective on this passage, whereas Hitchcock believes the battle of Gog of Magog will take place and end sometime in the first half of the 70th week, before the Antichrist turns against Israel. Though there are different perspectives on this prophetic passage out there, most of the teaching on Ezekiel 38-39 found in books and on the internet advocates one form or another of this popular view. For the most part, Ezekiel 38-39 is viewed as an account of a preliminary end-times battle that either leads up to the 70th week, or, takes place and ends sometime before the last 3 ½ years of the 70th week. In addition, most popular teaching on this passage upholds that Gog in Ezekiel 38-39 is someone other than the Antichrist.

2 Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2018), 121.

3 Mark Hitchcock, *The Coming Islamic Invasion of Israel* (Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 2002), 68.

POPULAR VIEWS ON GOG'S INVASION IN EZEKIEL 38



THE SIMPLE TRUTH ABOUT THE BATTLE OF GOG OF MAGOG

In the next four chapters, my primary goal is to demonstrate why I believe the prevailing popular interpretation of Ezekiel 38-39 is exegetically unsound and inaccurate. In contrast to this view, what I hope to prove as we study this passage are the following key points:

1. Ezekiel 38-39 is an expanded prophetic commentary based on Numbers 24:3-9 and Deuteronomy 32, and cannot be understood apart from these earlier texts.
2. Just like Numbers 24:7, Ezekiel 38-39 further proves that Gog is the Antichrist.
3. The Ezekiel 38 invasion most likely marks the beginning of the Time of Jacob's Trouble, which corresponds to the midway point of Daniel's 70th week (Dan. 9:27).
4. The final defeat of Gog in Ezekiel 38-39 only occurs *after* Jesus returns to this earth, which means this entire passage covers an extended period of time that probably lasts about 3 ½ years (i.e. the last half of Daniel's 70th week).

5. The final defeat of Gog in Ezekiel 38-39 is synonymous with the Second Coming of Jesus and the Battle of Armageddon in Revelation 16 and 19.
6. By using strategic language, Ezekiel presents the defeat of Gog in Ezekiel 38-39 as the Jewish nation's final eschatological Passover deliverance, which will usher in the Messianic Age.
7. In Ezekiel 38-39, the Antichrist (i.e. Gog) leads a coalition of Middle Eastern and North African nations. This reinforces the idea that the Antichrist will most likely arise out of the Middle East, not Europe.

THE TIMING OF THE BATTLE

Historically, interpreters have held to a number of different opinions regarding the timing of Gog's invasion of Israel in Ezekiel 38. Part of the reason there is so much confusion on this issue is because most prophecy teachers do not understand that Gog in Ezekiel 38-39 is the same Antichrist figure who was initially introduced in Numbers 24:7 (see Ezek. 38:17).

Once we grasp that Gog is the Antichrist, and that he made his first appearance in Numbers 24, it is hard to argue that Gog's invasion of Israel in Ezekiel 38 could take place at some other time besides the beginning point of the Time of Jacob's Trouble (halfway through Daniel's 70th week). We know from Daniel 9:27 that the Antichrist turns on Israel halfway through Daniel's 70th week, which consequently leads to a period of unparalleled distress and suffering in Israel (cf. Dan. 12:7-13).

So when we compare Scripture to Scripture, it can be argued that Gog's invasion of Israel in Ezekiel 38 is a more detailed description of the events described in Daniel 9:27 and 12:7-12, which are also tied to the period of time Jeremiah called the Time of Jacob's Trouble (Jer. 30:7; cf. Zech. 12:3; 14:1-2). In simple terms, Gog's invasion of Israel in Ezekiel 38 is what happens after the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel, which then starts the timeclock of Israel's final 3 ½ years of

suffering and exile before the return of Jesus. Since Gog is the Antichrist, and since it appears from Daniel 9:27 that the Antichrist will establish a false peace treaty with Israel during the first half of the 70th week, it is not possible that his invasion of Israel could occur before the midpoint of the 70th week.

ISRAEL AT PEACE, ISRAEL IN EXILE

When we understand how Ezekiel describes the circumstances in Israel leading up to Gog's invasion, it becomes more apparent that this invasion is connected to the start of the Time of Jacob's Trouble. First, Ezekiel says the invasion will take place at a time when Israel is "living securely." As we read in Ezekiel 38:7-9:

Be prepared [Gog], and prepare yourself, you and all your companies that are assembled about you, and be on guard for them. After many days you will be summoned; in the **latter years** [*acharit shanim*] you will come into the land that is restored from the sword, whose inhabitants have been gathered from many nations to the mountains of Israel which had been a continual waste; **but its people were brought out from the nations, and they are living securely, all of them.** You will go up, you will come like a storm; you will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your troops, and many peoples with you (cf. Ezek. 38:10-12).

In these verses we see that Gog will invade Israel after she has been restored and regathered from "many nations" in the "latter years." This scenario fits perfectly with the history of the modern State of Israel.

Notice as well how Ezekiel uses the phrase *acharit shanim* to describe the timing of Gog's invasion. This is a modified form of the preferred eschatological time marker used by Moses, *acharit (ha)yawmim* ("latter days"). The use of this phrase further links Gog's invasion to the Time of Jacob's Trouble, which was first introduced with similar language in Deuteronomy 4:30 and 31:29.

Ezekiel builds on the theology of Moses however, and in this same

text also indicates that just prior to Gog's invasion Israel will be "living securely." In Ezekiel 38:11 the Land is described at this time as being "at rest," with its cities and villages "without walls and having no bars or gates." When read in light of Daniel 9:27, it is quite possible that this sense of ease and security in Israel just prior to Gog's invasion will be a direct result of Gog's temporary covenant with Israel, which will consequently leave the nation feeling more secure than they actually are, and therefore unsuspecting of any imminent threat.

Because the verses that follow the initial account of Gog's invasion in Ezekiel 38:10-12 (Ezek. 38:13-23; 39:1-6) describe the subsequent defeat of Gog and his armies, many interpreters have assumed that Gog's invasion is unsuccessful, and that it results in his immediate defeat. According to most interpretations of Ezekiel 38-39, Gog essentially tries and fails.

The problem with the idea that Gog's invasion of Israel is a failure, is that in Ezekiel 39:23-28 we are told the exact opposite. In this passage Ezekiel tells us that when Gog invades Israel, the nation will fall into the hands of their enemies and go into exile:

The nations will know that **the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against Me**, and I hid My face from them; **so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword**. According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions I dealt with them, and I hid My face from them. [...] Then they will know that I am the LORD their God **because I made them go into exile among the nations**, and then gathered them to their own land (Ezek. 39:23-24).

Now of course, some will argue that the exile spoken of here is not related to Gog's invasion of Israel. After all, isn't it possible that Ezekiel 39:23-24 could be referring to the Babylonian exile, or perhaps the exile of the Jewish people in the time of the Romans?

The problem with both of these options is that neither one of these previous exiles suits the context of Ezekiel 38-39. As we have seen, this text describes events that take place in Israel in the "latter years" (38:8),

and the contextual “adversaries” of Israel referred to in Ezekiel 39:23 would most logically be Gog and his armies. Therefore, the exile mentioned in Ezekiel 39:23-28 obviously occurs as a direct consequence of the events mentioned in the immediate context. Namely, Gog’s invasion of Israel. Many interpreters do not see this because 1) they do not understand that Gog is the Antichrist, and 2) they do not understand that the modern State of Israel will suffer a temporary defeat at the hands of the Antichrist during the Time of Jacob’s Trouble.

For a time at least, Gog will be successful in his efforts to subjugate Israel, and the Jewish people will be given into His hand. Most popular interpretations of Ezekiel 38-39 miss this critical piece of information in Ezekiel 39:23-24, which in turn leads to the mistaken belief that Israel is somehow immediately triumphant over Gog and his armies.

EZEKIEL 38-39 = THE TIME OF JACOB’S TROUBLE

When Ezekiel 38:10-12 and Ezekiel 39:23 are read together, these texts collaborate to present Gog’s invasion of Israel as a form of discipline from the Lord, which He Himself will orchestrate (Ezek. 38:4) to punish Israel for her “iniquity,” treachery, “uncleanness” and “transgressions” (Ezek. 39:23-24). After this invasion takes place, Ezekiel then says that Israel will go into exile, and fall into the hands of their adversaries. In effect, Ezekiel presents Gog’s invasion as leading to the very same events that are also connected to Israel’s final period of purging and refinement in the writings of the other Hebrew prophets.

EZEKIEL 38-39 AND DEUTERONOMY 32

Another clue that Ezekiel wants us to understand Gog’s invasion as the catalyst that starts Israel’s final period of suffering before the Messianic Age, can be seen when we compare some of the strategic language in Ezekiel’s prophecy to the language used in the Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. We already saw in chapters 9-10 how Deuteronomy 32 is one of the foundational texts related to the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, which all of the later prophets simply elaborated upon. What we will see now however, is

that there are also a couple of hints in Ezekiel 38-39 that Ezekiel wants us to read his prophecy in light of this earlier text from the Torah.

For one, when speaking of Israel's time of suffering in the "latter days" (Deut. 31:29) Moses specifically mentioned in Deuteronomy 32:20 and 32:25 that God would hide His face from Israel during this time, and give them over to the power of the sword:

Then He said, "I will hide My face from them, I will see what their end shall be; for they are a perverse generation, sons in whom is no faithfulness" (Deut. 32:20).

Outside the sword will bereave, and inside terror. Both young man and virgin, the nursling with the man of gray hair (Deut. 32:25).

It is no coincidence that this is exactly what Ezekiel says will take place as a result of Gog's invasion of Israel. "I hid My face from them; so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and all of them fell by the sword" (Ezek. 39:23). Ezekiel 38:10-13 and 39:10 also mention that as a result of Gog's invasion, Israel will be "plundered" by her enemies, which again, would not be the case if this invasion were unsuccessful.

The appearance of this language indicates that Ezekiel 38-39 is a prophetic expansion of the original Song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32. Moses described Israel's time of eschatological suffering in more generic terms, but Ezekiel gives us much more detail in terms of how God will finally purge Israel and fulfill His purposes for the Jewish nation in the last days. He will do this by temporarily allowing the Antichrist to control, defile, and subjugate His Land, which is precisely why Deuteronomy 32:43 also says that when the Messiah returns, He will have to "atone for His *land* and His people."

EZEKIEL 38-39 IN COMPARISON TO EZEKIEL 34-37

The block of passages in Ezekiel 34-37, which make up the preceding context of Ezekiel 38-39, also supports the idea that this later passage speaks of the same period of discipline Moses introduced us to in

Deuteronomy 32. As we saw in chapter 10, it was in Ezekiel 35 that Ezekiel himself first referenced Israel's time of "calamity," and what he called "the time of the punishment of the end" (Ezek. 35:5), which will be a time when Israel's enemies and neighbors will see that their land has been "laid desolate" (Ezek. 35:12). In Ezekiel 37, Ezekiel also spoke of how at this time Israel will resemble a disorderly mass of dry, defeated, and disconnected bones, right up until the time when her Davidic King appears to reign in her midst (Ezek. 37:1-28).

When the invasion of Gog is understood against the backdrop of this prior context, it becomes even more apparent that Ezekiel 38-39 is telling the same story as these earlier chapters in Ezekiel 35-37, but from a different angle. This is called prophetic repetition or recapitulation. In other words, for Ezekiel, the invasion of Gog in Ezekiel 38 is presented as that which starts Israel's time of calamity (Ezek. 35). It is what explains why Israel will say in the last days, "our bones are dried up and our hope has perished" (Ezek. 37:11). This will all be because of the actions Gog takes against the Jewish State during the Time of Jacob's Trouble.

Ezekiel chapters 34-39 do not record a strict chronological sequence of prophetic events from one chapter to the next. Instead, each of these chapters contribute one piece to a larger puzzle. They tell the same story of how Israel will be punished by God in the last days, but also finally delivered and saved by their Davidic King at the beginning of the Messianic Age. Below is a list of some of the important parallel passages in Ezekiel 34-39 that further prove that all of these prophecies are about the same events:

THE TIME OF PUNISHMENT, DEFEAT, AND EXILE IN EZEKIEL 34-39

- **Ezekiel 35:5:** The sons of Israel are delivered to the "power of the sword at the time of their calamity, at the time of the punishment of the end."

- **Ezekiel 35:12:** Israel's enemies will see that the mountains of Israel are "laid desolate."
- **Ezekiel 36:2:** Israel's enemies will say that the heights of Israel have "become our possession."
- **Ezekiel 36:5:** Israel's enemies will appropriate God's land for themselves, "as a possession with wholehearted joy and with scorn of soul."
- **Ezekiel 37:11:** Israel will say, "our bones have dried up and our hope has perished."
- **Ezekiel 38:7:9:** Gog will invade Israel "like a storm," and cover the land "like a cloud."
- **Ezekiel 39:21-28:** Israel will go "into exile for their iniquity" and fall into the "hand of their adversaries, and all of them will fall by the sword."

THE TIME OF MESSIANIC REDEMPTION IN EZEKIEL 34-39

- **Ezekiel 34:23:** The Lord will set His "servant David" over Israel, who will be "prince among them."
- **Ezekiel 34:27-31:** The Land of Israel will be fruitful, and Israel will be "secure" after God delivers them from those who "enslaved them." In addition, the Jewish people will never again "endure the insults of the nations."
- **Ezekiel 36:15:** The Lord will not let Israel "hear the insults from the nations anymore." Israel will not hear disgrace and will not "stumble any longer."
- **Ezekiel 36:23:** The Lord says, "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you [Israel] have profaned in their midst. The nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the LORD God, when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight."

- **Ezekiel 36:25-29:** God will “sprinkle clean water” on Israel and cleanse them from all their “filthiness,” “idols,” and “uncleanness.” God will give Israel a “new heart and put a new spirit” within them. Israel will be careful to observe the Lord’s ordinances.
- **Ezekiel 36:25-36:** The Land of Israel will be fruitful, and the desolate land will become “like the garden of Eden.”
- **Ezekiel 37:13-14:** Israel will know that the Lord is their God, when He regathers them to their land and puts His Spirit within them.
- **Ezekiel 37:24:** The Lord says, “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd; and they will walk in My ordinances and keep My statutes and observe them.”
- **Ezekiel 37:26-28:** God says He will build His sanctuary in Israel, “and the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forever.”
- **Ezekiel 38:23:** The Lord says, “I will magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD.”
- **Ezekiel 39:7:** The Lord will make His holy name known in the midst of Israel, the nations will know that He is the Lord, and Israel will no longer profane His name.
- **Ezekiel 39:27-29:** The Lord will bring Israel back from captivity, and pour out His Spirit upon them.
- **Ezekiel 40-43:** God builds His sanctuary in Israel and His Glory comes to dwell among His people.

As we can see, all of Ezekiel 34-39 is about the Time of Jacob’s Trouble and Israel’s subsequent redemption when the Messiah appears to reign as their Davidic King. The same themes of discipline, exile,

and tribulation are repeated in each of these chapters. In addition, the same themes centered around restoration from exile, divine blessing on the Land, God's presence with His people, the salvation of the nations, and the outpouring of the Spirit, are also repeated in nearly all of these chapters. In Ezekiel 34-39, Ezekiel gives us one of the fullest pictures in all of Scripture regarding what the Time of Jacob's Trouble will actually look like, and what will take place when Israel's Messianic King returns.

Those who say that the Battle of Gog of Magog is not intricately connected to the start of the Time of Jacob's Trouble and the final conquests of the Antichrist, are missing how Ezekiel 38-39 is situated within the broader literary context of Ezekiel 34-37, and also Ezekiel 40-43. In this concluding portion of his prophecy, Ezekiel tells us what Israel will go through in the "latter years" (38:8), during "the time of the punishment of the end" (Ezek. 35:5), as well as how they will be redeemed by their Messiah (Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-28). It could even be said that Ezekiel 34-39 is Ezekiel's version of Numbers 24 and Deuteronomy 32.

Because they understood the eschatology of the Torah so well, all of the prophets looked at the end times through the same lens. They understood that Israel's rebellion will lead to a period of harsh divine discipline, but that ultimately, the Lord's covenant with Israel and the nations will also lead to glorious redemption in the Messianic Age. Ezekiel 38-39 expands on this same basic end-times story that Moses himself first articulated in the Torah.

THE MOST LIKELY TIME THE INVASION WILL TAKE PLACE

In summary, the most likely time the initial invasion of Israel recorded in Ezekiel 38 will take place, is sometime very close to the start of the Time of Jacob's Trouble, probably about 3 ½ years before the return of Jesus. I am almost willing to say this is the only possible time the invasion can take place.

No other interpretation of the timing of this invasion adequately takes into consideration that Gog is the Antichrist, and that according to Ezekiel 39:21-28, his invasion of Israel leads to an extended period of

time in which Israel will experience exile, captivity, defeat, and desolation (Ezek. 35:5-15; 36:1-3, 36:5; 36:35; 37:11; 39:23-28). Those who say that the Battle of Gog of Magog is just a short preliminary battle that takes place well before the 70th week, or perhaps, sometime during the 70th week, but not in connection with the conquests of the Antichrist, often end up unintentionally creating various end-time scenarios that will never take place.

Ezekiel 38-39 is not about some sideshow battle that is then brushed under the rug of history in preparation for the really significant events of the last days. Quite the contrary, Ezekiel 38-39 is about *the* final battle before the start of the Messianic Age.

This passage gives us a full panoramic view of the Time of Jacob's Trouble and the last half of Daniel's 70th week. It shows more clearly than any other text of Scripture how this period of time will start. The events recorded in these chapters will begin when Gog invades and conquers Israel, and they will end, as we will see in the next chapter, when Jesus returns to confront him.



15

THE END-TIMES PASSOVER IN EZEKIEL 38-39

“Before Him goes pestilence, and plague comes after Him.”

—HABAKKUK 3:5

IN NUMBERS 24:7 we were first introduced to the idea that when the Messiah returns, He will defeat Gog. We also saw how Numbers 24:8 links the general timing of Gog’s defeat to Israel’s eschatological Passover and final exodus, or, to the time when Jesus will again bring the Jewish nation “out of Egypt.”

In Ezekiel 38:16-23, Ezekiel picks up these prior theological threads from the book of Numbers and elaborates on Gog’s defeat shortly after the Second Coming. As we will see, in this text we are given an awe-inspiring prophetic glimpse into how Jesus will destroy Satan’s number one representative on the earth in the last days. Not coincidentally, it is also in this same text that we find many other clues linking Gog’s defeat to the final End-Times Passover that will usher in the kingdom of God.

GOG MEETS THE MESSIAH

The final showdown between Gog and the Messiah is described quite vividly in the following text:

“It will come about on that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel,” declares the LORD God, “that My fury will mount up in My anger. In My zeal and in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish of the sea, the birds of the heavens, the beasts of the field, all the creeping things that creep on the earth, **and all the men who are on the face of the earth will shake at My presence**; the mountains also will be thrown down, the steep pathways will collapse and every wall will fall to the ground. I will call for a sword against him [Gog] on all My mountains,” declares the LORD God. “Every man’s sword will be against his brother. **With pestilence and with blood I will enter into judgment with him; and I will rain on him and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire, and brimstone.** I will magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD” (Ezek. 38:18-23).

There are a number of key points we need to take away from this passage, especially if we want to fully appreciate how this text does in fact refer to the end of the 70th week and the Second Coming of Jesus:

1. The Lord Himself will bring Gog against Israel so that the nations might know Him, and in order that His holy name might be sanctified through Gog’s destruction (38:16, 23).
2. When Gog is destroyed there will be intense and cataclysmic natural disasters. These will include a great earthquake, the destruction of mountains, and the collapse of steep pathways and every wall (38:20).

3. When Gog is destroyed the Lord will unleash His “blazing wrath.” All mankind and all of the creatures of the earth will shake at His presence (38:20).
4. The Lord will judge Gog with “pestilence,” “blood,” “torrential rain,” “hailstones,” “fire and brimstone” (38:22). At this time, the Lord will magnify Himself, sanctify Himself, and many nations will know that He alone is the Supreme Ruler of heaven and earth.

When we combine this text in Ezekiel 38:16-23 with what we know from Numbers 24:7-8, it becomes even more apparent that Ezekiel is telling us the specific events that will take place when Jesus returns and exalts Himself above Gog in the last days. It was in Numbers 24 that Moses (& Balaam) first showed us how Israel’s King will be “higher than Gog” (Num. 24:7). Now, Ezekiel is giving us a fuller picture of what the Messiah’s victory over Gog will look like.

Some might argue that I am inappropriately “reading Jesus into this passage,” because admittedly, the text in Ezekiel never mentions the Messiah by name. However, what we must remember is that we were already told in Numbers 24:7 that it will be Israel’s Seed and King who will defeat Gog in the last days. Therefore, Ezekiel didn’t need to use a descriptive title for the Messiah when speaking of Gog’s destruction in Ezekiel 38-39. Based on the prior text in Numbers 24:7, it is implied that it will be Israel’s Messiah who will carry out the judgments of the Lord against Gog, which are described in more detail in Ezekiel’s prophecy. Ezekiel knew his Torah well, and as he pondered the Messiah’s victory over Gog in Numbers 24, the Holy Spirit gave him an even deeper understanding of what exactly this victory will entail. To once again quote Old Testament scholar William Tooman:

There are several good reasons to identify Numbers 24:7 as the original source for the Gog figure in [Ezekiel 38-39] [...] The weight of the text-critical evidence and the correspondence between

Numbers 24 and [Ezekiel 38-39] strongly suggest that **[Ezekiel] derived his villain from the Balaam Oracles.**¹

Similarly, Old Testament scholar John Sailhamer has also written:

It is Numbers 24 that Ezekiel surely has in mind when he identifies Gog with the one spoken of in “former days.”²

Because we were already told earlier in Scripture that it will be the Messiah who defeats Gog, when the Lord speaks of Gog and the nations encountering His “presence” (*panim*, lit. “my face”) in Ezekiel 38:16-23, we should understand this as a reference to God’s presence, or His “face,” being manifest in the person of Jesus, who is the “radiance” of God’s glory, and the “exact representation of His nature” (Heb. 1:3). After all, it is not God the Father who will confront the Antichrist, but it will be God the Son, returning to this earth to reign as King over Israel and the nations:

For his [Israel’s] king [the Messiah] will be higher than Gog, and His kingdom shall be exalted. God brings Him out of Egypt, He is for Him like the horns of the wild ox. He will devour the nations who are His adversaries, and will crush their bones in pieces, and shatter them with his arrows (Num. 24:7-8).

All of Ezekiel 38-39 is an expanded prophetic commentary on Numbers 24, and even more broadly, on the eschatology of the Torah. Ezekiel was shown that after Jesus rescues the Jewish remnant from captivity and exile, leads them out of Egypt and through the wilderness (Deut. 33:1-2; Habakkuk 3), He will then enter the Land of Israel and confront the Antichrist and his armies. At this time, there will be a battle unlike anything the world has ever seen. Jesus will display the full breadth of His miraculous power, and the earth will literally shake at His

1 William A. Tooman, *Gog of Magog: Reuse of Scripture and Compositional Technique in Ezekiel 38-39* (Tubingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 140-143.

2 John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009), 476.

presence. When these events take place, Jesus will unleash a torrential storm of fire, rain, hail, brimstone, blood, and pestilence against Gog. Israel's King will slay the Antichrist right in the very land he thought he had successfully taken from the Lord and His people:

I will strike your bow [Gog] from your left hand and dash down your arrows from your right hand. You will fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your troops and the peoples who are with you; I will give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and the beast of the field. You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken (Ezek. 39:3-4).

Shockingly, this reference to Gog falling “on the open field” indicates that instead of hiding or running from the Messiah, Gog will actually be so bold as to try and confront Jesus face to face when He returns. When he does however, the Antichrist and his armies will be publicly shamed, humiliated, and shattered by Jesus. They will be given as food to the vultures and beasts of the field.

After His awe-inspiring victory over Gog, Jesus will then take up the scepter of Judah and command obedience from the Gentiles (Gen. 49:10). In effect, Ezekiel presents the Messiah's victory over Gog as the beginning of His coronation as the King of Israel. This is why a few short chapters later Ezekiel tells us that after the Battle of Gog of Magog, the Messiah will stand in Jerusalem and finally say:

Son of man, this is the place of My throne and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell among the sons of Israel forever (Ezek. 43:7).

From a contextual perspective, the Messiah's victory over Gog marks the transition from the “latter days” into the Messianic Age. After Gog is defeated Jesus will oversee the building of the Messianic Temple in Jerusalem, just like Moses oversaw the building of the Tabernacle in the wilderness. After the Temple is constructed Jesus will reign in the midst of His people during the Millennium, seated on His throne in the Holy of Holies (Ezek. 40-47).

IT'S A SNAPSHOT OF AN EXTENDED PERIOD OF TIME

Unfortunately, the most popular interpretations of Ezekiel 38-39 rob people of their ability to see how this passage records some of the most important and awe-inspiring details about Jesus and His Second Coming in all of Scripture. Ezekiel 38-39 is part of the Good News about Jesus and His kingdom, and we cannot afford to distort the meaning of this critical Gospel text. The Holy Spirit put this passage in the Bible so that our hearts would yearn more for our glorious and majestic miracle-working King.

Besides not recognizing that Gog is the Antichrist who is only destroyed *after* Jesus returns, there is one other main reason why many interpreters cannot see that Ezekiel 38:17-23 is about the Second Coming. Namely, because most of them are under the mistaken impression that all of the events mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39 must occur within a very short period of time. They read of Gog's invasion in Ezekiel 38, and then, a few short verses later, they see that the Lord says, "*on that day* when Gog comes against the land of Israel" he will be destroyed (Ezek. 38:18).

Based on this verse, it could be argued that these events must take place within one 24-hour time period, which is in fact the way many prophecy teachers have understood the message of Ezekiel 38:18. As noted by prophecy teacher Joel Richardson, some have even described Ezekiel 38-39 as the "'One-Day-War'—or even the 'One Hour War.'"³ And why not? Shouldn't we read Scripture literally, and therefore interpret the word "day" in Ezekiel 38:18 literally as well?

Of course, I am in favor of taking the actual words of Scripture seriously. However, the Old Testament phrase "on that day" often has a more flexible meaning more along the lines of, "during that significant period of time." In other words, this phrase is employed by the Biblical prophets to highlight noteworthy events on God's prophetic timeline. It very often does not specify a literal 24-hour day.

3 Joel Richardson, *Mideast Beast: The Scriptural Case for an Islamic Antichrist* (Washington D.C.: WND Books, 2012), 164.

A perfect example of what the phrase “on that day” often means in the Hebrew Bible can be seen in Isaiah 11:1-16. We already saw in chapter 8 that Isaiah 11:1 mentions how the Messiah will be a “shoot” that springs “from the stem of Jesse.” This passage also speaks of how the “Spirit of the Lord will rest” on the Messiah (Isa. 11:1-5). We know from the Gospels that these verses were partially fulfilled in the first century, when Jesus was born as a descendant of Jesse and David, and also when He ministered to the masses in the power of the Holy Spirit.

However, within this very same passage, Isaiah also says that when the shoot springs forth from the “stem of Jesse,” He will “slay the wicked” with the “breath of His lips.” When this happens, Isaiah also tells us that the “wolf will dwell with the lamb,” and the “earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isa. 11:6-9).

Then, quite notably, Isaiah says, “*in that day* the nations will resort to the root of Jesse, who will stand as a signal for the peoples” (Isa. 11:10). In the next verse, Isaiah also says, “it will happen *on that day* that the Lord will again recover” His scattered Jewish remnant, who will at this time conquer their enemies and finally dwell in peace (Isa. 11:11-16).

If we were to read Isaiah 11 in an extremely literal fashion, we would basically have to say that right after Jesus was born, He should have slayed the wicked with the breath of his mouth, ushered in world peace, and lead Israel to conquer her enemies, all in one 24-hour period of time. After all, Isaiah does say these things will happen in a “day.”

Thankfully however, most people would not interpret Isaiah 11 in this way, because they instinctively recognize that there are often long and indeterminate time gaps between the events described in one single prophecy. In the case of Isaiah 11 there is more than a 2,000-year time gap between the initial and final Messianic fulfillments of this prophecy.

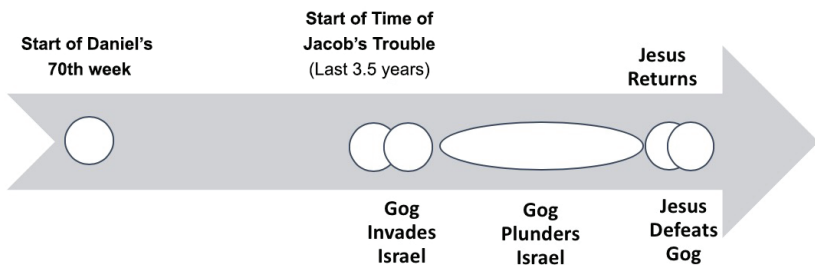
This means Isaiah was using the phrase “on that day” in this passage in a figurative sense, to describe a significant series of events related to the ushering in of God’s kingdom, not one literal day. Even in modern times we often use the word “day” in a figurative sense as well, such as

when we say, “I remember back *in the day*” (i.e. I remember back in that earlier time).

Regarding Ezekiel 38-39, we also need to recognize that when the Lord says Gog will be destroyed on the “day” he invades Israel, He is not saying Gog will be destroyed before the sun sets. Just like in Isaiah 11, Ezekiel is using the phrase “on that day” to indicate that Gog’s invasion of Israel and subsequent defeat will play a critical role in the unfolding of redemption history, and the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom. Once we understand how the prophets used the phrase “on that day” throughout the Hebrew Bible, there is very little exegetical warrant to say that this phrase in Ezekiel 38-39 must refer to a literal 24-hour period of time.

As we saw in the last chapter, Ezekiel viewed Gog’s invasion of Israel as synonymous with the Time of Jacob’s Trouble. So, if Gog invades Israel about 3 ½ years before the return of Jesus, and then is not defeated until Jesus returns, this implies that most of the events recorded in Ezekiel 38-39 cover a period of time that will last for roughly 3 ½ years. This is a panoramic snapshot and summary of a complex series of events that are packed into two relatively short chapters of Scripture. It is not a literal play-by-play commentary on events that will happen one after another in rapid-fire succession. (The same pattern can also be seen in Zechariah 12 & 14. Both of these chapters describe the same events as Ezekiel 38-39).

PROBABLE TIMELINE OF EZEKIEL 38-39



READING EZEKIEL 38-39 AS A PASSOVER TEXT

Another reason we can be certain that Ezekiel 38-39 refers to the Antichrist and the return of Jesus, is because of the way this prophecy connects Gog's defeat to the eschatological fulfillment of Passover. As we saw in chapter 2, on the night before He was crucified Jesus told His disciples:

I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God (Lk. 22:15-16).

I cannot prove this beyond any shadow of a doubt, but it is possible that when Jesus said this He had Ezekiel 38:16-23 on His mind. The reason I say this is because out of all of the writings of the Hebrew prophets, it is this text in particular that most clearly presents the eschatological victory of the Messiah over the Antichrist in terms of a final Passover deliverance for Israel and the nations. At the very least then, what we can be sure of is that Ezekiel 38-39 was one of the primary reasons why Jesus associated the inauguration of the kingdom of God with the feast of Passover. In essence, Ezekiel 38-39 tells us what background events must take place before we celebrate Passover with Jesus in the Age to Come.

There are many clues in Ezekiel 38-39 that reveal a connection between the original Passover and the Second Coming of Jesus. We will now explore these clues in more detail, which should help to further explain why Jesus spoke of a still future fulfillment of Passover in the kingdom of God.

GOG IS THE END-TIMES PHARAOH

In the book of Exodus we are repeatedly told that it was the Lord Himself who hardened Pharaoh's heart, primarily so that He could manifest His glory and power through Pharaoh's disobedience and eventual judgment. Even though there are indications that Pharaoh also played a role in the hardening of his own heart (Ex. 8:15, 32), the book

of Exodus still presents God's sovereign hand as the primary causative factor behind Pharaoh's obstinance:

- "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart that I may multiply My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 7:3; cf. 7:13, 8:19).
- "And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses" (9:12).
- "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may perform these signs of Mine among them [...]" (Ex. 10:1).
- "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not let the sons of Israel go" (Ex. 10:20).
- "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he was not willing to let them go" (Ex. 10:27).
- "Thus I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will chase after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD" (Ex. 14:4).
- "As for Me, behold, I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so they will go in after them; and I will be honored through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD, when I am honored through Pharaoh, through his chariots and his horsemen" (Ex. 14:18).

It is certainly no coincidence that when we encounter Gog in Ezekiel 38-39, we are also repeatedly told that the Lord Himself will sovereignly orchestrate Gog's disobedience to serve His own ends:

- "Behold, I am against you, O Gog, [...] **I will turn you about and put hooks in your jaws, and I will bring you out**, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them splendidly attired, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them wielding swords" (Ezek. 38:3-4).

- “It shall come about in the last days [*acharit (ha)yawmim*] that **I will bring you against My land**, so that the nations may know Me, when I am sanctified through you, before their eyes, O Gog” (Ezek. 38:16).
- “Behold, I am against you, O Gog [...]; and **I will turn you around, drive you on, take you up from the remotest parts of the north and bring you against the mountains of Israel**” (Ezek. 39:2).

In these verses, Gog is presented as a kind of End-Times Pharaoh; as one whose actions of disobedience the Lord will facilitate in order to glorify His own name when Jesus returns. Just as Exodus says that Israel and the Egyptians came to know the Lord through the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart (Ex. 6:7; 14:4), Ezekiel also says that Israel and the nations will come to know the Lord through Gog’s invasion of Israel and eventual destruction. Here are a few examples of where this idea is found in Ezekiel 38-39:

- “I will magnify Myself, sanctify Myself, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations; and they will know that I am the LORD” (Ezek. 38:23).
- “I will send fire upon Magog and those who inhabit the coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the LORD” (Ezek. 39:6).
- “My holy name I will make known in the midst of My people Israel; and I will not let My holy name be profaned anymore. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. Behold, it is coming and it shall be done,” declares the LORD God. “That is the day of which I have spoken” (Ezek. 39:8).
- “And I will set My glory among the nations; and all the nations will see My judgement which I have executed and My hand which I have laid on them. And the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God from that day onward” (Ezek. 39:21).

Anyone who says that Gog is not the Antichrist, and that he is therefore defeated prior to the return of Jesus, faces the insurmountable challenge of trying to explain how all of these verses could be fulfilled before the Second Coming. After all, when will the Lord make Himself “known in the sight of many nations?” During the Messianic Age. When will God not allow His holy name to be profaned any more in Israel? Only after Jesus returns. When will God set His “glory among the nations”? When He establishes His kingdom on this earth. When will the entire house of Israel come to know the Lord and experience a great outpouring of His Spirit? Only after the Second Coming of their Messiah.

By emphasizing how these specific events will take place after Gog is defeated, Ezekiel connects Gog’s defeat to the inauguration of the kingdom of God. He is telling us that Gog’s defeat represents the climax of Israel’s End-Times Exodus and final Passover deliverance. This is the time when they will experience ultimate victory through the hands of their New Moses, after He returns to vanquish the Final Pharaoh, that is, Gog, the Antichrist, the great end-times archenemy of the Lord and His people.

JESUS IS THE MIRACLE-WORKING NEW MOSES

In addition to the comparisons between Gog and Pharaoh in Ezekiel 38-39, there is another key piece of evidence in Ezekiel 38:22 that indicates that we are supposed to interpret the actions of Israel’s Warrior Messiah in this passage through a Passover lens as well. Namely, the emphasis on the miraculous plagues of “pestilence,” “blood,” “torrential rain,” “hailstones,” “fire,” and “brimstone” that Jesus will use to defeat Gog and his armies. Any ancient Israelite familiar with the original Passover story would have understood how this plague language connects the glorious victory of the Messiah back to the miracle-working power of Moses in Egypt. Not all of the original “10 plagues” from the book of Exodus are mentioned in Ezekiel 38:22. However, three of them most certainly are. These include “pestilence” (*dever*), “blood” (*dam*), and intense severe weather, including “hail” (*elgaviysh*) and “fire” (*esh*).

The plague of pestilence is what afflicted the Egyptian livestock in Exodus 9:3. The plague of blood corresponds to the plague on the Nile river and the entire Egyptian water supply in Exodus 7:17-21. The torrential rain, hailstones, fire, and brimstone in Ezekiel 38:22 also correspond to the plague of hail and intense severe weather in Exodus 9:18-26.

Some different words are used in each of these texts. Yet, there is still no denying that with this language Ezekiel is evoking the Lord's historic plagues of judgement against Egypt:

Now the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand toward the sky, that hail may fall on all the land of Egypt, on man and on beast and on every plant of the field, throughout the land of Egypt." **Moses stretched out his staff toward the sky, and the LORD sent thunder and hail, and fire ran down to the earth.** And the LORD rained hail on the land of Egypt. So there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail, very severe, such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. The hail struck all that was in the field through all the land of Egypt, both man and beast; the hail also struck every plant of the field and shattered every tree of the field. Only in the land of Goshen, where the sons of Israel were there was no hail (Ex. 9:22-26).

When we analyzed Deuteronomy 18:18-19, 33:1-5, and 34:10-12 (chapter 12), we saw that the Torah ends by looking forward to the Messianic King who will model His kingdom ministry after the ministry of Moses. Deuteronomy 34:10-12 even hints that this coming Deliverer "like Moses" will be a miracle worker who performs "signs and wonders" with "mighty power" and "great terror," just as Moses did against Pharaoh.

In Ezekiel 38:22, by strategically linking the destruction of Gog with the original Passover plagues in the book of Exodus, Ezekiel draws on this promise of Messianic redemption in the Torah. He presents the Messiah as Israel's New Moses who will defeat the powers of evil through a supernatural display of miraculous signs and wonders. Just

like Moses called down the Passover plagues against Pharaoh, Jesus will do the exact same thing to the Antichrist when He encounters him in the Land of Israel.

The idea that Ezekiel 38-39 is meant to be read as an eschatological replay of the original Passover story is not widely recognized in Christian circles. However, there has been a long-standing trend in traditional Judaism to read Ezekiel 38-39 in precisely this manner.

Rabbi Moshe Eisemann points out in his commentary on Ezekiel:

There is a wealth of Midrashic literature [i.e. traditional Jewish commentary] which relates the plague, blood, hailstones, etc. mentioned in [Ezekiel 38] to similar disasters which befell the Egyptians (see *Tanchuma* Bo 4). In fact, *Tanchuma* (VaEirah 22) teaches that when Moses prayed that the plague of hailstones stop, the stones which were then falling remained suspended in the air until the time they would fall upon Gog's army. **Apparently, the Sages wish to draw our attention to the thread which, spanning the centuries, ties Gog to Egypt.** Pharaoh attempted to squash the nation before it ever achieved an independent existence. Gog, in one last gigantic effort, throws the might of the nations against a people whose resilience had been tested over the centuries, but who now seemed vulnerable to attack. Egypt, at the beginning of history, and Gog, at its end, share a hatred against the bearers of Divine Glory on earth. Both are smashed by the furious forces of nature, which God chooses as the agent with which He establishes His nation.⁴

The Jewish Midrash that links the plagues of Ezekiel 38-39 to the original plagues in the book of Exodus states:

4 Rabbi Moshe Eisemann, *Yechezkel: Ezekiel/ A New Translation with Commentary Anthologized from Talmudic, Midrashic and Rabbinic Sources* (Brooklyn: Mesorah Publications, Ltd, 2003), 590-591. There is also a Jewish tradition linking the battle of Gog of Magog to Sukkot (see Eisemann 580). However, this tradition rests on questionable exegesis. When we employ a historical-grammatical and canonical approach to the study of Ezekiel 38-39, it is clear that this text is meant to be read as an account of Israel's eschatological Passover and exodus.

“Then the thunder and the hail ceased, [and no rain came pouring down to earth].” And where is it to be found? Our masters have said: **“It is suspended in the air until Gog and Magog come.”** It is so stated (concerning Gog in Ezek. 38:22): “And I will pour torrential rain, hailstones, <fire, and brimstone upon him and his hosts and the many peoples that are with him>.”⁵

When Ezekiel 38-39 is read in light of the book of Exodus, it is easy to see that Ezekiel is presenting the Messiah as Israel’s final Passover Deliverer who will appear to defeat the End-Times Pharaoh at the dawn of the Age to Come. Again, this does not mean I want to digress into speculation over when exactly Jesus returns to this earth (i.e. “the day or the hour”). However, there can be no doubt that with the use of this strategic plague language in Ezekiel 38:22, Ezekiel connects the glorious appearance of the Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom to Passover.

I suspect that when most people read the account of God’s judgment against Egypt in Exodus, our familiarity with this story often causes us to sanitize and downplay the sheer terror and overwhelming magnitude of what the Lord did to Egypt at that time. What we need to recognize however, is that through the ministry of Moses, the Lord brought the largest superpower and strongest military in the ancient world to its knees. With His 10 plagues, the Lord utterly broke Egypt.

In the last days, when Jesus returns, circumstances will be exactly the same. People will marvel at the power of the Antichrist and the military might of his armies. However, Jesus will confront Gog in open battle, and through the most horrifying display of judgment, power, wrath, plagues, and cataclysmic weather the world has ever seen, He will completely vanquish Gog and his armies (cf. Zech. 14:12-13). Jesus is going to bring the greatest superpower, and the most malicious political leader in all of human history to complete destruction. This will mark Jesus’

5 *Midrash Tanhuma: Vol. II, Exodus and Leviticus*, trans. John. T. Townsend (Hoboken: KTAV Publishing House, Inc., 1997), 52.

entrance into the Land of Israel, when He will be glorified among His people at the start of the Messianic Age, and when He will finally be “higher than Gog,” just as Balaam originally predicted in Numbers 24.

Furthermore, even as the book of Exodus says the Israelites “plundered the Egyptians” (Ex. 12:36), there is also another undeniable Passover parallel in Ezekiel 39:10. In this verse Ezekiel notes that after Gog is defeated, Israel “will take the spoil of those who despoiled them and seize the plunder of those who plundered them.” At this time, Jesus will no longer be known among the nations only as God’s Passover Lamb. But instead, He will truly become our Passover King.

PARALLELS BETWEEN THE ORIGINAL
PASSOVER AND EZEKIEL 38-39

Original Passover Story	The End-Times Passover in Ezekiel 38-39
The Lord hardens Pharaoh’s heart for His own glory (Ex. 7:3).	The Lord brings Gog against Israel for His own glory (Ezek. 38:16).
Moses defeats Pharaoh with the plagues of judgement (Ex. 7-12).	Jesus defeats Gog with the plagues of judgement (Ezek. 38:22-23).
Israel plunders the Egyptians (Ex. 12:36).	Israel plunders Gog and his armies (Ezek. 39:10).
The Lord confuses Pharaoh and his armies, and fights for Israel (Ex. 14:24-25).	The Lord turns Gog’s armies against one another, and fights for Israel (Ezek. 38:21).
Israel and the Egyptians come to know the Lord (Ex. 12:38; 14:4; 14:30-31).	Israel and the nations come to know the Lord (Ezek. 39:8).
God’s Glory comes to dwell in the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:34-38).	God’s Glory comes to dwell in the Messianic Temple (Ezek. 43:1-9).

EZEKIEL 38-39 AND THE BATTLE OF ARMAGEDDON

Another Biblical clue that confirms that Gog is only defeated after Jesus returns, can be seen by analyzing the many parallels between the Battle of Armageddon in Revelation 16 and 19 and the text of Ezekiel 38-39. In essence, through the intentional use of intertextual language and symbols, the book of Revelation presents the Battle of Armageddon as another perspective on Gog's defeat in the book of Ezekiel.

The Battle of Armageddon is covered in both Revelation 16:13-21 and 19:11-21. These texts refer to the period of time soon after the return of Jesus and elaborate on how the Beast (Antichrist) will gather "the kings of the whole world" to Har-Magedon in Israel (16:15-16), specifically for the purpose of trying to destroy Jesus and His heavenly armies (19:11-16):

And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army (Rev. 19:19).

This battle most likely takes place after Jesus has come "out of Egypt" and delivered His Jewish remnant from captivity throughout the Middle East. In other words, Jesus will lead Israel through their End-Times Exodus, and then He will encounter the Beast and his armies in the Promised Land.

The similarities between the destruction of the Beast that will occur at this time, and the destruction of Gog in Ezekiel 38-39, are quite noteworthy, and certainly not the result of coincidence. These similarities include:

1. In Ezekiel 39:17-20, Ezekiel is told to speak to the birds and the beasts of the field, and to tell them, "Assemble and come, gather from every side for My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you [...] that you may eat flesh and drink blood. You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of princes of the earth, as though they were rams, lambs, goats, and bulls [...]". In Revelation 19:17, John sees an angel crying out "to all the

birds which fly in midheaven,” and saying, “Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.” These two passages describe the exact same thing. Namely, how God will gather the Antichrist and his armies not for the purpose they are expecting, but instead, to be the main course for the wild animals and birds of prey after they are defeated by Jesus.

2. Both Ezekiel 38:19 and Revelation 16:18 speak of a “great earthquake” that will occur sometime shortly after the return of Jesus, and in conjunction with the defeat of Gog and the Beast.
3. Both Ezekiel 38:22 and Revelation 16:21 use similar plague language to describe the destruction of the Antichrist and his kingdom. As we already saw, Ezekiel derived his plague language from the book of Exodus. In Revelation, the plagues of the original Passover story are also referenced, particularly extreme weather and hail. “And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of hail, because its plague was extremely severe” (Rev. 16:21).
4. Ezekiel 38:20 says that when Gog is defeated, “the mountains also will be thrown down, the steep pathways will collapse and every wall will fall to the ground.” Revelation 16:20 says that when the Beast is defeated, “every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.”
5. Ezekiel 38:19 associates the destruction of Gog with the Lord’s “blazing wrath.” Revelation 16:19 associates the destruction of the Antichrist with “the cup of the wine of” the “fierce wrath” of God.

The repetition of all of these precise theological themes from Ezekiel in Revelation 16 and 19, lends an immense amount of support to the idea that Gog's defeat in Ezekiel 38-39 is synonymous with the defeat of the Antichrist, which Revelation even more clearly states will not occur until after the Second Coming. Many scholars have discerned the close relationship between these two groups of texts in Ezekiel and Revelation, including New Testament scholar Grant R. Osborne. When commenting on Revelation 16 Osborne writes, the background to this text "is also the Gog-Magog tradition of Ezekiel 38-39 depicting the final war with the enemies of God."⁶ Similarly, in his magisterial commentary on Ezekiel, Old Testament scholar Daniel Block also writes:

Allusions to the Gog oracle appear in Christian apocalyptic tradition, probably as a result of Jewish influence. Most notable is John's portrayal of the eschatological conflicts in Rev. 19-20. The scene of the birds gathered for the great supper of God in 19:17-21 is clearly borrowed from Ezekiel's last frame (39:17-20). [...] **Although this passage never mentions Gog by name, the beast [...] certainly represents him. In the prophecy John fills in several details missing from Ezekiel's prophecy.**⁷

The reason most prophecy teachers today do not make the connection between the defeat of Gog in Ezekiel 38-39, and the defeat of the Antichrist in Revelation, is because they adhere to an interpretive tradition that has led them to believe that Gog and the Antichrist must be two different people. As a result, they are then forced to develop various prophetic scenarios in which a political leader distinct from the Antichrist, named Gog, will be defeated sometime before the start of, or

6 Grant R. Osborne, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 596. See also Joel Richardson's excellent summary of scholarly positions on the link between Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 16 & 19; *Mideast Beast: The Scriptural Case for an Islamic Antichrist* (Washington D.C.: World Net Daily, 2012), 179-183.

7 Daniel I. Block, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25-48* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 490-491.

possibly by the midpoint of, Daniel's 70th week (see chapter 14). From this point, the compounding errors in their eschatology only continue to multiply.

In reality, Ezekiel 38-39 is much more straightforward than many prophecy teachers have led us to believe. The defeat of Gog in this passage describes the defeat of the Antichrist at the Battle of Armageddon. As is so often the case, the different Biblical prophets, in this case Ezekiel and John, received complementary visions from the Holy Spirit regarding the same events, both of which were rooted in the original revelation given to Moses and Balaam in the Torah (Num. 24).

A BRIEF COMMENT ON REVELATION 20:7-9

Before we move on to examine one more piece of evidence that links Gog's defeat to the start of Jesus' millennial reign, I do feel I should pause briefly to say a few words about the relationship between Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 20:7-9. In Revelation 20:7-9 we are told that after the "thousand years" of Jesus' millennial reign on earth,

Satan will be released from prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.

Because of the reference to Gog and Magog in this passage, some interpreters have argued that the defeat of Gog in Ezekiel 38-39 might take place not at the end of the 70th week, but instead, at the end of the Millennium. Old Testament scholar J. Paul Tanner defends this position in his paper, "Rethinking Ezekiel's Invasion By Gog." Tanner writes that the "most plausible time of fulfillment [of Ezekiel 38-39] is at the end of the millennium when Satan has been released and allowed to deceive the nations one final time to strike Israel."⁸

8 J. Paul Tanner, "Rethinking Ezekiel's Invasion By Gog," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 39/1 (March 1996) 29-46.

Contrary to Tanner's suggestion, the events of Revelation 20:7-9 should be understood as part of a *second* battle that is distinct from the one mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39. As we have already seen, Gog is the Antichrist who conquers and plunders Israel during the Great Tribulation (Ezek. 39:10), and causes a large percentage of the nation to go into exile (Ezek. 39:27-28). Gog's invasion of Israel will begin a period of time during which the Lord will hide His face from Israel because of their iniquity (Ezek. 39:23).

Placing the events of Ezekiel 38-39 at the end of the Millennium would not allow for this final period of discipline and exile to take place, because as we see in Revelation 20, the invasion mentioned in this text is immediately thwarted, which then paves the way for the final judgment (Rev. 20:11-15), and the establishment of the New Heavens and the New Earth (Rev. 21-22). Also, it would be completely absurd to say that God will hide His face from Israel after the Millennium, when the nation has already been living in God's presence for 1,000 years!

Another problem with placing the events of Ezekiel 38-39 at the end of the Millennium, is that those who hold to this position are forced to ignore the numerous intertextual links between Ezekiel 38-39 and the Second Coming/Armageddon texts in Revelation 16 and 19. This is a major problem. We cannot brush all of these connections under the rug, because John very intentionally presents the Battle of Armageddon, which takes place soon after the return of Jesus, as the fulfillment of Ezekiel 38-39.

Finally, we can be certain that Ezekiel 38-39 will be fulfilled not after the Millennium, but rather, soon after Jesus returns to this earth, because the conclusion of the Gog of Magog episode leads to the salvation of Israel and the nations, and a massive outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We know from many other Scriptures that these are events that will take place right after the Davidic Messiah begins His reign in Israel (Ezek. 37; 39:29). To say that Ezekiel 38-39 will not be fulfilled until after the millennial reign, is akin to saying that Israel and the nations will not walk in the knowledge of God, or receive His Spirit, until Jesus has

already been on the earth for 1,000 years. This is an untenable position.

What all this means is that the battle described after the Millennium in Revelation 20 may very well be a sort of prophetic replay of the original 70th week invasion by Gog. There is an element of history repeating itself here, and it is certainly significant that “Gog and Magog” are mentioned again in Revelation 20. I do not deny the link between this passage and Ezekiel 38-39. However, this link does not automatically mean that we can conflate these two passages, primarily because the events spoken of in Revelation 20 do not adequately harmonize with *all* of the events described in Ezekiel 38-39.

THE SEVEN MONTHS OF CLEANSING IN EZEKIEL 39

One final piece of evidence that confirms the timing of Gog’s defeat can be found in the repeated refrain in Ezekiel 39, which mentions how Gog and his armies will be buried for seven months, “in order to cleanse the land” (39:12-16). As we read in Ezekiel 39:14-16, at this time:

They will set apart men who will constantly pass through the land, burying those who were passing through, even those left on the surface of the ground, **in order to cleanse it**. At the end of seven months they will make a search. As those who pass through the land pass through and anyone sees a man’s bone, then he will set up a marker by it until the buriers have buried it in the valley of Hamon-gog. And even the name of the city will be Hamonah. **So they will cleanse the land** (Ezek. 39:14-16).

The main idea in this passage is that after the birds of prey and beasts of the field feast on the flesh of Gog and his armies, there will be an abundance of partial corpses and bones left over in Israel. As a result, certain people, called “buriers” in verse 15, will have to spend seven full months cleaning up the mess and cleansing the Land.

At first glance, this emphasis on the meticulous burial of Gog and his armies may seem somewhat strange and out of place to us modern readers. Most teaching on Ezekiel 38-39 ignores or glosses over Ezekiel 39:14-16.

However, what we need to recognize is that the reason there is so much emphasis on the burial of the dead in these verses, is because Ezekiel wanted to demonstrate the correlation between the defeat of Gog and his armies, and the arrival of God's manifest presence in Israel during the Messianic Age. In other words, there is an emphasis in 39:14-16 on the cleansing of the Land, because this is the necessary prerequisite that will allow the Glory of the Lord to be manifest in the Millennial Temple (Ezek. 40-43).

In the Torah, dead human bodies and corpses were always associated with ritual defilement. Contact with the dead made a person "ceremonially unclean" and unable to participate in divine worship at the Tabernacle (Num. 19:11-22). In addition, no ancient Israelite would ever have conceived of God's Glory dwelling in a land full of corpses.

When Ezekiel emphasizes the cleansing of the Land after the defeat of Gog, he is showing us how at this time Israel will be more zealous for the presence of the Lord than ever before. For the first time in their history Israel will actually take God seriously, and do whatever is necessary to prepare for the building of His sanctuary in their midst. As noted by Block, "Once the city (and the entire land) has been purged of every vestige of defilement, the stage is set" for the Glory of God to return to Israel (Ezek. 43:1-5).⁹

Once we understand how the cleansing of the Land in Ezekiel 39 is connected to the establishment of the Millennial Temple, it becomes even easier to see that the defeat of Gog must take place at the end of the 70th week, when Jesus returns. Those who say that Gog is not the Antichrist, and that he is defeated either before the 70th week, or by the midpoint of the 70th week, are forced to ignore how Ezekiel presents the burial of Gog and his armies as a preliminary step of purification that sets the stage for the dedication of the Messianic Temple, which is where God will set His glory "among the nations" after Jesus returns (Ezek. 39:21). The death of Gog leads to the purification of the Land, which leads to the building

9 Block, 472.

of the Messianic Temple, which leads to the Glory of the Lord dwelling among the Israelites in the Age to Come. When read from a macro, literary perspective, this is the main point of Ezekiel 39-43.

As a brief aside, some may also wonder why Ezekiel 39:14 mentions that the Land of Israel will be cleansed for “seven months” after Jesus returns. This specific timeframe may indicate that the Messianic Temple will not be dedicated until seven months after the Second Coming. I cannot prove this beyond any shadow of a doubt, but I have often wondered if this reference to the seven months of cleansing is meant to connect the eventual dedication of the Temple in the Messianic Age, to Israel’s fall festivals, including the Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement, and Feast of Tabernacles.

As I mentioned in chapter 3, Passover occurs in the first month on the Biblical calendar (i.e. in *Aviv*), in the spring, while Israel’s later fall feasts occur six months later, in the seventh month. If Jesus does in fact return just before Passover, which I believe is possible, then Ezekiel 39:14 would indicate that seven months later, during the time of the fall feasts, is when the nations will be gathered to Jerusalem to witness the dedication of the Temple, and to joyfully celebrate the establishment of God’s kingdom (see Zech. 14:16-18).

Of course, I am not dogmatic about the idea that the “seven months” in Ezekiel 39 correlates to the time between the first Biblical month, when Passover occurs (or the time right before), and the fall feasts. However, given that Ezekiel does connect the Second Coming of Jesus and the defeat of Gog to Passover, it is possible that he was also connecting the final cleansing of the Land and the dedication of the Millennial Temple to Israel’s later fall feasts. Even if it takes longer than seven months to build this final Temple, which is also a definite possibility, I still suspect that the first season of fall holy days after the End-Times Passover will possess deep prophetic significance as the Messianic Age begins.

Further support for the idea that the fall feasts have a prophetic significance related to the dedication of the Messianic Temple may also be found in Israel’s past history. The book of 1 Kings records that Solomon

brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem during the Feast of Tabernacles, “in the seventh month” (1 Ki. 8:2), and also dedicated the first Temple at this time as well (1 Kings 8:65-66). In like manner, the book of Ezra records that it was during the Feast of Tabernacles that the Jewish exiles who returned from Babylonian captivity once again began offering sacrifices to God in Jerusalem (Ezra 3:1-7).

What this means is that there is a definite precedent in the Hebrew Bible linking the dedication of God’s holy Temple to the fall feasts. Because this is the case, it is certainly possible that the later Hebrew prophets also understood the fall feasts to be connected to the climactic celebrations that will take place after the End-Times Passover, once the Messiah has solidified His rule, been enthroned in the Messianic Temple, cleansed Israel and the nations, and ushered in the age when God’s glory will fill the entire earth (Ezek. 43:1-5).

THE FULFILLMENT OF THE FEASTS AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Below is a brief overview of how I believe all of the Biblical feasts will be fulfilled in the future, when Jesus returns. I am still tentative on some of the details related to each of the feasts. Nevertheless, I thought this information would be helpful for people who want a better understanding of why Paul said in Colossians 2:17 that all of the feasts are a “shadow” and anticipation of “what is to come.”

- **Passover, Unleavened Bread, and First Fruits:** Jesus delivers Israel and leads them through their End-Times Exodus. He fulfills His role as the New Moses and defeats the Final Pharaoh with a miraculous outpouring of plagues and judgment. Passover is celebrated “in the kingdom of God,” as the first Biblical feast that takes place in the Messianic Age, in the spring. Key Scriptures: Numbers 24:8; Deuteronomy 18:15-18; 33:1-5; Isaiah 11:11-16; 27:12-13; Ezekiel 38-39; Hosea 2:14-15; Micah 7:14; Habakkuk 3:1-15; Psalm 68; Zechariah 9:11-17; 10:11; Luke 22:15-16; Revelation 15-16.

- **The Feast of Weeks (*Shavuot*/Pentecost):** After the Second Coming, Jesus initiates the greatest outpouring of the Holy Spirit in all of history. Israel and the nations are baptized in the Spirit, empowered to walk in God's ways, and given spiritual gifts in great abundance. Key Scriptures: Ezekiel 36:22-27; 37:7-14; Joel 2:28-29; Zechariah 12:10-14.
- **The Feast of Trumpets:** Just as Israel was called to Mt. Sinai with the sound of a great trumpet blast (i.e. rams horn; Ex. 19:13, 19), all the peoples of the earth will be called to appear before the Messiah at Mt. Zion in Jerusalem. From there He will teach us His ways and enter into judgment with mighty nations. Key Scriptures: Isaiah 18:3, 7; 2:2-4; 27:12-13; 66:18-21; Zechariah 8:20-23; Psalm 68:29-35. (Note: Many people might mention that the Rapture will represent the eschatological fulfillment of the Feast of Trumpets. That may or may not be partially true, but in this context, I am trying to point out how the Feast of Trumpets will also have ongoing significance even after the kingdom of God is established).
- **The Day of Atonement:** The Messiah purifies both His land and His people. He cleanses the nations of their impurities, and fills the earth with the knowledge of the glory of God. Key Scriptures: Deuteronomy 32:43; Habakkuk 2:14; Ezekiel 39:11-16; Romans 11:26-27.
- **The Feast of Tabernacles:** The earth will be blessed with agricultural abundance like the garden of Eden. Israel and the nations will celebrate God's presence, provision, victory, and reign at the Temple in Jerusalem with great joy and feasting. Key Scriptures: Zechariah 14:16-19.
- **Sabbath:** Jesus is enthroned as the King of all creation. All the peoples of the earth will worship Him from "new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath" (Isaiah 66:23).

JUST KEEP IT SIMPLE

I hope the last two chapters have helped you see that Ezekiel 38-39 is much more straightforward than many people have been led to believe. This critical prophecy is a concise summary of the Time of Jacob's Trouble, the exploits of the Antichrist, and the return of Jesus to this earth. Out of all of the prophecies in the Hebrew Bible, it is also perhaps Ezekiel 38-39 that best explains why in the Gospel of Luke Jesus associated the kingdom of God and His Second Coming with Passover. Ezekiel 38-39 represents the canonical development of an idea first introduced by Moses in Numbers 24 and Deuteronomy 33. Namely, that the end times and the return of the Messiah to this earth should be understood through the lens of Israel's original Passover and exodus from Egypt.

GOG AND THE RUSSIANS?

“When we study a book of the Bible we are seeking to be controlled by the intent of the author. We are determined to hear what he is saying, not what we want him to say.”

—RICHARD FOSTER

ONE OF THE GREATEST BENEFITS Ezekiel 38-39 has to offer as we seek to obtain a better understanding of Biblical eschatology, is that this passage mentions many specific nations that will be involved in Gog’s invasion of Israel during the Time of Jacob’s Trouble. In many respects, Ezekiel 38-39 tells us more about the geopolitical entities that will form an alliance against Israel during the end times than any other passage in Scripture.

Unfortunately however, over the last 100 years or so, many prophecy teachers have mistakenly connected Gog and his kingdom to the land of Russia. As a result, many believers today assume, without ever taking a look at all of the relevant data, that Gog will be a Russian.

In this chapter, I want to explain why Gog will in all likelihood not come from Russia, and why the “Russian-led invasion” theory of Ezekiel 38-39 is inaccurate. Then, in the next chapter, we will take a closer look at what Ezekiel actually does tell us about the native region

of Gog, as well as the nations he will lead in an attack against Israel before the return of Jesus.

Before we begin, I do also want to add that this chapter will be the most technical and academic chapter in this entire book. I will try to keep things as simple and straightforward as possible. However, because determining which nations will be involved in the Ezekiel 38-39 invasion is such a vitally important topic, I do feel that it needs to be analyzed in the most comprehensive and detailed way possible.

ROSH, MESECH, AND TUBAL?

When trying to pinpoint where Gog comes from, one of the first things we need to do is determine the best possible translation of Ezekiel 38:2. In the NASB this verse is translated:

Son of man, set your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal [...]

As we can see, according to the NASB, Gog is said to come from the land of Magog, and is also described as the prince (*nasi*) of three places: Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. The same general translation of Ezekiel 38:2 can also be found in the New King James Version of the Bible.

In contrast to the NASB and the NKJV however, many other modern translations of the Bible describe Gog not as the “prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal,” but instead, as “*the chief [rosh] prince of Meshech and Tubal.*”

King James Version: “Son of man, set thy face against Gog, the land of Magog, the chief [*rosh*] prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him [...].”

New International Version: “Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief [*rosh*] prince of Meshek and Tubal; prophesy against him [...].”

English Standard Version: “Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief [*rosh*] prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him [...].”

Holman Christian Standard Bible: “Son of man, turn your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief [*rosh*] prince of Meshech and Tubal. Prophesy against him [...].”

Jewish Publication Society: “O mortal, turn your face toward Gog of the land of Magog, the chief [*rosh*] prince of Meshech and Tubal. Prophesy against him [...].”

At the heart of this discrepancy in the major translations of Ezekiel 38:2, is the question of whether the Hebrew word “*rosh*” in this verse should be transliterated as the proper name of a place/people group (i.e. Rosh), or instead, translated as an adjective modifying the word “prince,” thus, “chief (*rosh*) prince (*nasi*).” The implications connected to where a person lands on this issue are quite significant, primarily because the phonetic similarity between the word *rosh* and Russia has been the driving force behind the popular theory that Gog will be a Russian.

EZEKIEL 38:2 IN THE ANCIENT MANUSCRIPTS

The idea that *rosh* in the Hebrew text of Ezekiel 38:2 should be translated as a proper noun, Rosh, goes back quite far into antiquity. The Greek Septuagint (LXX), as well as two other ancient Greek versions of the Hebrew Bible, Theodotian and Symmachus, translate *rosh* as a proper name. Furthermore, it is also possible that the punctuation of the Masoretic Text supports this reading as well, though scholars are not in agreement on this, and both sides use the MT to support different readings.¹

1 Ezekiel scholar Daniel Block writes that the Masoretic “construct pointing” implies that they read *rosh* in Ezekiel 38:2 as a proper name. However, Sverre Boe in his excellent work *Gog and Magog* states the opposite. Block also seems to be uncertain of his own position on this at some points as well. See Daniel I. Block, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament, The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 25-45* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 434-435. Also, Sverre Boe, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38-39 as a Pre-text for Revelation 19,17-21 and 20,7-10* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 100.

Alternatively, there are also some ancient manuscripts of the Bible that imply that Ezekiel refers to Gog as the “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal,” not as “the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.” The Aramaic Targum of Jonathan seems to support this reading, as does the Greek version of the Old Testament known as Aquila, and the Latin Vulgate. The Latin in the Vulgate is particularly striking, as it presents Gog as the “*principem capitus Mosoch et Thubal*.”

It is not uncommon for people defending different translations of Ezekiel 38:2 to point to the ancient texts that support their case, while at the same time ignoring all of the competing manuscript evidence. However, what we need to recognize at this point is that the only thing the ancient manuscripts conclusively prove, is that the debate over how to properly translate Ezekiel 38:2 has been going on for over 2,000 years. From manuscript evidence alone, no firm conclusions can be reached regarding which translation is best.

BIBLE STUDY 101

Because the ancient manuscripts present two different translations of Ezekiel 38:2, we then have to ask how we should go about determining which translation is the most accurate. Are we doomed to uncertainty on this issue, or a simple coin toss?

I do not believe we are, and as I will now try to demonstrate, the translation “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal,” or something similar, is in fact the best translation of Ezekiel 38:2 when all of the evidence is weighed objectively. To briefly elaborate, the word *rosh* in verse 2 is in all likelihood modifying the word “prince” (*nasi*) as an adjective, or at the very least, as a clarifying term. It is highly improbable that Ezekiel wanted us to read *rosh* as the proper name of a nation or people group, and it is even more unlikely that he intended this word to be understood as a reference to Russia.

Why do I say this, and how can we be so sure?

For one, the word *rosh*, and its derivatives, are used almost exclusively in the Hebrew Bible to mean “head, chief, top, or foremost.” This

is simply what the word means in both Biblical and modern Hebrew.

The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament gives the following definition of the word *rosh*:

[T]he primary meaning of this root [*rosh*] is “head.” It is common to all Semitic languages and appears in its root forms nearly 750 times. It is used for the “head” as part of the body (Gen 3:15) and by extension for the notion of “chief” of a family (Ex 6:14), as “chief officer” of the divisions of Israel (Ex 18:25) and the like. [...] It is also used for the top or summit of a geographical feature such as a mountain or hill (Ex 17:9) and the upper part of a building or architectural feature (Gen 11:4; II Chr 3:15) [...] **The root is widely used in the OT with other terms in the sense of the superlative** [...] There are many examples of this usage (Ex 30:23) where the meaning is “best,” “foremost,” “the uniquely finest” etc.²

Nearly all modern Bible dictionaries and lexicons, as well as most academic commentaries, support the idea that in Ezekiel 38:2 the term *rosh* is used in a manner consistent with its traditional meaning throughout the Hebrew Bible, not as a proper name, but rather, to communicate that Gog is the lead or chief prince of a particular region. In a direct parallel to how *rosh* is used as a modifying term in Ezekiel 38:2, the term is used in a similar way in 2 Kings 25:18, 2 Chronicles 19:11, 27:5, 31:10, and Ezra 7:5. These verses use *rosh* to modify the word “priest,” as in, “the chief priest.” This phrase (the chief priest) appears in the following forms in these verses: *kohen harosh*, *hakohen harosh*, and *hakohen rosh*.

Two other interpretive clues that hint at how *rosh* should be understood in Ezekiel 38:2 can also be found in Numbers 10:4 and 36:1. In these verses we read about the “chief princes” (*hanasim rashey*) of Israel. It is quite significant that here in the book of Numbers both *rosh* (chief)

2 William White, “rosh,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, eds. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, & Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1980), 825-827.

and *nasi* (prince) are used in a way that closely parallels the way these terms are used in Ezekiel 38-39.

Given the numerous instances in which *rosh* was used with another designated title throughout the Old Testament, primarily to indicate a top leader within a larger class of leaders, it is doubtful that Ezekiel would have suddenly and randomly used the word in a different way in Ezekiel 38:2. Those who say otherwise (i.e. NASB & NKJV) are in essence saying that Ezekiel was using *rosh* in a way that completely contradicts its normal range of meaning throughout the entire Hebrew Bible, and also in the book of Ezekiel itself.

The only time *rosh* is ever used as a proper name anywhere in the Bible is once, in Genesis 46:21, where it refers to one of the sons of Benjamin. However, in this verse, the context does not allow that *rosh* could refer to anything other than the proper name of an individual, which is not the case in Ezekiel 38:2. Below are a handful of other examples that summarize the current consensus among Old Testament scholars concerning how *rosh* should be understood in this prophetic passage:

- “Accordingly, the prince, chief of Meshech and Tubal, combines Ezekiel’s preferred title for kings with a hierarchical designation, the addition serving to clarify the preceding [...] term. Ezekiel’s point is that Gog is not just one of many [...] princely figures, but the leader among princes and over several tribal/national groups” (Daniel I. Block, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25-48*).³
- “Gog is called the “chief prince” of Meshech and Tubal” (Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr., *The New American Commentary, Vol. 17: Ezekiel*).⁴

3 Daniel I. Block, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25-48* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 435.

4 Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr., *The New American Commentary, Volume 17: Ezekiel* (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 331.

- “It seems probable that the Hebrew text should be understood such that [*rosh*] means “head” or “chief” (Sverre Boe, *Gog and Magog*).⁵
- “[T]he designation “chief prince” is only used of the tribal chiefs of Israel in the book of Numbers (10.4; 36.1). Numbers 10.4 refers to the “princes [...], chiefs [...] of the tribes of Israel.” Numbers 36.1, likewise, refers to the “princes [...], chiefs [...] of the ancestral houses. The author of [Ezekiel 38-39] seems to have reapplied the phrase to Gog, as leader of all the “tribes” of nations” (William A. Tooman, *Gog of Magog*).⁶

When I was in Bible college, one of the first things we learned was that in order to determine the meaning of a Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic word, we should look primarily at how the word is used throughout the Bible. Usage *within the Bible itself* is what determines a word’s range of meaning. Then, once all the various ways a term is used in the Bible have been analyzed, a decision can be made on the most likely meaning of that word when it appears in a number of different contexts.

Rosh is a fundamental Hebrew word. It’s one of the first words a beginning Hebrew student learns, and it is still commonly used in Israel today to refer to heads of state (i.e. the prime minister is called *rosh hamemshela*, or, “the head of the government”). We should always be open-minded and willing to consider the validity of different interpretations of Scripture. However, we should also be hesitant to advocate for an alternate reading of the text that goes against the most fundamental rules of normal speech and vocabulary. As things stand now, I do not find any conclusive evidence within the Hebrew Bible to support the idea that *rosh* in Ezekiel 38:2 could mean anything other than “head,

5 Sverre Boe, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38-39 as a Pre-text for Revelation 19,17-21 and 20,7-10* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 101.

6 William A. Tooman, *Gog of Magog: Reuse of Scripture and Compositional Technique in Ezekiel 38-39* (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 151.

chief, foremost, etc.” I will cover some of the competing claims to the contrary later in this chapter. But suffice it to say for now, that the translations of Ezekiel 38:2, both ancient and modern, that present Gog as the “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal,” are the most accurate (i.e. KJV, NIV, ESV, HCSB, JPS).

A PLACE CALLED ROSH IN THE BIBLE?

In addition to the basic dictionary definition of *rosh*, the second primary reason I do not interpret this word in Ezekiel 38:2 as a proper name, is because from Genesis to Revelation, the Bible never identifies any place or people group called *rosh*. As we will see, all of the other proper names mentioned in Ezekiel 38:2-6 can be found quite easily in other parts of the Bible as references to proper nations or geographic locales, whereas *rosh* cannot. This is critical to understand, because it implies that in verses 2-6, Ezekiel was drawing his list of nations from the preexisting geopolitical framework of the Hebrew Bible.

To see why Ezekiel mentioned the proper nations he did in Ezekiel 38:2-6, we need to look at each of them a little closer. After Gog, the next three proper names mentioned in this passage are Magog, Meshech, and Tubal. Not coincidentally, these three proper names are first mentioned together in Genesis 10:2, where they refer to three of Japheth’s sons:

The sons of Japheth were Gomer and **Magog** and Madai and Javan and **Tubal** and **Meshech** and Tiras.

In this verse, just like in Ezekiel 38:2, Magog, Meshech, and Tubal all appear together. However, there is no mention of anyone called Rosh. Similarly, in Ezekiel 27:13 and Ezekiel 32:26, Meshech and Tubal also appear together as the proper names of different nations/people groups (i.e. the descendants of the original pair), but again, Rosh is nowhere to be found.

When referring to Tyre in Ezekiel 27:13 Ezekiel says, “Javan, Tubal and Meshech, they were your traders [...]” Then, in Ezekiel 32:36 we read, “Meshech, Tubal and all their hordes are there [...]”.

There are two important takeaways from this data so far. First, in Ezekiel 38, Ezekiel is definitely extrapolating his list of nations mostly from the original “Table of Nations” in Genesis 10, as well as the writings of the other Hebrew prophets. Second, because Meshech and Tubal already appear two times as a pair in the chapters leading up to Ezekiel 38, it is most logically consistent to also conclude that Ezekiel is presenting them as a pair again in Ezekiel 38:2. It would not make sense for Meshech and Tubal to suddenly appear with some previously unknown and unmentioned entity called Rosh in Ezekiel 38:2.

Besides Magog, Meshech, and Tubal, the other five nations mentioned in Ezekiel 38:2-6, which will comprise the bulk of Gog’s army, include Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, and Beth-Togarmah:

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshek and Tubal. I will turn you around, put hooks in your jaws and bring you out with your whole army—your horses, your horsemen fully armed, and a great horde with large and small shields, all of them brandishing their swords. **Persia, Cush, and Put will be with them**, all with shields and helmets, also **Gomer with all its troops, and Beth Togarmah** from the far north with all its troops—the many nations with you” (Ezek. 38:3-6; NIV).

Just like Magog, Meshech, and Tubal, all of these other nations are also repeatedly referred to throughout the Hebrew Bible. Persia was well known in Ezekiel’s day as the eastern kingdom that would eventually conquer the Babylonians (2 Chron. 36:20-23; Dan. 8:20, 10:1-20, 11:2). Cush is mentioned in the original Table of Nations as one of Ham’s sons and the father of Nimrod (Gen. 10:6-8). By Ezekiel’s time, Cush represented a well-known geographical region and people group, and one that is mentioned numerous times in the Hebrew prophets (Ps. 68:31, 87:4; Is. 11:11, 18:1, 20:3-5, 37:9, 43:3, 45:14; Jer. 46:9; Nah. 3:9; Zep. 3:10). Prior to Ezekiel 38, Ezekiel himself refers to Cush at least three times (Ezek. 30:4-9).

Along with Cush, Put was also one of Ham’s sons, mentioned in

the original Table of Nations (Gen. 10:6). Besides Ezekiel 38:2, Put appears as a nation in Jeremiah 46:9, Ezekiel 27:10, Ezekiel 30:5, and Nahum 3:9.

Gomer appears less often in the Hebrew Bible, but this name is mentioned in the Table of Nations to describe one of the sons of Japheth (Gen. 10:2-3; cf. 1 Chron. 1:5-6). Likewise, Togarmah is listed as one of the sons of Gomer in Genesis 10:3, and Ezekiel also mentions Beth-Togarmah in Ezekiel 27:14, in the very same context in which he speaks of Meshech, Tubal, Persia, and Put.

When we search the entire Bible for the names of the different nations/peoples mentioned in Ezekiel 38:2-6, all of them can be found quite easily in multiple places throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. Most of them can also be found earlier in the book of Ezekiel itself, sometimes even in the very same verse or passage.

Conversely, no nation or people called *rosh* can be found anywhere else in the entire Bible. This creates a serious problem for those who say that *rosh* in Ezekiel 38:2-3 must refer to a nation or specific people group.

I find it hard to accept that we could say on the one hand, all of the locations/peoples mentioned in this passage were drawn from the preexisting geopolitical framework of the Hebrew Bible, but then on the other hand, that Ezekiel also introduced a new and previously unknown place called Rosh in this passage as well. Do you see the inconsistency and contradiction there? If a place called Rosh is going to play a prominent role in end-time events, why was this place not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, like all of the other proper place names that appear in Ezekiel 38:2-3? Because an overt reference to a people or place called Rosh cannot be found anywhere else in the Bible, and because the word *rosh* means “head or chief” in almost every other instance in Scripture, we should not presume to read an additional proper name into the text of Ezekiel 38:2-3. As of now, the only thing we can conclude with absolute certainty is that Ezekiel 38:2-3 says the following nations will play a unique role in the unfolding of end-time events: Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, and Beth-Togarmah.

RESPONDING TO OBJECTIONS

As much as I believe Ezekiel 38:2-3 refers to Gog as the “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal,” I do also understand that a case can be made for interpreting *rosh* in this passage as a proper name. For this reason, what I want to do now is cover some of the primary pieces of evidence that are often cited by those who believe Ezekiel spoke of Gog as the “prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal.” At this time, I am not convinced that any of this evidence is strong enough to justify reading *rosh* as a proper name. However, it is still important to know and understand where other people are coming from on this issue.

THE GRAMMAR AND SYNTAX OF EZEKIEL 38:2-3

If *rosh* means “head, chief, foremost, etc.”, why can’t we just agree to read this word in Ezekiel 38:2-3 in light of its normal dictionary definition? One simple answer to this question is because the Hebrew grammar and sentence structure used in Ezekiel 38:2-3 is somewhat awkward and unconventional. Based strictly on the normal rules of Hebrew grammar and syntax, a case can be made for reading *rosh* as a proper name. Because of this, most serious scholars who are in favor of this interpretation will usually begin with the “grammatical argument” to support their position. It is not uncommon to hear things such as, “‘the chief prince’ translation fails grammatically.”⁷

While it is well beyond the scope of this book to delve into the nuances of Hebrew grammar and syntax,⁸ I can say that reading Ezekiel 38:2-3 as a reference to the “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal” does not completely violate all of the rules of Biblical Hebrew. This is why most Hebrew language scholars now recognize that although the reading “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal” requires us to bend some of the

7 Jon Mark Ruthven with Ihab Griess, *The Prophecy that is Shaping History: New Research on Ezekiel’s Vision of the End* (Fairfax: Xulon Press, 2003), 22.

8 See James D. Price, “Rosh: An Ancient Land Known to Ezekiel,” *Grace Theological Journal* (1985) 67-89.

normal rules of Hebrew grammar, it does not break them completely.⁹

In other words, the translation “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal” still fits within the overall grammatical boundaries of the Hebrew language. In the process of communication, there will always be exceptions to basic grammatical rules, and there is much more evidence in the Hebrew Bible to support the idea that *rosh* in Ezekiel 38:2-3 is modifying the noun “prince” (*nasi*), than there is evidence to support the idea that *rosh* is the proper name of a people group or nation. Old Testament scholar J. Paul Tanner has summarized this position well, stating,

[W]e must admit that the grammatical construction is difficult [in Ezekiel 38:2]. But the noun form of [*rosh* to modify another title] is used in 2 Kings 25:18 in a somewhat similar construction for the chief priest: *kohen harosh* [literally: “priest the chief”]. In 1 Chronicles 27:5 the position of the article is reversed, the result being *hakohen rosh*.¹⁰

THE LAND OF RASHI, RISHI, RESHU AND THE RESHITES

Besides the grammatical argument, those who believe *rosh* in Ezekiel 38-39 is a proper name will also often point to the phonetic similarities between the word *rosh*, and the names of some other peoples and lands that are mentioned in certain extrabiblical sources. For example, as James D. Price has demonstrated, there are in fact ancient

9 I say this because, admittedly, the translation “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal,” or “the prince, chief of Meshech and Tubal,” does run against the normal syntax rules of what is called a “Hebrew construct chain.” Normally in Biblical Hebrew, there would not be an intervening word (*rosh*) in between the construct noun, in this case “prince” (*nasi*), and the genitive or absolute nouns that follow (i.e. the places that Gog is said to be the prince of). See Gary D. Pratico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew: Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 95-104. However, there are examples of “broken construct chains” in the Hebrew Bible and many Hebrew grammarians have pointed this out. See Ronald J. Williams, *Williams’ Hebrew Syntax, Third Edition* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 7-10. Furthermore, a word’s normative set of definitions within the Bible itself carries more weight when determining its meaning than grammar and syntax alone, quite simply because grammatical rules are sometimes flexible in the course of everyday speech.

10 J. Paul Tanner, “Rethinking Ezekiel’s Invasion By Gog,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 39/1 (March 1996) 29-46. Please note, I have expanded Tanner’s abbreviations and modified some of his transliterations to facilitate a better reader experience.

Mesopotamian records that refer to the lands of Rashi or Rishi, and a people known as the Reshites. In the Annals of Sargon (c. 722-705 BC) we find these words:

In the might and power of the great gods, my lords...I cut down all my foes...the lands of Ellipi and **Rashi which are on the Elamite border on the banks of the Tigris.**¹¹

Besides Sargon, the Assyrian kings Sennacherib (705-681 BC) and Assurbanipal (c. 668-627 BC) also mention the same land of Rashi/Rishi. In addition, other ancient literature mentions a people called the Reshites as well.

Based on this evidence, scholars like Price have argued that the appearance of Rashi, Rishi, and the Reshites in these extrabiblical sources is proof that the word *rosh* in Ezekiel 38:2-3 is a proper name, and that Ezekiel was probably referring to this same ancient people group and their land. After all, each of these words do sound very similar.

Many other prophecy teachers have latched onto this idea as well. They believe that because words similar to *rosh* appear in some ancient sources as a proper noun, this must be solid evidence that *rosh* in Ezekiel 38 should be understood in the same way. This sentiment is summarized by Ron Rhodes (who quotes prophecy teachers Tim LaHaye, Ed Hindson, and Tommy Ice) in his book, *Northern Storm Rising*. Rhodes states:

Rosh appears as a place name in Egyptian inscriptions as Rash as early as 2600 BC, and one inscription from 1500 BC refers to a land called Reshu that was located to the north of Egypt. As a toponym (place name), *Rosh* (or its equivalent) is found over 20 times in other ancient documents. Indeed, the term *Rosh* “is found [...] ten times in Sargon’s inscriptions, once in Assurbanipal’s cylinder, once in Sennacherib’s annals, and five times in Ugaritic tablets.”¹²

¹¹ See Price, 71.

¹² Ron Rhodes, *Northern Storm Rising: Russia, Iran, and the Emerging End-Times Military Coalition Against Israel* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2008), 109.

To be sure, all of these references to a people and land whose name sounds similar to the Hebrew word *rosh* might initially seem like solid proof that Ezekiel was speaking of the same people, which would also imply that *rosh* in Ezekiel 38:2-3 should be read as a proper noun as well. After all, how can the average churchgoer possibly refute someone who is quoting ancient Egyptian and Assyrian texts, and the annals of King Sargon himself! When many people encounter evidence like this, they will often just throw up their hands, and say to themselves, “well, it looks like this teacher really knows what they are talking about. I’ve never been to Bible college or seminary myself, so I guess I should just accept what they are telling me.” But if we take a step back and consider what these prophecy teachers are saying, there are a number of serious problems that come up if we try to equate the *Hebrew* word *rosh* in Ezekiel 38:2-3, with the words Rashi, Rishi, and the Reshites in the extrabiblical *Assyrian* and *Egyptian* literature.

The first problem with reading these words from the extrabiblical literature into Ezekiel 38-39, is related to the “phonetic overlap” that occurs in different languages. Two words can sound the same, even in the same language, and mean completely different things. For example, the name Rush (as in Rush Limbaugh) has absolutely no relationship to the word Russia, even though both words sound very similar. This problem is even further compounded when we compare similar sounding words in different languages. In English we all know what it means to be embarrassed. In Spanish however, the word *embarazada* means pregnant.

Therefore, it is pure conjecture to say that because the word *rosh* in *Hebrew* starts with an “r” sound and ends with an “sh” sound, this must mean it is representing the same land and people group whose name in *Ancient Assyrian* (i.e. Akkadian) also started with an “r” sound and ended with an “sh” sound. When prophecy teachers such as LaHaye, Ice, and Rhodes say that Rosh is mentioned in other ancient sources, they are spinning the facts to suit their own preferred interpretation of Ezekiel 38. What they should actually say is that a people group whose

name, in another language, sounds similar to the Hebrew word *rosh*, is mentioned in some extrabiblical literature. That is all, which proves nothing as far as Ezekiel 38:2-3 is concerned. Two words in different languages cannot be equated just because they sound similar.

Imagine someone saying that the Spanish word for “pregnant” is somehow related to the English word “embarrassed” just because they sound the same. We would say this is absurd. Yet, this is exactly the type of scholarly smoke and mirrors people are using when they conflate *rosh* in Ezekiel 38-39 with Rashi and the Reshites in the extrabiblical sources.

I am not saying the prophecy teachers who espouse this view are purposely deceiving people. But I am saying they are confused, and that their confusion is causing them to unintentionally mislead their audience.

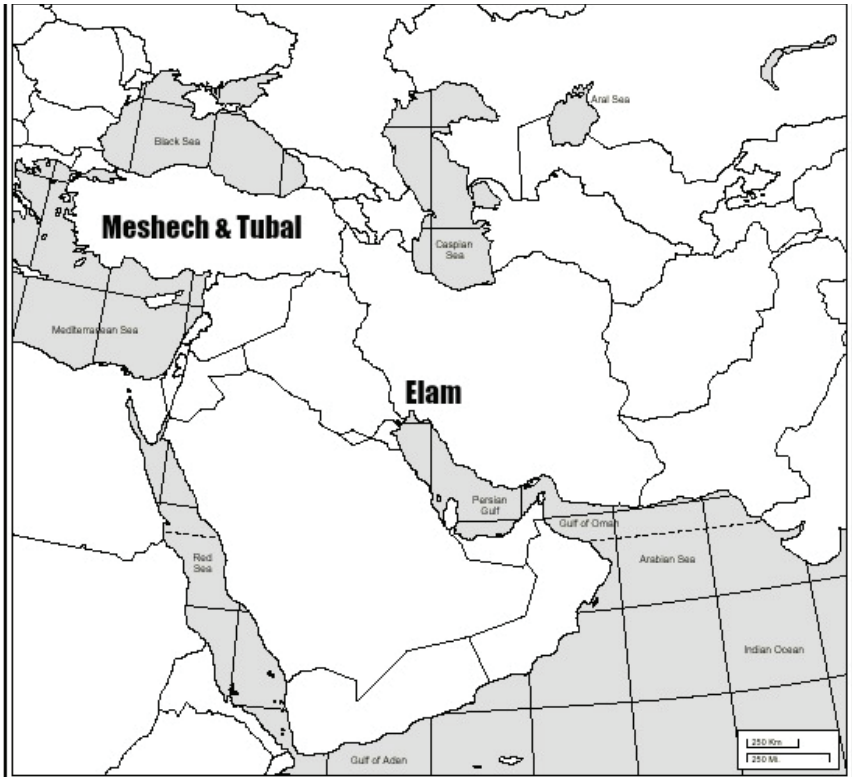
As I mentioned earlier, the way to do solid Biblical exegesis is to determine the meaning of a Biblical word based on the way it is used within the Bible itself. Historical background information can be helpful in exegesis, but when we interpret Ezekiel 38:2-3, we should not use historical background information (i.e the annals of Sargon) as a replacement for doing a proper Hebrew word study of *rosh*, which in turn can show us how Ezekiel, as a Hebrew speaker, would have been using this term.

There will always be similar sounding words in different languages, because there are only so many different phonetic sounds to go around. If a land called Rosh or Rashi was mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, then we could begin to entertain the idea that the extrabiblical literature may confirm that this was the place Ezekiel was speaking of. However, because such a place is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible, whereas every other one of Ezekiel’s nations most certainly is, and because *rosh* has a very well-established definition in Hebrew, we should not conflate the term *rosh* in Ezekiel 38-39 with the similar sounding word for the land of Rashi in the Mesopotamian literature.

The second reason we should not equate *rosh* in Ezekiel 38:2-3 with the land of Rashi and the Reshites in the Mesopotamian literature, is

because geographically this place had nothing to do with the lands of Meshech and Tubal. In the book of Ezekiel, Meshech and Tubal are always mentioned as a pair, because these two places represented a fairly specific geographic location on the map. This is similar to how we reference Dallas/Ft. Worth today. These are technically two distinct areas, but they still represent one broader location. As we will explore further in the next chapter, Meshech and Tubal were in the land of Anatolia/Asia Minor, in modern Turkey, and fairly close to one another.

If Ezekiel meant to include the land of Rashi along with Meshech and Tubal, then we would have to be able to show that the land of Rashi was close to or somehow associated with Meshech and Tubal. However, Sargon tells us specifically that the land of Rashi was “on the Elamite border on the banks of the Tigris.” This places the land of Rashi in modern Iran (ancient Elam), bordering the Persian Gulf and the southeastern border of Iraq, close to a thousand miles away from where we know Meshech and Tubal were!



Even if Ezekiel did know of the land of Rashi (which is certainly possible), he would not have included a reference to this place along with Meshech and Tubal, quite simply because the land of the Elamites was not in any way geographically connected to the lands of Meshech and Tubal. Many scholars have recognized this, and therefore, also dismissed the idea that Ezekiel was referring to the land of Rashi or the Reshites.

- L.C. Allen writes, the “only known ancient geographical name that would resemble the alleged [Rosh] is [Rashi] (or Arasi) of neo-Assyrian records, a district on the border of Babylonia and Elam..., which had nothing in common with Meshech and Tubal.”¹³

¹³ Leslie C. Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 29: Ezekiel 20-48* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 199.

- Ezekiel scholar Daniel Block has expressed a similar view on the obvious disconnect between Meshech and Tubal and the land of Rashi. Block contends that Rashi “was located far to the east on the border between Babylon and Elam, and would have nothing to do with Meshech and Tubal.”¹⁴
- Similarly, Sverre Boe has also noted, “one great obstacle to such identification is the combination of this possible nation [Rashi] with the remote Meshech and Tubal [...]”.¹⁵

Mesech and Tubal are mentioned together by Ezekiel to identify the general region from which Gog will arise. Gog will emerge from a geographically contained area, the area that includes Meshech and Tubal. That’s the point of Ezekiel 38:2-3.

Adding the name of another place into this passage, which was about a thousand miles away from Meshech and Tubal, would contradict the entire purpose of these two verses. It would be like saying Gog comes from the land of Meshech and Tubal, which were very close to each other, but then at the same time, he also comes from the land of Rashi, on the other side of the map. Not only would this make no sense, but it would also bring confusion into the discussion of where Gog is from, when Ezekiel’s entire purpose was to clarify the general region of Gog’s initial domain.

In summary then, there is no linguistic basis to justify reading Ezekiel 38:2-3 as a reference to the land of Rashi that is mentioned in some of the extrabiblical literature. There is also zero geographical basis to connect the land of Rashi in the Mesopotamian records to the lands of Meshech and Tubal in the Bible. What this means is that even when we consider some of the best evidence put forward by those who believe Gog is the “prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal,” this evidence

14 Block 435.

15 Boe, 100.

still does not disprove the idea that Ezekiel was using *rosh* in a manner consistent with its normal dictionary definition. In Hebrew, *rosh* means “head, chief, or foremost.” To interpret this word in Ezekiel 38:2-3 in any other way would require a mountain of solid evidence proving that Ezekiel himself meant to use *rosh* in this passage in a different way. To date, no such evidence exists.

GOG AND THE RUSSIANS

In the last 50-100 years, the primary driving force behind attempts to justify reading *rosh* in Ezekiel 38-39 as a proper name, rather than as part of Gog’s title, has been a desire among many prophecy teachers to connect Gog to modern Russia. After communism won the day in Russia in the early 1900s, and then with the subsequent Cold War between the U.S. and Russia after World War II, it became somewhat of a fad to try to correlate what was happening on the broader geopolitical stage with prophetic events predicted in the Bible. Thus, the Russian-led invasion theory of Ezekiel 38-39 was born and popularized, and has now become a pillar of doctrine within many evangelical prophecy circles today.

When trying to trace out the academic roots of this theory, many people point to the Hebrew Lexicon of Wilhelm Gesenius, which was first published in 1829, and then subsequently expanded until his death in 1858. Commenting on the word *rosh*, Gesenius famously wrote the following about Ezekiel 38:2-3 and 39:1:

A northern nation, mentioned with Tubal and Meshech; undoubtedly the Russians, who are mentioned by Byzantine writers of the tenth century under the name [the Ros], dwelling north of the Taurus, and also by Arabic writers of the same age, dwelling on the river [...] Volga.¹⁶

16 Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, trans. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 752. I have changed “Wolga” in this quote to “Volga” and also adjusted some of the punctuation.

After Gesenius, this theory was then carried over into the famous Scofield Reference Bible, which was first published in 1909, and sold over two million copies by 1945! In his notes on Ezekiel 38-39 Scofield wrote, “that the primary reference is to the northern European powers, headed up by Russia, all agree.”

Although Scofield died in 1921, over the next 50 years the Russian-led invasion theory of Ezekiel 38-39 only continued to gain steam, primarily among conservative evangelicals. In the 1970s and 1980s Hal Lindsey popularized this view through his books *The Late Great Planet Earth* and *The 1980s: Countdown to Armageddon*.

Even President Ronald Reagan, whose presidency lasted from 1981-1989, accepted the idea that Ezekiel 38-39 refers to Russia. Commenting on Ezekiel 38-39 Reagan once said:

Ezekiel tells us that Gog, the nation that will lead all of the other powers of darkness against Israel, will come out of the north. Biblical scholars have been saying for generations that Gog must be Russia. What other powerful nation is to the north of Israel? None. But it didn't make sense before the Russian [i.e. Communist] revolution, when Russia was a Christian country. Now it does, now that Russia has become communistic and atheistic, now that Russia has set itself against God. Now it fits the description of Gog perfectly.¹⁷

Since Reagan, others have noted that Ezekiel 38-39 may have also played a role in shaping foreign policy in the Bush White House, especially after the September 11th attacks.¹⁸ Additionally, in the last 30 years in particular, writing popular-level books on the prophecies of Ezekiel that villainize Russia, and associate this nation with the Gog of Magog invasion, has become a bonafide cottage industry. The famous

17 From Lydia Lee, “The enemies within: Gog of Magog in Ezekiel 38-39,” *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*, 73(3), 4541.

18 Ibid., see also Stephen Spector, “Gog and Magog in the White House: Did Biblical Prophecy Inspire the Invasion of Iraq?”, *Journal of Church and State*, 56 no 3, Sum 2014, p. 534-552.

fictional prophecy book *Left Behind* (1995) even ends with an appendix that states:

The Hebrew prophet Ezekiel was given a detailed prophecy twenty-five hundred years ago foretelling that Russia would become a dominant player on the world scene in the last days (Ezekiel 38-30, NKJV).¹⁹

Millions of well-meaning Bible students and teachers have bought into this interpretation of Ezekiel 38-39. As we will continue to see however, connecting Gog primarily to modern Russia is a serious mistake.

THE RUS PEOPLE AND EZEKIEL 38-39?

The idea that Ezekiel 38-39 refers to modern Russia is based on the phonetic similarity between the Hebrew word *rosh*, and the names Rus and Ros, which were used by the Middle Ages to refer to some of the inhabitants of the lands now occupied by Russia and the Ukraine. It is also likely that some people in this region were already using the name Rus earlier as well. However, it wasn't until the 700s AD that Vikings from Scandinavia conquered what is now modern Russia, and adopted the name of the people they conquered, called "the Rukh-As, or Rus."²⁰ After they were firmly entrenched in the region, the Vikings established what became known as the kingdom of Kievan Rus (i.e. the precursor to modern Russia and today's ethnic Russian population). As noted by Gesenius, Byzantine and Arabic writers also mentioned a people called the Ros in the 900s AD.

Those who favor the idea that Ezekiel 38-39 refers to Russia have often been quick to point out how much the words Rus and Ros sound like the Hebrew word *rosh*, as well as how much the names of the Russian cities Moscow and Tobolsk sounds like Meshech and Tubal.

19 Tim LaHaye & Jerry B. Jenkins, *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995), 479.

20 H.J. Ellison, *History of Russia* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), 12. See also Tanner.

However, reading *rosh* in the book of Ezekiel as a reference to the ancient kingdom of the Rus people is fraught with insurmountable problems. This is why there are almost no serious Biblical scholars today who believe Ezekiel 38-39 refers to Russia.

For starters, reading Ezekiel 38:2-3 as a reference to the Russians (i.e. the Rus) would require that *rosh* in this verse is a proper name, rather than an adjective modifying the noun “prince” (*nasi*). We have already seen how unlikely this is, as well as why most scholars now prefer the translation “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal,” or something similar like, “the prince, chief of Meshech and Tubal.” So even right out of the gate, based merely on the simple vocabulary words Ezekiel uses, the Russia theory already begins to crumble.

Second, even if we did want to hypothetically entertain the idea that *rosh* is a proper name in Ezekiel 38-39 (which is not completely impossible, but about 99% unlikely), it would still have to refer to a Biblical place that Ezekiel himself was aware of in the 500s BC. The Russians were not even known as a proper people until the Middle Ages, and their precursor kingdom was not even established until the 700s AD, roughly 1,300 years after Ezekiel lived.

As we already saw, every single one of Ezekiel’s nations or people groups is mentioned elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, Beth-Togarmah). So why would it make sense to say that in addition to referencing all of these known places that existed in his own time, Ezekiel was also peering 1,300 years into the future, and referring to the Russian kingdom? Yes, anything is possible, because Ezekiel was a prophet who foresaw the future. However, we also need to recognize that he predicted the future by using the geographic place names that were well known during his lifetime. This point has been perfectly summarized by Ezekiel expert William Tooman, who writes:

Gog's allies, with one exception, were derived from the Torah [...]. **The list of nations that make up Gog's horde (38.2-6) was adapted from the Table of Nations in Gen 10.** Meshek [...], Tubal [...], Cush [...], Put [...], Gomer [...], Togarmah [...], and even Magog itself [...] appear in Gen 10.2-8. All but one of these nations appear elsewhere in Ezekiel as well (32.26; 27.10, 14).²¹

The very fact that every single one of Ezekiel's nations was drawn directly from the Hebrew Bible makes it unlikely that there is also another futuristic nation called Rosh or Rus that all of a sudden appears in the text of Ezekiel. Reading Russia and the Rus people into Ezekiel 38:2-3 is a classic example of "anachronism." That is, reading something from later history into an earlier period of time with zero historical warrant. It is also a perfect example of "confirmation bias," which occurs when we read evidence in a way that supports our pre-suppositions or interpretive agenda, rather than objectively and with an open mind. In addition, this reading is predicated on the illogical assumption, discussed earlier, that just because two words in different languages sound similar, they must be related. The similarities between the Hebrew word *rosh* and the name of a people called the Rus/Ros (in a Slavic language), who lived over a thousand years after Ezekiel, proves absolutely nothing except that the two words sound similar. This is merely a linguistic coincidence.

Below are some quotes from top Hebrew scholars, commenting further on whether or not Ezekiel 38-39 refers to Russia:

- "The name "Russia" has a rather late association with the modern-day state and would certainly not have been the intention of Ezekiel writing in the sixth century BC [...] For Ezekiel, Meshech and Tubal were not Russian cities but ancient ethnic groups that carried on trade with Tyre" (see Ezek. 27:13) (J. Paul Tanner, "Rethinking Ezekiel's Invasion By Gog").²²

21 Tooman, 147.

22 Tanner, 11 & 32.

- “The popular identification of Rosh with Russia is impossibly anachronistic and based on faulty etymology, the assonantal [phonetic] similarities between Russia and Rosh being purely accidental (Daniel I. Block, *The New International Commentary of the Old Testament: The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25-48*).”²³
- “In the first place, the earliest attestation of the name ‘Rus’ (Russia) dates back to the mid-ninth century A.D. and is thought to have been brought to the area around Kiev by the Vikings. It is etymologically unrelated to the Hebrew term, and modern lexicons have universally rejected Gesenius’s claim. Nor can Meshech and Tubal be linked with Moscow and Tobolsk. Rather, they are to be linked with the *Mushku* and *Tabal* peoples of central and eastern Anatolia, who are well-known in cuneiform texts from the first half of the first millennium B.C. (Iain M. Duguid, *The New Application Commentary: Ezekiel*).”²⁴
- “Gog is further described as “chief prince” of Meshech and Tubal. There are only two proper names here, since *rosh* (“chief, head”) is nowhere attested as such. It has no more connection with Russia (a name of Norse extraction) than Meshech has with Moscow. There is an evil empire here, but it is not the USSR. We have already encountered these two peoples in the list of Tyre’s trading partners (27:13) [...] and they are also listed together as “sons” of Japheth in Gen. 10:2” (Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*).²⁵

23 Block, 434.

24 Iain M. Duguid, *The New Application Commentary: Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 453.

25 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Interpretation, A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching: Ezekiel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 184.

WHAT ABOUT ROS IN THE SEPTUAGINT?

In response to the idea that Ezekiel 38-39 has nothing to do with Russia, some people still argue that because the Septuagint (LXX) translates *rosh* as a proper name, this must be proof that Ezekiel did speak of the Rus people ahead of time, and that the Septuagint translators were aware of this. One problem with using the Septuagint to bolster the claim that Ezekiel spoke of Russia, is that the Septuagint translation didn't begin until the 200s BC, and it was not completed until the 100s BC, hundreds of years after Ezekiel lived. The Septuagint is a *translation*. It is an *interpretation*. It can be helpful in some cases (as we saw in chapter 6 with Gog in the LXX), but it is not infallible, and very often, it exhibits blatant errors. Furthermore, scholars generally accept that the LXX versions of the Torah are in many cases more reliable than the LXX versions of the later prophets, which is yet another reason why the LXX translation of *rosh* as a proper noun in Ezekiel 38-39 should be questioned.

The Hebrew text itself, as well as what we know of Ancient Near Eastern nations from the Hebrew Bible, is a much better guide when it comes to determining what Ezekiel himself was trying to say. At best, the Septuagint might show us that its translators were aware of a people or location in their own time known as Ros or Rus, and that they in turn mistakenly imported this name into Ezekiel 38-39.

We do know from the Greek writer Aristotle that there was a city called Rosos in the 300s BC, near the northeastern tip of the Mediterranean, near modern Syria and Turkey. Aristotle wrote, but “in Issos and around **Syrian Rosos**: they issue forth from the Syrian Gates, separated from the Tauros and the Rosia Mountains.” Since this place was fairly close to Meshech and Tubal, it is possible that this is why the LXX translators, also Greek speakers like Aristotle, read *rosh* as a proper name and connected it to these two other nearby places.²⁶

However, just as I said when we looked at Rashi and the Reshite people in ancient Mesopotamia, the presence of yet another place name

26 See Ruthven 71, 78, & 136.

in antiquity that sounds similar to the word *rosh* still gives us zero credible evidence that Ezekiel himself, who lived hundreds of years before Aristotle, was referring to this place. All it does is possibly explain why the Septuagint translators got confused. Even more to the point, that the Septuagint translators may possibly have been referring to a place near Syria/Turkey when they improperly translated the word *rosh* as a proper noun, still establishes zero connection between the LXX rendition of Ezekiel 38-39 and Russia. Keep this in mind the next time you hear someone referencing the Septuagint as proof that Gog will come from Russia. Anyone who says this is confused.

WHAT ABOUT THE “REMOTE PARTS OF THE NORTH”?

There are three places in Ezekiel 38-39 where Gog is said to come from “the remote parts of the north,” or, the “remotest parts of the north” (38:6; 38:15; 39:2). Notably, in each of these instances, the Hebrew phrase is essentially identical (*yarkete tsaphon*), though for some reason the NASB translators opted for “remotest” in Ezekiel 39:2, rather than simply “remote” (as in 38:6 and 38:15).

Because the farthest northern location from Israel is technically in Russia, many have assumed that the phrase *yarkete tsaphon* also proves Gog will be a Russian. Upon closer inspection however, arguing that Gog will come from Russia just because he is identified with “the remote parts of the north” is misguided.

The most important word in Ezekiel 38:6, 38:15, and 39:2 is the Hebrew term *yarka*, which generally means the “recesses, flank, side, coast, or part.” Notably, in Jeremiah 6:22, Jeremiah uses both the term “north,” and “remote” (*yarka*) in the same context to refer to Babylon. “Behold a people is coming from the north (*tsaphon*) land, and a great nation will be aroused from the remote parts (*yarka*) of the earth.” In Jeremiah 31:8 and 50:41 Jeremiah also “combines the notion of ‘north’ with the phrase ‘remote parts of the earth.’” In both of these instances Jeremiah is referring to Babylon.²⁷

27 See Tanner, 43-35.

What this means is that the phrase “remote parts of the north” in Ezekiel does not have to be read as a reference to Russia. *Yarkete tsaphon* does not imply the farthest northern location from Israel in a literal sense. It just implies a location far to the north.

As Old Testament scholar Paul Tanner points out, it was common for the Hebrew prophets to use variations of this phrase to refer to a “place of high elevation,” or, “to countries of the Middle East in closer proximity to Israel.” According to Tanner, *yarkete tsaphon* could even refer to,

not so much the precise geographical direction from Israel, but rather to the direction of advance and attack upon Israel (armies came against Israel from the north). This is how Jeremiah viewed Babylonia, though Babylonia was technically to the east.

Consequently, Tanner concludes that based on the phrase “remote parts of the north” in Ezekiel 38-39, “there is no firm basis on which to interpret Gog as Russia.”²⁸

CONCLUSIONS

All of the Biblical evidence in Ezekiel 38-39 supports the idea that Gog should be understood as the “chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.” No solid case can be made that Gog is connected to a land called Rosh, Ros, Rus, Rashi, Rosos, Russia, etc. Furthermore, even if by some long shot *rosh* in Ezekiel 38-39 is actually a proper name, it would still have to refer to a place near Meshech and Tubal, in modern Turkey, or thereabouts, which would rule out any association with modern Russia and Moscow.

The “Russian-led invasion” theory of Ezekiel 38-39 has been a part of popular eschatology for far too long, and God’s people should recognize that this theory has no Biblical basis. This does not mean Russia will not play any part in the key geopolitical events that transpire in the last days. However, Russia is not the primary focus of Ezekiel 38-39.

28 Ibid., 35.

GOG, THE MIDDLE EASTERN ANTICHRIST

The Jews “who think Jerusalem belongs to them today will not be able to find a tree to hide behind tomorrow.”

—ANTI-SEMITIC TURKISH PRESIDENT, RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN, 2018

SO WHERE DOES GOG, the End-Times Pharaoh come from, and which nations does Ezekiel say he will lead in an alliance against Israel during the Time of Jacob’s Trouble? In chapter 7 we explored how Numbers 24 gives us the first hint in Scripture that Gog will be associated with the nations of the Middle East and North Africa. In this chapter, we will see how Ezekiel 38-39 expands on this earlier idea from the Torah. Perhaps more than any other passage in the Bible, Ezekiel 38-39 provides further proof that the Antichrist will in fact be the leader of a Middle Eastern and North African empire in the last days.

A WORD ABOUT METHODOLOGY

Before we look at each of the geographical locations mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39, we should review the best way to interpret these place names. It is very common to find Bible commentaries that state that all of the nations mentioned in this prophecy are merely “symbolic” of

the “universal” enemies of God in the last days. According to this theory, Ezekiel 38-39 only describes some sort of generalized battle between the forces of good and evil, and therefore, has absolutely nothing to tell us about the specific nations that will invade Israel with the Antichrist. Here are two examples from popular evangelical commentaries of this symbolic interpretation of Ezekiel 38-39:

- “Ezekiel’s association of Gog and Magog with peoples at the extremities of the then known world (Ezek. 38:2) suggests that they might be interpreted in a representative and eschatological sense rather than identified particularly [...]” (From “Magog,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*).¹
- “However, even if correct identifications were to be made on the basis of sound linguistic and archaeological data, attempts to isolate particular nations as “Israel’s last enemies” fly in the face of what the text is saying. The point of Ezekiel 38-39 is not that at some distant point in the future these *particular* nations will oppose Israel [...]. Rather, these seven nations from the ends of the earth, from all four points of the compass, represent symbolically a supreme attempt by the united forces of evil to crush the peace of God’s people” (*NIV Application Commentary: Ezekiel*).²

Another popular way of understanding the nations mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39 can be described as the “ancestral-migration” method of interpretation. This approach to identifying the nations mentioned in this passage does take the proper names of these nations seriously. However, instead of limiting these nations to their ancient geographical boundaries, the ancestral-migration method attempts to identify the

1 “Magog” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. J.D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, & Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 879.

2 Ian M. Duguid, *The NIV Application Commentary: Ezekiel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 453.

modern blood-line descendants of these ancient nations, as well as where they live today.

Both of these interpretive approaches to the place names in Ezekiel 38-39 are flawed. The symbolic approach is untenable because it relativizes the words of Scripture to the point where they have no real meaning. Ironically, those who hold to this symbolic interpretation of Ezekiel often have no problem interpreting references in the prophets to *ancient* Israel, *ancient* Babylon, *ancient* Persia, etc. as references to particular places. However, when they come to texts that speak of the future, they all of a sudden change their methodology and say that the specific names mentioned in future prophecies are merely “representative” and symbolic of the forces of evil in a general sense. This is a glaring inconsistency and a serious interpretive error.

The ancestral-migration method is also without any merit, primarily because since Ezekiel originally gave his prophecy in the 500s BC, the descendants of these original nations have migrated and intermarried throughout the entire earth. Those who follow the ancestral-migration method often end up chasing rainbows and making the interpretation of Ezekiel 38-39 far more complicated than it needs to be. Furthermore, there is often widespread disagreement among proponents of this approach regarding where the descendants of these nations might actually be today.

In contrast to both the symbolic and the ancestral-migration approaches to this prophecy, what we need to remember is that when the Biblical writers used a particular place name to speak of events in the last days, they were still making a specific prophetic prediction, concerning a specific geographical location that will eventually play a role in the fulfillment of prophecy. In some cases, the name of a place, like Egypt for example, has stayed consistent for thousands of years, which makes the interpretation of certain end-time prophecies even easier (i.e. Num. 24:8; Isa. 19). In other cases, the names of different places on the map have changed numerous times since the days of the prophets. This is certainly the case with the places mentioned in Ezekiel 38-39.

However, instead of relativizing Ezekiel's words, or getting lost trying to chase down the genealogical descendants of the nations he mentioned, we only need to determine the territorial boundaries of these ancient nations and then correlate them with modern nations in the 21st century.

So where exactly were Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, and Beth-Togarmah? Thankfully, as we will see, modern scholarship and archaeology have now made it possible to identify each of these ancient places with somewhere close to 90-100% accuracy. In the next section, I will summarize the scholarly consensus regarding where each of these locations can be found on a modern map.

MAGOG

Of all the places mentioned in Ezekiel 38:2-6, the location of Magog is probably the most controversial. Part of the reason for this is because in his work *Antiquities of the Jews*, the Jewish historian Josephus links Magog with a people the Greeks called "the Scythians." Many prophecy teachers have pounced on this reference, primarily because at one point the Scythians lived on the "Russian Steppes," in "present-day Ukraine, north of the Black Sea." It is not uncommon for Josephus' Scythian comment to be used as evidence by those who support the idea that Gog will come from Russia, or the former USSR.

The problem with equating the Scythians only with modern Russia and the Ukraine however, has been summarized by historian Edwin Yamauchi. Yamauchi notes that the "name 'Scythian' designates a number of nomadic tribes from the Russian steppes," some of whom migrated and lived in Anatolia (modern Turkey) during Ezekiel's lifetime.³ For this reason, most scholars now recognize that when identifying Magog we need to determine not only where some of the Scythians lived in antiquity, because they lived in many different places. Rather, we need to determine how Ezekiel, in the 6th century BC, would most

3 Edwin Yamauchi, "The Scythians: Invading Hordes from the Russian Steppes," *Biblical Archaeologist* (Spring 1983), 90-99.

likely have understood the term “Magog.”

There is now almost universal agreement among scholars that Magog should be understood as a reference to modern Turkey. Nearly all reputable commentaries, Bible Atlases, and Bible dictionaries reflect this view. A few examples:

- From the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*: “Magog is often interpreted as a contraction of an original Akkadian *mat Gugi* (“land of Gog”), and as referring to the territory of Lydia in western Anatolia [Turkey].”⁴
- From *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “Magog is associated in the Table of Nations (Gen. 10:2) with Meshek and Tubal, eponymous sons of Japheth whose territories are presumed to lie somewhere in the vicinity of modern Turkey.”⁵
- From the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “Magog (possibly meaning “the land of Gog”) was no doubt located in Asia Minor [Turkey] and may refer to Lydia.”⁶
- The *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* locates Magog in the Table of Nations in central Turkey.⁷

As a brief side note, I should mention that certain prophecy teachers believe Magog could also include some of the southern portions of the former Soviet Union, including the central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, parts of Afghanistan, etc. Though I personally believe this could be possible, I still lean more towards associating

4 Daniel Bodi, “Ezekiel,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, Volume 4: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel*, ed. John H. Walton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 484.

5 “Gog and Magog,” in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 686.

6 “Gog,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. J.D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, & Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 537.

7 See *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, ed. Carl G. Rasmussen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 83.

Magog with modern Turkey because 1) this view aligns more with the current scholarly consensus, and 2) Magog is mentioned in connection with Meshech and Tubal, which were both undoubtedly in Turkey.

MESHECH & TUBAL

This connection between Meshech, Tubal, and modern Turkey is now a point of widespread agreement among scholars.

- From historian Edwin Yamauchi: “Since the late nineteenth century, Assyrian texts have been available which locate Meshech (*Mushku*) and Tubal (*Tabal*) in central and eastern Anatolia [Turkey] respectively.”⁸
- From the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*: “Meshech is the Assyrian *Muski*, which under Sargon II designated Phrygia in Asia Minor. Tubal is the Assyrian *Tabal*, the region between the Halys River and the Taurus [mountains in Turkey].”⁹
- From the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “The descendants of Meshech are identified with the *Muskaya* mentioned in Assyrian records (sometimes in association with the *Tabalu*) and with the *Moschoi* of the Greek tradition. They lived for several centuries in Asia Minor [Turkey], but were eventually pushed by their enemies into the mountainous area SE of the Black Sea.”¹⁰
- From the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “Tubal was apparently the eponymous ancestor of a Neo-Hittite confederacy located in the heartland of the Taurus mountains in SE Asia Minor [Turkey]. [...] The name Tabal(a) is mentioned in numerous Assyrian records of the punitive campaigns into the Taurus. The

8 E. Yamauchi, “The Scythians: Invading Hordes from the Russian Steppes,” *Biblical Archaeologist* (Spring 1983), 96.

9 Bodi, 484.

10 “Mesech,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. J.D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, & Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 929.

people of Tabal/Tubal are evidently the ones later referred to as Tibarenoi by Herodotus (Hist. 3.94), who states that they supplied troops to the Persian armies of Darius and Xerxes. Their ferocity was proven by the fact that their defeat and destruction came only after hundreds of years of continual warfare.”¹¹

- From the *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*: Tubal was a region in “E central Turkey mentioned in prophetic literature (Isa. 66:19), especially in conjunction with Meshech [...]”.¹²

PERSIA

Ancient Persia in Ezekiel’s day can be quite easily correlated with the modern nation of Iran.

- From *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “The Persians probably came to the Iranian plateau from central Asia around 1,000 BC, roughly the time of the emergence of monarchic Israel in the Levant. [...] The first known references to the Persians (and to the closely related Medes) in cuneiform sources date to the reign of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (mid-ninth century BC).”¹³
- From the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “As a geographical term Persia may be taken to mean the Iranian plateau, bounded by the Tigris Valley on the W and S, the Indus Valley on the E, and the Armenia ranges and the Caspian Sea on the N, comprising in all something near one million sq. mi. (2.6 million sq. km.).”¹⁴

11 “Tubal,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. J.D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, & Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 1491.

12 *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, ed. Carl G. Rasmussen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 301.

13 “Persia,” in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 1303.

14 “Persia,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. J.D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, & Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 1105.

CUSH

In the Hebrew text, Ezekiel 38:5 mentions the nation of Cush. This term is sometimes equated with Ethiopia (NASB). However, it is more likely a reference to the land directly south of Egypt, in modern Sudan.

- From *The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary*: “Cush, the neighboring country to the south of Egypt, known as Nubia [...]”.¹⁵
- From the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*: “Egyptian, Akkadian, and Hebrew term broadly referring to the countries of the Upper Nile south of Egypt. In a narrower sense Cush consisted of the territory between the second and fourth cataracts of the Nile, roughly the present northern Sudan (equivalent to ancient Nubia). The OT generally uses the term in that sense. The Greeks called it Ethiopia, which eventually gave its name to modern Ethiopia (farther to the south and east).”¹⁶

PUT

Put is a reference to modern Libya, but may also include some other North African nations as well (i.e. Tunisia and Algeria?).

- From *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “‘Put’ appears as a geographic designation that can be identified with Libya, based on Old Persian *putiya* and Babylonian *puta*, and is the source of soldiers in passages in Ezekiel (27:10; 30:5; 38:5), Jeremiah (46:9), and Nahum (3:9).”¹⁷

15 *The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, & Mark W. Chavalas (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 717.

16 “Cush,” in *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, eds. Walter A. Elwell & Philip W. Comfort (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers), 341.

17 “Put,” in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 1385.

- From the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: No passage in the Bible “yields sufficient information to locate Put with certainty, but the linking with African countries [Jer. 46:9; Ezek. 30:5; Nah. 3:9] makes clear that Put was also located in the same area, and Libya appears to be the most likely choice.”¹⁸
- From *The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary*: “Put may refer to the Libyans west of Egypt.”¹⁹

GOMER

Gomer in the time of Ezekiel was in all likelihood a reference to modern Turkey (and vicinity). Some have equated Gomer with Germany, but there is no historical or archaeological evidence to support this position.

- From *The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary*: “Gomer is the Assyrian Gimirri, the Cimmerians of the Greeks, who in the seventh century B.C. raided all Anatolia [Turkey].”²⁰
- From *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “In the Table of Nations (Gen. 10) Gomer is the son of Japheth, the son of Noah. He typically is identified as the ancestor of the Cimmerians, an Indo-European people who lived in what is now southern Russia, north of the Black Sea, in the second millennium BC, but who threatened Assyria around 700 BC.”²¹ In other words, at one point the Cimmerians did live in and around southern Russia. However, by Ezekiel’s time Gomer would probably have been

18 “Put,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. J.D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, & Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 1196.

19 *The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, & Mark W. Chavalas (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 713.

20 Ibid.

21 “Gomer,” in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 687.

linked to the lands controlled by the Assyrian Empire, including modern Syria and Turkey.

- From the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: In Ezekiel, the reference to Gomer is “probably to Gomer’s offspring, the Cimmerians [...], who were forced out of S Russia by the Scythians and settled in Asia Minor [Turkey] at the end of the eighth century B.C.”²²
- From *The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary*: “Gomer has been equated with the Gimarrai of the Assyrian annals and the Cimmerians of Greek sources. In Homer’s *Odyssey* they lived on the north shore of the Black Sea. They attacked the kingdom of Urartu from the north and caused problems for the Assyrians in the eighth century. Sargon died in battle against them in Tubal. They appear to have been driven into Anatolia [Turkey] according to Heroditus. They came to be involved with the Anatolian kingdom of Lydia in the seventh century B.C.”²³
- *The Oxford Bible Atlas* locates Gomer in northern Turkey, near Meshech and Tubal.²⁴

BETH-TOGARMAH

Beth-Togarmah is often placed in either eastern Turkey, or Armenia, just to the northeast of Turkey. In a general sense, Beth-Togarmah probably refers to this entire eastern Turkish/Armenian region.

- From *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “Scholars generally identify Beth Togarmah with Armenia. Togarmah, who settled in the area subsequently known as Beth Togarmah, was a son of

22 “Gomer,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. J.D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, & Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 539.

23 *The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, & Mark W. Chavalas (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 723.

24 *Oxford Bible Atlas*, ed. Adrian Curtis (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 110.

Gomer and a great-grandson of Noah (Gen. 10:3; 1 Chron. 1:6).²⁵

- From the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*: “A place in “the far north” that exchanged horses and mules for the merchandise in Tyre and that had military connections with Gog (Ezek. 27:14; 38:6). It was probably located in what is modern Armenia.”²⁶ “Togarmah is probably to be associated with Til-garimmu, a city located in Urartu (Armenia), the eastern part of Cappadocia, SE of the Black Sea.”²⁷
- From *The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary*: “Beth Togarmah was most likely the capital city of Kammanu, a central Anatolian [Turkish] kingdom. It was known in Hittite sources as Tegaramara and in Assyrian sources as Til-Garimmu.”²⁸
- From the *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*: “As an ethnographic term, most have identified Togarmah with Armenia. The Armenians identify Togarmah (Thorgon) as the founder of their race.”²⁹
- The *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible* places the descendants of Togarmah in Genesis 10 in eastern Turkey, near the border of Armenia and Georgia.³⁰
- The *Holman Bible Atlas* places Togarmah in eastern Turkey.³¹

25 “Beth Togarmah,” in *The Baker Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2013), 200.

26 “Beth Togarmah,” in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. J.D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, & Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 196.

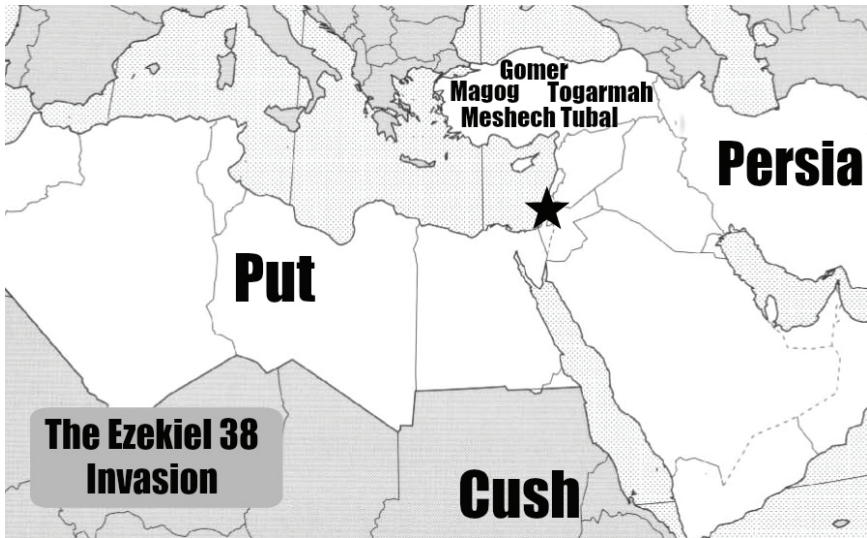
27 “Togarmah,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, eds. J.D. Douglas, Merrill C. Tenney, & Moises Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 1466.

28 *The IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, & Mark W. Chavalas (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 723.

29 “Togarmah,” in *Tyndale Bible Dictionary*, eds. Walter A. Elwell & Philip W. Comfort (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers), 1268.

30 See *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, ed. Carl G. Rasmussen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 83.

31 Thomas V. Brisco, *Holman Bible Atlas* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publisher, 1998), 36, 132.



GOG, THE MIDDLE EASTERN ANTICHRIST

Many prophecy teachers have understood that in Ezekiel 38-39, Gog leads a coalition of Middle Eastern and North African nations against Israel. However, because most of them have not yet realized that Gog is the Antichrist, they often assume that these Middle Eastern and North African nations, all of which currently contain a Muslim majority, will be “wiped out” long before the return of Jesus, and therefore, not pose any real threat to Israel in the later stages of the 70th week. As the explanation usually goes, there will be “a Russian-led Islamic invasion of Israel” that will be thwarted by God. This will pave the way for the Antichrist to arise out of Europe, and consolidate his power once the Muslims are out of the way. This view is summarized by prophecy teacher Tommy Ice:

If the tribulation is closely preceded by a failed regional invasion of Israel, in other words Russia and her Muslim allies, then this would remove much of the Russian and Muslim influence currently in the world today and allow a Euro-centric orientation to arise.³²

32 Tommy D. Ice, “Ezekiel 38 & 39,” Liberty University, May 2009, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=pretrib_arch.

In contrast to this popular view that the Muslim nations of the Middle East will be wiped out before the rise of the Antichrist, Ezekiel tells us a completely different story. For one, Ezekiel links the Antichrist (Gog) to modern Turkey (and/or its immediately surrounding vicinity). Second, Ezekiel singles out all Islamic nations in the Middle East and North Africa as comprising the vanguard of Gog's invasion force during the 70th week. Ezekiel does also say there will be "many" other nations with Gog and his armies when they invade Israel (Ezek. 38:6). This means we cannot yet determine with 100% accuracy each and every one of the countries that will forge an alliance with the Antichrist to invade Israel. However, even with that being said, Ezekiel still presents the Antichrist as a Middle Eastern political leader who will oversee an alliance of other Middle Eastern and North African nations, including modern Turkey, Iran, Sudan, and Libya, and probably also some of the other surrounding Islamic nations as well.

Based on this information, it is hard to deny that Ezekiel 38-39 does in fact support the idea that the Antichrist will arise out of the Middle East, not Europe, and that he could very well be a Muslim, not a "secular humanist," nor the advocate of some nebulous and purely syncretistic "one-world religion" as so many people currently believe. Because the geopolitical situation in the Middle East can change so dramatically in such a short amount of time, I am not quite at the point where I would dogmatically say that the Antichrist will definitely be Turkish. However, given that four or five of the geographic locations mentioned in Ezekiel 38 are in Turkey (Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Gomer(?), and Beth-Togarmah(?)), it is indeed likely that Israel's last-days archenemy will emerge from this particular region, or somewhere very close.

Those of us with an interest in the signs of the times should keep a close eye on events in modern Turkey. We should also watch for the emergence of a new Middle Eastern and North African alliance/empire in this region in the days ahead.

THE EUROPEAN ANTICHRIST?

The idea that the Antichrist will be a European who oversees a “revived Roman empire” has roots going back to the earliest days of the Church. For many years I personally subscribed to this belief myself. However, the more I began looking into all of the prophecies that supposedly support this position, the more I began to realize how much it is based on a set of preconceived assumptions that must be read into Scripture, rather than an objective analysis of Scripture itself. In short, there is actually no verse in the entire Bible that says the Antichrist will come from Europe. Conversely, there are numerous passages in Scripture that link the Antichrist to the Muslim-majority nations of the Middle East. We already saw how this is the case in Numbers 24. Now, when we look at Ezekiel 38-39, we can see how Ezekiel expands on this earlier prophecy and gives us even more of the specific details concerning which nations will forge an alliance with Gog in the early stages of his rise to power.

It is beyond the scope of this book to fully explore and defend the Middle Eastern/Islamic Antichrist theory. If you would like to know more about this position, I highly recommend three books by prophecy teacher Joel Richardson: *Mideast Beast: The Scriptural Case for an Islamic Antichrist*, *Mystery Babylon: Unlocking the Bible’s Greatest Prophetic Mystery*, and *Islamic Antichrist: The Shocking Truth About the Real Nature of the Beast*. You can also check out Richardson’s excellent YouTube videos on his channel, “Joel Richardson.”

When I first heard of Richardson’s work from a friend, I admit, I was skeptical. I thought this was just another sensational and opportunistic end-times prediction. However, I was wrong. Richardson’s books are more exegetically grounded and historically informed than 99% of prophecy books on the market today. In *Mideast Beast* Richardson writes:

Today, I receive a steady stream of emails and reports from individuals expressing how much these books have affected them and transformed their understanding of the end times. Students, pastors, and even reputable scholars have expressed that they have abandoned

the popular notion that the Antichrist, his empire, and his religion will emerge out of Europe or a revived Roman Empire. Instead they have come to recognize the simple fact that the Bible emphatically and repeatedly points to the Middle East as the launchpad and epicenter of the emerging empire of the Antichrist and his religion.³³

In *Mystery Babylon*, Richardson also states:

Throughout the Scriptures, whenever the nations of the Antichrist are mentioned, those that will attack Israel in the last days, they are all Middle Eastern and North African nations—Muslim majority nations. Conversely, there is not a single mention of a European nation or any other non-Muslim majority nation being judged on the Day of the Lord for attacking Israel. Now, that isn't to say that none will. But overwhelmingly, the Bible repeatedly and consistently names and emphasizes nations from the Middle East and North Africa. We should also emphasize those nations. It is where the Bible is silent that we must be extremely careful not to add our own assumptions. When Bible teachers tell you that we should not look to the Middle East as potentially producing the Antichrist and his system, they are simply not being true to the Scriptures.³⁴

Based on the prophetic testimony of Scripture, we cannot afford to ignore the role that Islam and the Muslim-majority Middle Eastern nations are going to play on the world stage in the last days. Islam is not going to disappear before the Second Coming. The Middle Eastern nations are not going to be “wiped off the map” prior to the rise of the Antichrist. Instead, a strong case can be made that Islam will be the religious system of the Antichrist, and one of the greatest challenges to the Lord's people during the end times. It is also undeniable that the Middle

33 Joel Richardson, *Mideast Beast: The Scriptural Case for an Islamic Antichrist* (Washington D.C.: WND Books, 2012). IV.

34 Joel Richardson, *Mystery Babylon: Unlocking the Bible's Greatest Prophetic Mystery* (Washington D.C.: WND Books, 2017), 83.

East and North Africa will comprise the geopolitical sphere of power at the heart of unfolding prophetic events just before the return of Jesus.

THE WITNESS OF HISTORY

Recently, my wife was involved in a discussion with some Christian leaders on the topic of the Antichrist. Not surprisingly, these men were discussing the idea that the Antichrist will come from Europe, and oversee a “revived Roman empire.” My wife casually mentioned to one of them that she thought the Antichrist could possibly come from the Middle East (because she had heard her crazy husband going on and on about eschatology for months!). However, the man leading the discussion brushed her comment off and said something along the lines of, “Oh yes, that’s a new position that some have advocated in the last few years, but it’s not the traditional view of the Church.”

In reality, various Jewish and Christian scholars over the last 2,000 years have understood perfectly well that Gog in Ezekiel 38-39 is in fact the Antichrist, and many have also recognized that he will come from the Middle East. These are not new ideas, and below are a handful of examples that prove this:

- Tractate *Avodah Zerah* in the Babylonian Talmud mentions how Gentile converts will see Gog fight against the Messiah. Of particular note in this text is how the Jewish sages correlated the Battle of Gog of Magog with the prophecy of the Messiah’s victory over the Gentile nations in Psalm 2. Thus we read, “When these converts see the war of Gog and Magog, every convert of this sort will say to Gog and Magog: For what purpose did you come? **They [Gog and his armies] will say to him [the convert]: We came to fight against the Lord and against His Messiah,** as it is stated: ‘Why are the nations in an uproar? And why do the peoples mutter in vain. The kings of the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against His Messiah’ (Psalms 2:1–2).” As you can see, many of the early Jewish sages understood that the defeat of Gog does not take

place until *after* the Messiah returns, and that Gog is therefore the final archenemy of Israel (i.e. Antichrist).³⁵

- The medieval Jewish philosopher and theologian Saadia Gaon (882-942 AD), in *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, connected the events of Ezekiel 38-39 to the last days and the time of Messianic redemption. Gaon believed that Gog would fight the Messiah Son of David, and that Gog's defeat would lead to the nations becoming "submissive to Israel, and the descendant of David," who would command the Gentiles to come to Jerusalem every year to "celebrate the feast of tabernacles."³⁶ Gaon also connected the arrival of the Messiah Son of David to the defeat of Israel's Middle Eastern enemies, particularly "Edom."
- The idea that Gog should be equated with *the* end-times enemy of Israel and the Messiah (i.e. Antichrist) remains a predominant Jewish view to this day. For example, Orthodox Jewish Rabbi Naftali Silberberg writes on Chabad.org that the "defeat of Gog and Magog will precipitate the Messianic Redemption."³⁷
- In the 1700s, Christian revivalist John Wesley mentioned in his *Explanatory Notes on Ezekiel* that many people in his own day linked Gog and the land of Magog to modern Turkey. Wesley wrote, "Some believe the time is still to come, wherein this prophecy is to be fulfilled. And that it must intend those enemies of God's church who descended from the Scythians, and are now masters of Cappadocia [central Turkey], Iberia, Armenia [...]. Magog is, at least, part of Scythia, and comprehends Syria,

35 *The William Davidson Talmud, Avodah Zarah 3b*, https://www.sefaria.org/Avodah_Zarah.3b.5?lang=bi.

36 Saadia Gaon, *The Book of Beliefs and Opinions*, trans. Samuel Rosenblatt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 305-307.

37 Naftali Silberberg, "The Battle of Gog and Magog," Chabad.org, https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/1108919/jewish/Gog-and-Magog.htm.

in which was Hierapolis [in southwestern Turkey] taken by the Scythians, and called of them Scythopolis. **It is that country, which now is in subjection to the Turks, and may be extended thro' Asia minor,** the countries of Sarmatia, and many others, under more than one in succession of time. **And in the last time under some one active and daring prince [i.e. Antichrist], all their power will be stirred up against Christians.**"³⁸

- In the third century AD (240-320), the early Church Father Lactantius wrote that the Antichrist would come from the Middle East, particularly the region of "Syria," which encompassed parts of modern Syria and Turkey in his time. Lactantius wrote, "another king shall arise out of Syria, born of an evil spirit, the overthrower and destroyer of the human race."³⁹
- In the mid-1900s prophecy teacher G.H. Lang recognized that Gog would rule over a Middle Eastern empire, and that Gog is in fact the Biblical Antichrist. In this respect, G.H. Lang was truly one of the forerunners of the Middle Eastern Antichrist theory in modern times. In his commentary on Daniel, Lang wrote, "Thus emerges the material feature that **Gog rules Mesopotamia and Persia, that is, the very centre of the Middle East [...]**." "But if Gog be [...] in control of the Middle East at the period of Israel's regathering to the land, **who can he be other than the last head of the fourth kingdom of the image of Dan. 2, the little horn of the fourth beast of Dan. 7** [i.e. the Antichrist]?"⁴⁰ Lang's work

38 John Wesley, *Wesley's Explanatory Notes*, online, <https://www.christianity.com/bible/commentary.php?com=wes&b=26&c=38>.

39 Lactantius, *Divine Institutes, Book VII, chapter 17*, New Advent, from *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 7*, trans. William Fletcher, eds. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, & A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing Co.: 1886). Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, www.newadvent.org/fathers/07017.htm.

40 G.H. Lang, *Daniel* (Hayesville: Schoettle Publishing Co., Inc., 1985), 203 & 211.

is especially important because he was one of the first people to link Gog in Ezekiel 38-39, to the Antichrist figure in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. For those with an interest in Daniel's prophecies on the end times, Richardson's book *Mideast Beast* fully expounds upon and proves this connection even further.

- English evangelist Arthur W. Pink (1886-1952) also understood from the Old Testament (especially Micah 5:5) that the Antichrist will come from the Middle East, and more specifically from the region formerly occupied by the Assyrian Empire. Pink wrote, "We have seen that the Scriptures which help us to determine the direction from which he [Antichrist] will arise, speak of him under the title of the 'Little Horn.' Now the first thing this title denotes is that **he is a king, king of Assyria...[After he] acquires the crown of Syria he will speedily enlarge his dominions.**" The kingdom of ancient Assyria encompassed the modern nations of Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Jordan, and parts of Egypt. Just like Ezekiel 38-39 says, Pink knew the Antichrist would come from somewhere in this region.⁴¹

There are numerous other examples that could be cited from both Jewish and Christian sources, all of which further support the idea of a coming Middle Eastern Antichrist. However, for now, those listed above should help you appreciate that this is a reputable scholarly position. It is not some fad teaching or modern novelty.

The Final Pharaoh comes from the Middle East. Once we understand how Ezekiel 38-39 is in fact about the Antichrist, the Time of Jacob's Trouble, and the return of Jesus, this is much easier to accept. This also explains why even from the very beginning pages of the Bible, we are told that the Messiah will return to the Middle East, come out of Egypt, fulfill the Passover, and wage war against the nations surrounding Israel.

41 Quote from article by Joel Richardson, "The Syrian Antichrist," *WorldNetDaily*, June 4, 2012, <https://www.wnd.com/2012/06/the-syrian-antichrist/>.

THE RAPTURE DECEPTION

“When these things begin to take place, straighten up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

—LUKE 21:28

THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK we have covered many topics related to the end times and the return of Jesus. However, what we have not yet explored specifically, is the question of where the followers of Jesus (i.e. the Church/Congregation of Messiah) will be during the time when all of the events we have analyzed so far actually take place.

Will we face the Antichrist? Will we witness the Time of Jacob’s Trouble? Where will we be when Jesus returns and leads Israel out of Egypt, and then pours out His Passover plagues of wrath on Gog and his armies? Certainly, these are some of the most practical and relevant questions that arise from everything we have studied up to this point. In the next three chapters, our primary goal will be to determine God’s will for the Body of Messiah during the end times.

At the most fundamental level, determining God’s will for believers during the end times requires us to determine when the Rapture will take place. Unfortunately, millions of people have been misled into

believing that God's people will be supernaturally rescued (raptured) before the final tribulation begins. As we will see however, this view on the Rapture represents a serious theological error. The New Testament is clear that the Body of Messiah will go through the final tribulation, face the Antichrist, and only be supernaturally rescued by Jesus after enduring a crucible of suffering and affliction for the glory of God. In this chapter, I want to cover some of the most basic Rapture/end-times texts in the New Testament that support this thesis. Then, in the following two chapters, we will analyze the specific timing of the Rapture in more detail, as well as how Passover is connected to the Rapture and the Second Coming of Jesus in the book of Revelation.

Before we begin to explore the New Testament teaching on the Rapture, one public service announcement is in order. Throughout the next three chapters, I will use the terms Church, Congregation of Messiah, Body of believers, Body of Messiah, Body of Christ, and believers interchangeably. All of these terms should be understood as references to what the New Testament calls the "*ekklesia*" in Greek, which represents the called out and redeemed followers of Jesus, both Jewish and Gentile, who live under the New Covenant.

THE BASIC RAPTURE TEXT

In 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 Paul gives us a basic overview of the Rapture:

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.

In this passage, Paul was reassuring the Thessalonians that believers who have passed away will not miss out on the opportunity to be with Jesus when He establishes His kingdom. According to Paul, sometime before Jesus returns to this earth, the “dead in Christ” will be resurrected “first.” Then, believers who remain alive until this time will be “caught up” with them, “to meet the Lord in the air.” After this, although Paul does not exactly say when in this text, all believers will return to the earth together to rule and reign with our Messiah.

Nearly everyone agrees that in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 Paul was speaking about the Rapture. The controversy however, centers around when this meeting with “the Lord in the air” will take place.

In response to this question, there have been four predominant views offered by Christian and Messianic theologians throughout history. Each of these views, which will be summarized briefly below, take a different perspective on how much, or how little, of the last seven years before the return of Jesus (i.e. Daniel’s 70th week) believers will experience on the earth.

1. The Pre-Tribulation Rapture: This position is characterized by a belief that the Church will be raptured sometime before the start of Daniel’s 70th week. One of the key features of this view is the idea that God’s wrath will be poured out on the earth during the entire 70th week. Since Paul says believers are “not destined for God’s wrath” (1 Thess. 5:9), it is therefore concluded that the Church could not be on the earth during the final seven-year period.
2. The Mid-Tribulation Rapture: This position rests on the idea that the Church will be raptured right about the midway point of the 70th week, that is to say, 3 ½ years before the return of Jesus. The Mid-Tribulation Rapture theory has mostly fallen out of favor among scholars and those who study eschatology at a deeper level, and is generally viewed as advocating one of the least likely times in which the Rapture could occur.

3. The Post-Tribulation Rapture: Those who believe in a Post-Tribulation Rapture believe that the gathering of believers to meet the Lord in the air, and the Second Coming of Jesus to this earth, are one single and simultaneous event. Post-Trib teaches 1) that believers will go through the entire seven-year period, and 2) that believers will meet Jesus in the clouds as He descends from heaven, and then immediately return to the earth with Him as part of His victorious entourage.
4. The Pre-Wrath Rapture: The Pre-Wrath Rapture theory is in essence a modified form of the Post-Tribulation Rapture theory, albeit with some important differences. Pre-Wrath teaches that believers will 1) go through most of the 70th week, yet 2) still be raptured *into heaven* sometime before the wrath of God is poured out on the earth, towards the end of Daniel's 70th week. According to most proponents of Pre-Wrath, believers do spend some time with Jesus in heaven before He returns to this earth (*contra* Post-Trib), but this time does not span the entire 70th week, or even half of it (*contra* Pre-Trib and Mid-Trib). It probably only spans a matter of months, or up to a year, give or take.

In the rest of this chapter, my primary objective will be to explain why both a Pre-Tribulation and Mid-Tribulation Rapture do not harmonize with the teaching of the New Testament. As we will see, there are too many texts in the New Testament that indicate that the Body of believers will in fact go through the 70th week (or at least most of it). In chapters 19-20, I will then explain why the Pre-Wrath Rapture is the most likely Rapture scenario if all of the Biblical data is weighed objectively.

THE WORDS OF JESUS IN MATTHEW 24

Matthew 24 is one of the most foundational end-times texts in the entire New Testament. In this passage, Jesus' disciples approach Him and ask, "what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?" The

Greek word used in this verse for “Your coming” is *parousia*, which is the same word Paul used when referring to the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:15. Although *parousia* can sometimes mean “presence” or “return” in the New Testament, it is also given a more technical meaning in many other passages, and in these cases, it refers to the Second Coming of the Messiah (also see 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1; James 5:7-8; 2 Pet. 3:4-12; 1 Jn. 2:28). The presence of the term *parousia*, in conjunction with the phrase “the end of the age” in Matthew 24:3, proves that all of the subsequent discussion in Matthew 24-25 is about the end times and the glorious return of Jesus to this earth.

Many preterists (i.e. historicists) have argued that Matthew 24 in particular is only about events that happened in the first century, including the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD. However, such a strictly historical and non-eschatological reading of Matthew 24 does not fit the entire context of the passage at all. The events that transpired in 70 AD foreshadowed what will take place in the last days, and could very well represent a partial fulfillment of Jesus’ words in this passage. But again, we are told from the very beginning of Matthew 24 that Jesus is speaking about His Second Coming (*parousia*) and the end of the age, which will include events that did not come to pass in the first century. Simply put, the *parousia* of Jesus did not take place in the first century, and this present evil age did not come to an end at that time either.¹

After the disciples ask Jesus about the sign of His *parousia* and the “end of the age,” He first warns them of future false Messiahs, false prophets, wars, natural disasters, and persecution (24:4-11). Notably, in verses 12-13

1 When interpreting Matthew 24, preterists are forced to try and explain how the *parousia* of Jesus must have already occurred in the first century. This is an extremely far-fetched idea, and one that requires us to completely ignore the clear eschatological overtones of the word *parousia* throughout the New Testament. Also, the preterist interpretation of the *parousia* in Matthew 24 distorts this glorious eschatological event associated with the coming of the Messianic Age, into an anti-climactic episode of judgment that did not bring any real and lasting redemption to either the Jewish people or the Gentile nations.

Jesus says, “Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.”

Already at the outset, it is important to note that when answering His disciples’ question about the end times and His Second Coming, Jesus initially says absolutely nothing about the Rapture. Instead, He attempts to focus their hearts on the need to recognize and avoid deception, and to remain steadfast as His witnesses in the midst of catastrophes and persecution. Even from the opening words of Jesus in Matthew 24:4-14, we can begin to make an argument that His intention was to prepare His disciples to go through the coming days of tribulation, not to teach that they will be rescued out of them through an early Rapture.

BELIEVERS WILL SEE THE ANTICHRIST

This idea that Jesus was expecting His disciples to experience the 70th week is confirmed by His next statement in Matthew 24:15-22:

Therefore **when you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken through Daniel the prophet standing in the holy place** (let the reader understand), then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains [...]. For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

The “abomination of desolation” in verse 15 is a reference to the Antichrist, who was given this title in Daniel 9:27, 11:31, and 12:10-13. Drawing on the eschatology of Daniel, Jesus mentions how after the Antichrist appears in the Temple in Jerusalem, he will break his peace covenant with Israel (Dan. 9:27), and then initiate a time of persecution against Israel and His disciples unlike anything the world has ever seen (Dan. 12:11-12). This time that Jesus calls the “great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21) will begin the last half of Daniel’s 70th week. As we saw in the last few chapters as well, this time of “great tribulation” also corresponds to the Antichrist’s (Gog’s) invasion and plundering of Israel in Ezekiel 38-39.

In Matthew 24:15-22, Jesus builds on his earlier exhortations to readiness, alertness, and perseverance, which can be found in the preceding verses, in Matthew 24:4-14. However, beginning in verse 15, Jesus goes one step further, and tells His disciples that they will indeed see the Antichrist, “the abomination of desolation,” and then go through a time of “great tribulation.” By telling His disciples that they will see the Antichrist appear as the “abomination of desolation” in Jerusalem, halfway through Daniel’s 70th week, Jesus completely disproves the idea that there could be a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

The Pre-Tribulation position maintains that believers will be raptured years before the Antichrist ever fulfills Daniel 9:27. However, in Matthew 24:15, Jesus unambiguously tells His disciples they need to be prepared to recognize the Antichrist when He does appear, and then, be ready to take action. In simple terms, Jesus presumes that His disciples will be on the earth to witness the actions of the Antichrist. That’s why He said to them, “when you [i.e. My disciples/the Body of Messiah] see the abomination of desolation [...]”

THE PRE-TRIBULATION RESPONSE

Because Matthew 24:15-22 so obviously indicates that Jesus’ disciples (the *ekklesia*) will be on the earth during the reign of the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation, those who believe in a Pre-Trib Rapture are forced to come up with an interpretation of Matthew 24 that somehow negates this idea and justifies their position. One of the primary ways they do this is by arguing that in Matthew 24, Jesus was not addressing His disciples as representatives of the Body of Messiah at all. Instead, as the Pre-Trib camp will argue, Jesus was addressing the disciples in Matthew 24 only as representatives of the *non-believing Jews* who will go through the 70th week, or perhaps, as representatives of people who will be saved *after* the Pre-Trib Rapture. Basically, in order for the Pre-Trib position to work, you have to find a way to support the idea that Matthew 24 is a word of admonition given to some group of people other than the disciples of Jesus in every age. You have to

find a way to make Jesus' words in Matthew 24 more or less irrelevant to the Church.

This might sound somewhat bizarre, but marginalizing the relevance Jesus' words in Matthew 24 have for the followers of Jesus today, is part and parcel of Pre-Tribulation theology. The entire Pre-Tribulation system of eschatology depends on the idea that Matthew 24 is not directly applicable to the Body of Messiah.

SPECIAL PLEADING

This notion that Jesus was not addressing His *ekklesia* in Matthew 24 is problematic for a number of reasons, and in the end, this view represents a classic example of what is called "special pleading." Special pleading is a common logical fallacy that occurs when people are too emotionally or dogmatically attached to an opinion, which in turn, leads them to come up with various extreme exceptions to the normal rules of interpretation. Special pleading is closely connected to states of denial and willful blindness.

An example might be a loving father who has a hard time accepting that his son is using drugs. Even though he comes home smelling like pot on a regular basis, the father reasons to himself, "no, not my son, it must just be his friends smoking, not him. My boy is the exception...." That's special pleading. It is a biased interpretation of the facts that depends on the existence of some extreme exception to the normal realities of everyday life, which causes a person to ignore what is right in front of them.

In the same way, the logical fallacy of special pleading is also operating when people say Matthew 24 is the one exception in the entire New Testament where the words of Jesus cannot be applied directly to the Church. I have never heard any pastor say from the pulpit that the words of Jesus in the Gospels are not directly relevant to His congregation. As a matter of fact, it is generally accepted as a fundamental tenet of New Testament faith that the Gospels were given to the followers of Jesus to be our basic manual of discipleship. We have all heard sermon after sermon in which Jesus' words to His disciples in the first century

are applied as “the Word of the Lord” to the Body of believers in the here and now, and rightly so.

Yet, in order for a Pre-Tribulation Rapture position to work, when it comes to Matthew 24, we are supposed to assume that the words of Jesus in this passage justify some sort of unique exception to the normal rules of New Testament interpretation, which therefore also means they are not applicable to us today, but instead, only to some other group of people (i.e. unbelieving Jews) who will remain on the earth during the 70th week, after the Rapture of the Church has already happened. The glaring problem with this view is that in Matthew 24, Jesus never says anything of the sort. He never says that the disciples in this passage should be understood as anything other than representatives of the broader Body of believers, as they are throughout the rest of the Gospels.

Furthermore, most New Testament scholars now accept that the Gospel of Matthew was one of the primary discipleship resources of Messianic Jews living in and around Israel in the first century. The Gospel of Matthew was written for these early members of the Messianic community, and we have every reason to believe that they would have understood the words of Jesus in Matthew 24 as being directly applicable to their own lives, as members of the Congregation of Messiah. Of course, these early disciples did not actually live to see the ultimate fulfillment of Matthew 24 during the end times. However, this passage was still given to them to be passed along to the disciples of Jesus who would live in subsequent generations, and especially to those who will be alive during the final days of tribulation.

Just as we understand the words of Jesus throughout the Gospels to be primarily applicable to His disciples today, we should understand Matthew 24 in precisely the same way. Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20, and we are right to apply His words in this context to the Body of believers in every age. Jesus revealed how His disciples should live in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7), and we are right to interpret His words in this context as a model for New Testament faith and practice today. Simple consistency then would

require that Jesus' words in Matthew 24 also represent an admonition and revelation given to us, His disciples. We cannot just "move the goal posts" when we come to Matthew 24 to support our own preferred position on whether or not the Body of Messiah will be on the earth during the 70th week. Instead, we need to discern what the Word of the Lord is to His people in this passage. Then, we need to allow it to carry its full weight as a prophetic word to believers who are alive today, just as the early Messianic community would have done.

New Testament scholar Alan Hultberg comments on how the entire structure of the book of Matthew itself confirms that Matthew 24 should be read as a word of admonition given to the Body of Messiah:

The purpose of the discourses in Matthew is to train the church in discipleship. Another basic and related theme in Matthew is that the only proper response to Jesus is discipleship. To be a member of the messianic community is to be a disciple (or "student"), and to be a disciple is to obey the teaching of Jesus (7:21-27; 28:19-20). Matthew's gospel, structured as it is around five major discourses of Jesus, is designed to convey that teaching. Thus each discourse begins with the introductory formula "His disciples came to him" (5:1; 10:1; 13:10; 18:1; 24:1) and concludes with variations of "when Jesus finished these words" (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). **This makes it highly unlikely that the teaching in the Olivet Discourse [in Matthew 24] is directed to the disciples as anything but disciples, representatives of those the gospel is designed to instruct.** [Therefore] what is important here is that if Matthew expects the church to see the abomination of desolation and the great tribulation, then the rapture must occur after the middle of Daniel's seventieth week.²

As Hultberg rightly notes, the Pre-Trib notion that Jesus' words in Matthew 24 were not written to instruct us, His disciples, contradicts the entire theological structure of the Gospel of Matthew. Once

2 Alan Hultberg, "A Case for the Prewrath Rapture," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation*, eds. Stanley N. Gundry & Alan Hultberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 115.

we understand this basic premise, the entire foundation of the Pre-Tribulation Rapture theory begins to crumble.

In Matthew 24:4-28, through His conversation with the disciples, Jesus tells His people, the Church, the Body of Messiah, to be prepared for the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation. As further clarified by Hultberg, the “disciples [in Matthew 24] are thus addressed as both primary witnesses of these tribulational events and as representatives of the final generation.”³ Jesus did not indicate that we will be gone or raptured before these events take place. Instead, He made sure to specify what we should watch out for so that we can play our part when it matters most. Because this is what Jesus emphasized in His eschatology, this is what we should emphasize as well.

2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-4

In addition to the Gospels, the rest of the New Testament also teaches that believers will face the Antichrist, and go through the Great Tribulation before they are raptured. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 for example, Paul builds on the eschatology of Jesus in Matthew 24:15, and informs the Thessalonian church that the *parousia* and the Rapture will not occur until after the Antichrist desecrates the Jewish Temple, in fulfillment of Daniel 9:27 and 12:11. Here Paul writes:

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless **the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed**, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, **so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.**

3 Ibid., 112.

One important takeaway from this passage is that Paul uses three terms/phrases to refer to the events associated with the Second Coming of Jesus. These include 1) “the coming (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus,” 2) “our gathering together to Him,” and 3) “the day of the Lord.” For Paul, all of these terms are linked, and essentially describe a series of events that will mark the transition into the Messianic Age.

With respect to the Rapture in particular, notice how Paul mentions in verse 3 that before this event can happen (i.e. “our gathering together to Him”), “the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed.” This is one of the clearest statements concerning the timing of the Rapture in the entire New Testament. There is a very simple chronological sequence in this text. For Paul, before the Second Coming, the Rapture, and the Day of the Lord can occur (vv. 1-2), two things must happen “first.” One, there must be a great rebellion against God on the earth, and two, the Antichrist must exalt himself above God in the Temple in Jerusalem (vv. 3-4). The Pre-Tribulation Rapture theory contradicts the basic end-times chronology Paul gives us in this text. As noted by Hultberg, “when Paul refers to signs prior to the day of the Lord in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, he means to include the Rapture as being preceded by those signs.”⁴ Apostasy → Man of Lawlessness → Antichrist in the Temple → Second Coming, Rapture, & Day of the Lord.

As we will see in the examples below, many of the most reputable New Testament commentaries on 2 Thessalonians reflect the idea that Paul is communicating a simple and straightforward message in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4. Namely, that the Body of Messiah will go through the Great Tribulation, and not be raptured until the “day of the Lord,” which will occur long after the Antichrist has already been revealed.

- Michael W. Holmes in *The NIV Application Commentary* writes: “But what about the Rapture? Don’t the Scriptures teach that believers will be “caught up” before the outbreak of

4 Ibid., 118.

the Tribulation? No, not really. Admittedly, the view that Jesus could come at any moment to take up believers and carry them to heaven prior to the Tribulation, and will then come again in judgment at the end of the Tribulation, is widely publicized and wildly popular. [...] Paul in both 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians links the “catching up” (1 Thess. 4:17) and the “gathering” (2 Thess. 2:1)—terms that for Paul are synonyms—as closely as possible to the coming of the Lord on the Day of the Lord (1 Thess. 4:16; 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:1-3). **And since Paul explicitly says that the Day of the Lord will not occur until *after* the revealing of the Antichrist, it follows that the “catching up” or “Rapture” will not occur until after the revealing of the Antichrist.** In short, first the appearance of the Antichrist, and only then the coming of the genuine Christ and the “catching up” of believers to be with him. [...] An important implication can be drawn from what Paul says here about the sequence of events: **Believers ought to be prepared to experience persecution and distress for the sake of the gospel during the time of the rebellion and Antichrist’s appearing.**”⁵

- Jeffrey A. D. Weima in the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*: “The apostle reassures the shaken church members that the day of the Lord [including the Rapture “gathering” v. 1] cannot have come **because this future event will not take place until certain clearly defined events take place first, foremost of which involves the appearance and destruction of the man of lawlessness, who for the present time is being restrained.**”⁶

5 Michael W. Holmes, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 239.

6 Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1-2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2014), 489.

- Gordon D. Fee in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*: “Paul’s explanation as to why they should not be deceived begins with a reminder about what must take place “first” [before the Rapture], namely, “the rebellion,” which includes “the revelation of the man of lawlessness [...]”.”⁷
- Gene L. Green in *The Pillar New Testament Commentary*: “Certain events were going to precede the day of the Lord, and the apostle puts forward the fact that these had not yet occurred as evidence that they were not on the very verge of its advent. He explains: *for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.*”⁸

Just like Jesus in Matthew 24, Paul warns the Thessalonian believers that the Church will see the Antichrist before they are raptured. That’s the basic message of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4. Furthermore, Paul’s warning to the Thessalonians that the Church will see “the man of lawlessness” in the Temple, is nothing more than a restatement of Jesus’ earlier comment to His disciples in Matthew 24:15, when he said, “when you see the abomination of desolation” (Matt. 24:15).

This link between Matthew 24 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 is also confirmed by the fact that both passages mention believers living through a time of extreme rebellion against God in the last days. For example, Jesus spoke of “lawlessness” being increased and most people’s love growing “cold” (Matt. 24:12). Paul speaks of the “apostasy,” and describes the Antichrist as a man associated with “lawlessness” (2 Thess. 2:3).

Paul’s application of Jesus’ words in Matthew 24:12-15 to a Gentile church is also further proof of what I argued in the last section. Namely, that Matthew 24 is applicable to the entire Body of believers as a whole,

7 Gordon F. Fee, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 280.

8 Gene L. Green, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), 306.

not exclusively to another select group of people that is distinct from the *ekklesia* (i.e. unbelieving Jews). If Matthew 24 is not applicable to the Body of Messiah as a whole, then Paul would never have repeated the same lessons from this passage when he exhorted the Thessalonian church about the end times. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 shows us that Paul understood Matthew 24 to be a word of prophecy given to the Church, which consequently rules out the possibility of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture.

Again, rather than developing elaborate Rapture scenarios that circumvent the plain meaning of Scripture, we need to accept the basic lessons both Jesus and Paul taught about the end times. They both said believers will live through the final apostasy (Matt. 24:12; 2 Thess. 2:3), and they both said believers will witness the fulfillment of Daniel 9:27 (Matt. 24:15; 2 Thess. 2:4). In essence, both Jesus and Paul understood that the Body of Messiah will be on the earth during the reign of the Antichrist, and experience the Great Tribulation. Then, as we will explore even more in the next chapter, we will be raptured towards the end of Daniel's 70th week, on the Day of the Lord.

THE BEAST AND THE SAINTS IN REVELATION 13:5-10

Another critical New Testament text that also teaches that the Body of Messiah will go through the Great Tribulation, and encounter the Antichrist, is Revelation 13:5-10. In this portion of Revelation, John writes the following about the Antichrist:

And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority **for forty-two months**. [...] **Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them**. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. If anyone has an ear, let him hear: If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. **Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints** (ESV).

One of the primary questions that is often raised in response to this passage is, “who are the ‘saints’ John refers to here?” Those who hold to a Pre-Trib Rapture believe these are “tribulation saints” that only get saved after the Rapture of the *ekklesia*. Alternatively, those who believe the Body of Messiah remains on the earth during the “forty-two months” of the Antichrist’s reign (Rev. 13:5), or at least during the majority of this time, understand the word “saints” in this passage to be nothing more than a synonym for New Testament believers (the *ekklesia*).⁹

If we analyze the use of the Greek word *hagios* throughout the New Testament, which is translated here as “saints” in Revelation 13, there is an overwhelming amount of evidence to support the idea that this term is in fact being used by John as a synonym for the Body of Messiah, not to represent some supposedly separate group of people called “tribulation saints.” *Hagios* is used roughly 222 times in the New Testament, and it most often denotes the concept of holiness. It is used to refer to the Holy (*hagios*) Spirit, the Holy Scriptures, a holy kiss, a holy place, the Holy of Holies, the holy city, as well as the attribute of holiness in reference to God or His people.

More importantly however, *hagios* is also used 47 times throughout Acts and the Epistles as a clear reference to and synonym for the New Covenant Body of believers (see Acts 9:13; 9:32; 9:41; 26:20; Rom. 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25; 15:26; 15:31; 16:2; 16:15; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:1; 6:2; 14:33; 16:1; 16:15; 2 Cor. 1:1; 8:4; 9:1; 9:12; 13:13; Eph. 1:1; 1:15; 1:18; 2:19; 3:8; 3:18; 4:12; 5:3; 6:18; Phi. 1:1; 4:21; 4:22; Col. 1:2; 1:4; 1:12; 1:26; 1 Thess. 3:13; 2 Thess. 1:10; 1 Tim. 5:10; Phm. 1:5; 1:7; Heb. 6:10; 13:24; Jude 1:3). There is only one place in the entire New Testament where *hagios* is used to denote a group of people that lived prior to the

9 The reason I say that some only believe the “saints” are on the earth during the majority of the Antichrist’s reign, and not the entirety of this time, is because in Matthew 24:22, Jesus mentions that the Great Tribulation will be “cut short” for His elect. Thus, it is likely that believers will actually be delivered through the Rapture before the last half of Daniel’s 70th week completely ends (i.e. sometime before the 42 months of the Antichrist’s reign come to an end). This will be further explained in the next chapter.

New Covenant era (Matt. 27:52), but this verse has no bearing upon the meaning of the word in Revelation. To summarize, essentially every time *hagios* is used to refer to a group of people in the New Testament, it refers to the followers of Jesus, the Church, the Body of Messiah, etc.

As I pointed out when we studied Ezekiel 38:2-3, Hebrew and Greek word usage within the Bible itself should be one of the primary driving factors that determines how we interpret Scripture. Based on the way *hagios* is used throughout the New Testament, we can be confident that John and his first century audience would have understood this term to be a reference to the existing Congregation of believers.¹⁰ There is no evidence in the New Testament that the word could mean anything else in Revelation 13:5-10.

The Pre-Tribulation position is often predicated on the idea that because the actual word “church” (*ekklesia*) never occurs in any of the texts in Revelation that speak of the Great Tribulation, this must mean the Church will be gone during this time. However, what those who defend this position fail to see, is that John did use synonyms for the *ekklesia*, such as *hagios*, to communicate that the Body of Messiah will be on the earth during the Great Tribulation. I have never heard anyone say that when the New Testament uses *hagios* elsewhere to refer to people who made up the *ekklesia*, such as in Paul’s epistles, this word could also potentially be interpreted as something other than a synonym for the churches he was addressing. Therefore, it would be entirely inconsistent, and yet another example of special pleading, to say that “the saints” in Revelation 13:5-10 represent a group of people besides the disciples of Jesus to whom the book of Revelation is addressed (Rev. 1:4; 22:16).

Once again, because those who believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture do not accept that the Body of Messiah will encounter the Antichrist,

10 Revelation 13:5-10 is drawn from Daniel 7:25, which speaks about the Antichrist wearing “down the saints of the Highest One,” which in that context refers to Israel and/or righteous Israel. In Revelation, John is drawing on this earlier text in Daniel and including the saints who make up the Body of Messiah along with Israel, as those who will suffer under the Antichrist’s reign during the Time of Jacob’s Trouble.

they are forced to come up with an alternate reading of the New Testament that violates some of the most basic rules of Biblical interpretation. In the case of Revelation 13:5-10, they are forced to reinterpret *hagios* as a reference to some unique class of people called “tribulation saints,” even though all John says about these people is that they are “*the* saints.” This group of saints in Revelation 13 is never distinguished from the saints who are mentioned in the rest of the New Testament. Thus, we should not presume to place them into some distinct category simply to try and justify the Pre-Tribulation Rapture position. We cannot just read things into Scripture that are not actually there.

All John is saying in Revelation 13:5-10 is that the Antichrist will have power for forty-two months, and will persecute the Body of Messiah for the majority portion of the last half of Daniel’s 70th week. Far from implying that believers will be raptured before the 70th week, or even halfway through Daniel’s 70th week (i.e. Mid-Trib), John indicates that believers will have to face the reality of martyrdom, imprisonment, and persecution during the reign of the Antichrist. Even as Jesus said in Matthew 24 that there will be a great need for endurance during the end times (Matt. 24:13), John says the exact same thing in Revelation 13:10: “Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.” Given the practical ramifications of this passage, Revelation 13 should be used within the Body of Messiah today to help prepare God’s people mentally and spiritually to face some of the harsh realities of the Great Tribulation, just as John intended.

ALL OF REVELATION IS FOR THE BODY OF MESSIAH

At the big-picture level, we also need to remember that the entire book of Revelation was written for the Body of Messiah. This is why it both begins and ends with Jesus telling us that everything in the entire book is relevant to His *ekklesia*. For example, in its opening verses, in Revelation 1:4, John writes, “John to the *seven churches* that are in Asia.” Then, in its closing verses, in Revelation 22:16, Jesus says, “I, Jesus, have sent My angel **to testify to you [plural] these things for the churches**, I am the

root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”

To say that Revelation was written “for the churches,” as Jesus clearly says it was, but then to turn around and also say that the *ekklesia* will not even experience most of the events described in Revelation (i.e. the Tribulation), is illogical, and no one in the early Church would have read Revelation in this way. In reality, Revelation is a discipleship manual to help the Body of Messiah, “the saints,” walk through the Tribulation to the glory of God. That’s why Jesus said at the end of this critical book of the Bible that it was written for us. This position has been appropriately summarized by New Testament scholar Douglas Moo, who writes:

Jesus claims that He has sent His angel “to give you (plural!) this testimony for the churches.” It is difficult to see how the chapters on the Tribulation could be a “testimony for the churches” if they are not involved in it. Finally, it simply appears improbable that the event described at the greatest length in Revelation (the Tribulation) would have no direct relevance for those to whom the book is addressed.¹¹

JESUS, PAUL, AND JOHN ON THE END TIMES

When we zoom out to take an objective look at what Jesus, Paul, and John taught about the Body of Messiah during the end times, it is not hard to see that they all communicated the same basic message. They all taught that believers will see the Antichrist and live through the Great Tribulation. Furthermore, they also taught that as a consequence, believers need to be both mentally and spiritually prepared to walk through the end times, remaining obedient to Jesus even to the point of imprisonment and death. May the Lord grant us all the heart, mind, and physical strength to live for Him all the way to the very end, no matter what the future may hold.

¹¹ Douglas J. Moo, “The Case for the Post-Tribulation Rapture Position,” in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulation?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 203.

19

THE RAPTURE ACCORDING TO JESUS

“You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”

—1 THESSALONIANS 1:9-10

IN THE LAST CHAPTER, we discovered that the Body of Messiah will face the Antichrist and go through the Great Tribulation. In this chapter, I want to explore in more detail exactly when the New Testament says the Rapture will take place. The basic idea we will unpack in the following pages, is how Jesus unambiguously connects the Rapture to the start of the Day of the Lord in Matthew 24, which is the time when God’s wrath will be poured out on the earth, towards the end of Daniel’s 70th week.¹

JESUS AND THE RAPTURE IN MATTHEW 24

The foundational text in the New Testament related to the specific timing of the Rapture can be found in Matthew 24:29-41. In this passage, Jesus tells us in no uncertain terms the general timeframe during

1 It is important to note at this point as well, that the Day of the Lord is not one literal 24-hour day. It is an extended period of time that will last many months.

which believers will be supernaturally gathered to meet Him in the air:

But immediately **after the tribulation** of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and **they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.**

As we can see, Jesus states in verse 31 that His “elect” who are alive during the reign of the Antichrist will not be “gathered” to meet Him in the air until “after the tribulation.” This is one of the clearest statements in Scripture regarding the timing of the Rapture, which rules out the possibility of either a Pre-Tribulation or Mid-Tribulation Rapture. The phrase “after the tribulation” implies that the Body of Messiah has already gone through the Great Tribulation by the time the Rapture takes place, not that they will be raptured before the final seven-year period, or somewhere near the midpoint of Daniel’s 70th week.

THE PRE-TRIBULATION RESPONSE

Because Matthew 24:29-31 states so unequivocally that the gathering of the elect occurs “after the tribulation,” you might be wondering how those who believe in either a Pre-Trib or Mid-Trib Rapture get around the plain and obvious message of this text. To briefly summarize, one of the ways they attempt to negate the idea that Matthew 24:29-31 does in fact refer to a Rapture that takes place after the Great Tribulation instigated by the Antichrist, is by arguing that this passage is not even about the Rapture at all! Especially for those in the Pre-Trib camp, a common argument is that Matthew 24:29-31 speaks exclusively of the regathering *of the Jews* back to the Land of Israel after the Second Coming, not the Rapture of Jewish and Gentile believers who make

up the Body of Messiah. From a Pre-Trib perspective, this passage has nothing to do with the actual Rapture, but is referring to a completely different event altogether.

In his book, *The Footsteps of the Messiah*, Messianic Jewish scholar Arnold Fruchtenbaum offers the typical, yet mistaken, Pre-Trib interpretation of Matthew 24:29-31:

Following the Second Coming, the Messiah will send *his angels* all over the world **to regather every Jew and bring them back into their Land**. The background to the Matthew passage is Isaiah 27:12-13, which prophesied that the final restoration of Israel will be signaled by the sound of a great trumpet.²

THE RESTORATION OF ISRAEL VS. THE GATHERING OF THE “ELECT”

To be sure, as we have seen throughout this book, the Hebrew prophets did in fact predict that the Jewish people who survive Daniel’s 70th week will be rescued by their Messiah and brought back to the Land of Israel after the Time of Jacob’s Trouble (Deut. 33; Isa. 11:11-16; 27:12-13; Jer. 23:5-8; Ezek. 36-37). When this happens, Isaiah 27:13 even says that “a great trumpet will be blown,” and Isaiah 11:12 also speaks of the “banished ones of Israel” being gathered from “the four corners of the earth.”

Because this language in Isaiah that describes the regathering of ethnic Israel in the Messianic Age does parallel some of the language in Matthew 24:29-31, those who believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture think they have sufficient proof to support the idea that these verses in Matthew are about ethnic Israel, not the Rapture of the *ekklesia*. However, if we look at the supposed similarities between Matthew 24:29-31, and the Jewish regathering texts in the Hebrew Bible in more detail, it becomes quite obvious that the regathering of ethnic Israel is not the subject of discussion in Matthew 24. Yes, both Matthew 24:31

2 Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio: Ariel Ministries, 2002), 635-636.

and Isaiah 27:13 do mention a great trumpet blast. However, that is pretty much the extent of the similarities between the text in Matthew, and the texts in the Hebrew Bible that speak of Israel being brought back to their land in the Messianic Age.

In the Hebrew prophets, the regathering of the Jews in the Messianic Age is often referred to as an event that takes place *on the earth*. This is a critical point to grasp. For example, in Isaiah 11:12, the regathering of the Jewish remnant is said to occur from “the four corners *of the earth*” (cf. Isa. 66:18-20; Jer. 23:7-8). Additionally, Isaiah 11:15-16 also mentions how this Jewish remnant will “walk over dry-shod” when the Messiah turns the Euphrates River (i.e. the River) into seven streams, and also how they will travel back to Israel on a “highway” from Assyria.

In contrast, the elect in Matthew 24:31 are gathered “from *the four winds*, from *one end of the sky to the other*.” This implies that the elect in Matthew 24:31 will meet Jesus in the air, which is something that is never said about the redeemed Jewish remnant that will survive the Time of Jacob’s Trouble. In simple terms, the regathering of the Jewish remnant in the Messianic Age, though it will certainly be accompanied by Jesus performing miracles on Israel’s behalf, is still presented in Scripture as more of a natural, on-the-earth event. Alternatively, in Matthew 24, Jesus speaks of a *supernatural* meeting with His people that will take place in “the sky,” when He appears in “the clouds” (v. 30). Given these important distinctions, we cannot equate the earthly regathering of Israel in Isaiah 11 and 27, with the heavenly gathering of the elect in Matthew 24. The specific language used in each of these texts indicates that they are concerned with two different events: 1) the restoration of Israel in the Messianic Age, after Jesus has already returned, and 2) a supernatural Rapture of believers “after the tribulation,” which will occur before Jesus actually steps foot on the earth.

Another key piece of evidence that proves that Matthew 24:31 is about the Rapture of the *ekklesia* that does not occur until we have first gone through the Great Tribulation, is Jesus’ use of the word “elect” (*eklektos*) in this verse. This is a word that is used throughout the New

Testament to refer to the elect disciples of Jesus, Jew and Gentile, who will inherit eternal life through faith in the Messiah (see Matt. 20:16; 22:14; Mark 13:20; 13:22; Luke 18:17; Rom. 8:33; 16:13; Col. 3:12; 2 Tim. 2:10; Tit. 1:1; 1 Pet. 1:2; 2:9; 2 Jn. 1:1; 2 Jn. 1:13; Rev. 17:14). Jesus had already used this word a few verses earlier, in Matthew 24:24, to refer to His disciples (i.e. members of the *ekklesia*), and there is no evidence that *eklektos* has a different meaning in Matthew 24:31.

To briefly summarize, the word *eklektos* is never used in the New Testament to refer to Israel, or to the remnant of Jewish people who will see Jesus face to face when He returns (as the Pre-Trib position would require). Just like we saw when we analyzed the word “saints” (*hagios*) in the last chapter, *eklektos* is often used as a simple synonym for the Church in the New Testament, and this is how it should be interpreted in Matthew 24:31.

The Pre-Tribulation Rapture position requires us to translate *eklektos* in this verse in a way that completely violates its most common meaning throughout the New Testament. A better option is to humbly accept that in Matthew 24:31, Jesus tells us that His elect disciples who live through the end times will be raptured, and will meet Him in the clouds, “after the tribulation.” The New Testament unambiguously teaches that believers will go through the period of “great tribulation” that Jesus expounds upon at length in Matthew 24.

MATTHEW 24:29-31 = 1 THESSALONIANS 4:14-17

It becomes even more apparent that Jesus was speaking of the Rapture in Matthew 24:29-31 when we compare this text to 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17. As we saw in the last chapter, it is here in 1 Thessalonians that Paul links the Rapture of believers with 1) the *parousia* (i.e. coming/presence) and the descent of the Lord, 2) the voice of an archangel, 3) a trumpet blast, 4) the resurrection of dead believers, and 5) a supernatural meeting with Jesus in the clouds. Other than an explicit reference to the resurrection, all of these precise elements are also present in Matthew 24. Matthew 24:3 and 24:37 mention the *parousia*, and Matthew 24:29-31

mentions the angels, the trumpet blast, and the supernatural meeting in the sky. These similarities between Matthew 24 and the very clear Rapture text in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 are not a coincidence. They indicate that Paul based his theology of the Rapture on the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 24, which in turn, also justifies the position that Matthew 24:29-31 is about the Rapture as well, not the regathering of ethnic Israel in the Messianic Age.

To say on the one hand that Matthew 24:29-31 is not about the Rapture (as the Pre-Trib camp must do), but then to say on the other hand that 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 most definitely is about the Rapture (as the Pre-Trib camp also does), is contradictory and incoherent. Two texts that speak of the same events cannot be about completely different events. Simple consistency requires that we accept that both 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 and Matthew 24:29-31 are about the Rapture. If this passage in Matthew is not about the Rapture, then neither can 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 be about the Rapture, and I do not know of anyone in the Pre-Trib camp who would ever argue that Paul was not speaking about the Rapture in this later text.

For further study, I recommend the book *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord* by eschatology expert Alan Kurschner. In Appendix 2 of this book, Kurschner outlines over 30 different parallels between Matthew 24-25 and Paul's eschatology in 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

The primary reason many people do not want to recognize the emphatic Rapture language in Matthew 24, is because they are already theologically committed to the Pre-Tribulation Rapture position. As a result, since they cannot deny that Jesus says the gathering of the elect in this context occurs "after the tribulation," they are forced to come up with an alternate reading of this text that negates its applicability to the *ekklesia*. This is a serious mistake. We need to accept that Jesus was speaking about the Rapture in Matthew 24:29-31 (just like Paul in 1 Thess. 4:14-17), and that He categorically says in this context that believers will go through the Great Tribulation, and not be raptured until we have first fulfilled God's purposes for His people during the reign of the Antichrist.

THE GREAT TRIBULATION “CUT SHORT” FOR BELIEVERS

As a brief aside, it is also worth mentioning that in Matthew 24:22, Jesus does indicate that the days of “great tribulation” will be “cut short” for “the elect” (i.e. the New Covenant *ekklesia*). This seems to imply that believers will not necessarily have to endure the entire last half of Daniel’s 70th week. As I will explain more in the next chapter when we look at the book of Revelation, it is probable that believers will be raptured and taken into heaven sometime towards the tail end of the 70th week, when the Antichrist’s reign is almost over.

This also implies that when Jesus uses the phrase “after the tribulation” in Matthew 24:29 to refer to the timing of the Rapture, He is not necessarily using this phrase in a *technical* sense to denote “after the 70th week,” or after the capital “T” Tribulation that many prophecy teachers often use as a synonym for the entire seven-year 70th week. Rather, He is only saying that the Rapture will occur “after the tribulation” from the vantage point of believers, because for them, those days will be cut short. It is most likely that even after the Rapture occurs, there will still be some time left of the Antichrist’s 42-month reign (Rev. 14:5; i.e. the remainder of the 70th week).

Furthermore, as we will soon see when we explore the concept of the Day of the Lord in more detail, for those who are left on the earth after the Rapture, to experience the wrath that will be poured out during the end of Daniel’s 70th week, the time of tribulation and suffering will most certainly not be over. Again, when Jesus says that the Rapture will take place “after the tribulation,” He is saying this is when the days of the Great Tribulation will end for His elect, not that this will be the time when the 70th week will be over and He will begin to immediately rule on the earth. Before Jesus can begin His reign, there will be other events that have to occur on the earth after the Rapture, in connection with the Day of the Lord.

I know some of these details might seem a little confusing at first, but they are important if we want to fully understand the Rapture doctrine, including why the Pre-Wrath Rapture is a better position than

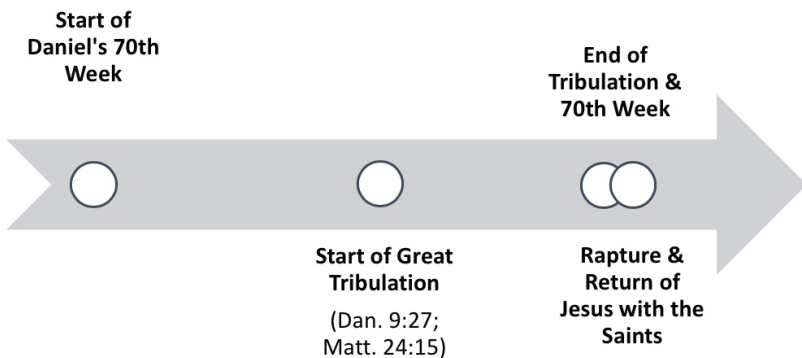
the traditional Post-Trib Rapture. This of course will all be discussed more in the pages that follow.

But in any case, for now, don't worry about getting too bogged down in the minutia. The most important point to grasp from Matthew 24:29-31 is that the *ekklesia* will be on the earth during the Great Tribulation initiated by the Antichrist, and that the Rapture will not take place until the Body of Messiah has first endured a period of intense persecution under the Antichrist.

WHERE DO BELIEVERS GO AFTER WE ARE RAPTURED?

Since Matthew 24:29-31 is about the Rapture, and since Jesus also says in this passage that the Rapture will occur “after the tribulation,” there are only a couple of options left when it comes to where believers go after we are raptured. The traditional Post-Tribulation theory has maintained that believers are transformed/resurrected after Daniel's 70th week, at which point we will meet Jesus in the air, and then return immediately to the earth with Him in a sort of U-turn fashion.

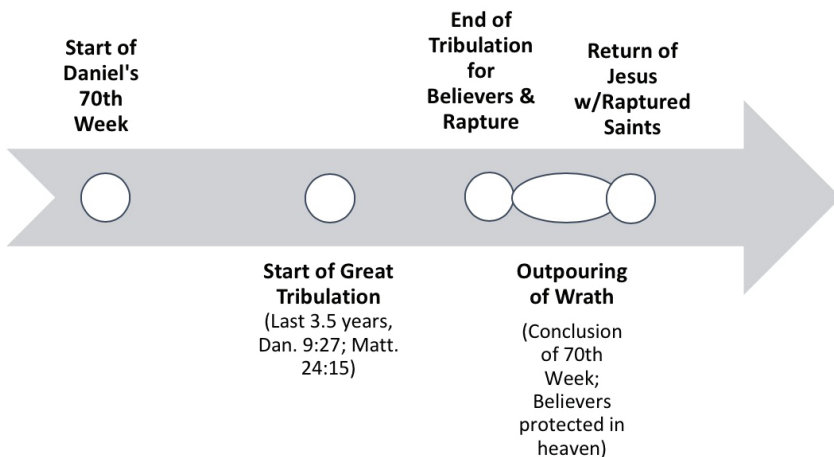
TRADITIONAL POST-TRIBULATION RAPTURE



TRADITIONAL PRE-WRATH RAPTURE

In contrast to the traditional Post-Trib position, proponents of the Pre-Wrath Rapture position believe that “after the tribulation,” believers will go up into heaven with Jesus for a brief period of time (probably for a matter of months or up to a year, give or take), before coming back to the earth with Him. One of the reasons the Pre-Wrath camp believes this, is because they understand that there is an intervening period of time between the end of the tribulation Jesus speaks of in Matthew 24:29, and the start of the Messianic Age. According to Pre-Wrath, this intervening period of time spans the tail end of Daniel’s 70th week, which will also be the time when the Day of the Lord, or, the day of God’s wrath, begins. Thus, believers are raptured into heaven right at the start of the Day of the Lord, where they are temporarily protected until the wrath of God runs its course on the earth. When the time of God’s wrath is complete (or mostly complete), believers return with Jesus to conquer, rule, and reign (more on this idea in the next chapter).

PRE-WRATH RAPTURE CHART



WHO IS RIGHT?

When trying to determine whether the traditional Post-Trib scenario, or the more nuanced Pre-Wrath scenario is more accurate, the first thing that needs to be recognized is that these are actually two different versions of the Post-Tribulation Rapture theory. For this reason, I think Pre-Wrath could also be called Post-Trib/Pre-Wrath. But for simplicity, I will call it Pre-Wrath.

With that being said, it is also important to understand that the Pre-Wrath position is the strongest. As we will see in the rest of this chapter, Jesus did teach that there will be an intervening time of wrath (i.e. the Day of the Lord) before the Messianic Age begins, and before He actually descends back to the earth to set up His kingdom. Those who espouse a traditional Post-Tribulation Rapture tend to miss this, or at the very least, they don't make the centrality of the Day of the Lord a significant enough component of their Rapture theology. I believe this is a mistake, primarily because the notion of the Day of the Lord was most certainly a central part of the Rapture theology of Jesus.

Of course, the fact that there will be a temporary period of wrath between the end of the Great Tribulation for believers and the start of the Messianic Age, does not have to imply that believers must spend this period of time in heaven (as the Pre-Wrath camp argues). It could be argued that believers will be raptured and transformed, meet Jesus in the clouds, return immediately with Him to the earth, and then spend the day of the Lord's wrath on the earth as well, protected from His punishment by virtue of having by that time received our immortal bodies. Those in the traditional Post-Trib camp are essentially forced to go in this interpretive direction.

There are multiple problems with this traditional Post-Trib scenario however. For one, Matthew 24 never actually says that Jesus comes right back down to the earth with His elect after the Rapture. Traditional Post-Trib has simply read this idea into the text (i.e. the U-turn theory), but it is not actually there. All Matthew 24:29-41 says is that the elect will be gathered and "taken" to be with Jesus. Even more importantly, there

are also numerous passages in Revelation that clearly show us that after believers are raptured, we will be taken into heaven, at the start of the Day of the Lord (i.e. sometime towards the end of Daniel's 70th week).

In the next chapter, I will discuss the passages in the book of Revelation that support the Pre-Wrath position against the traditional Post-Trib position. In the rest of this chapter however, I only want to lay a foundation, and cover how the idea that there will be a short-term period of wrath that follows the Rapture, was in fact a central part of Jesus' eschatology, as well as a primary reason why He said the Rapture must take place precisely when it does.

THE DAY OF THE LORD'S WRATH IN MATTHEW 24:29

The way Jesus indicates that God's wrath will not be poured out on the earth until "after the tribulation," is by referring to the heavenly disturbances that will occur at this time. Thus, we read in Matthew 24:29, "after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken."

Though it is easy for us modern readers to miss the significance of Jesus' statement here, it is important to recognize that in this verse, Jesus gives an abbreviated quotation of Isaiah 13:6-13, which is one of the key texts concerning the Day of the Lord in the Hebrew Bible. This passage in Isaiah reads:

Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore all hands will fall limp, and every man's heart will melt. They will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of them; they will writhe like a woman in labor, they will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame. Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it. **For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light; the sun will be dark when it rises and the moon will not shed its light.** Thus I will punish the world for its evil and

the wicked for their iniquity; I will also put an end to the arrogance of the proud and abase the haughtiness of the ruthless. I will make mortal man scarcer than pure gold and mankind than the gold of Ophir. Therefore I will make heaven tremble, and the earth will be shaken from its place at the fury of the Lord of hosts in the day of His burning anger (also see Isa. 24:23; Joel 2:10-11; Zeph. 1:14-18).

As we can see, in this passage, the heavenly signs of Matthew 24:29 are referenced within the context of a broader prophecy about the coming “day of the LORD.” According to Isaiah, this “day of the LORD” will be a time of “destruction from the Almighty” (v. 6), a time when people will be “terrified” and in “anguish” (v. 8), a time when God will unleash His “fury and burning anger” (v. 9), a time when God will “punish the world of its evil” (v. 11), and a time when mortal man will become “scarcer than pure gold” (v. 12). When all of these things happen, the heavens and the earth will also be shaken, “the sun will be dark,” “the moon will not shed its light,” and the stars of the heavens “will not flash forth their light.”

When Jesus referenced this prophecy from Isaiah 13 in Matthew 24:29, and said that all of these things will not take place until “after the tribulation,” this was His way of saying that the Day of the Lord is what takes place after the portion of the Great Tribulation that believers will endure. In other words, the Day of the Lord is what initiates and immediately follows the Rapture. Upon hearing this, Jesus’ first century Jewish audience would have understood that this will be the time when the heavenly signs of Isaiah 13 appear, and the time when God will call the world to account and punish the wicked.

Once we understand from Matthew 24:29 that God does not comprehensively punish the world for its iniquity until *after* the Great Tribulation is “cut short” for believers, it is much easier to see why in this same context Jesus also spoke about the Rapture (vv. 30-31). The Rapture in verse 31 is technically mentioned after the heavenly signs that announce the Day of the Lord in verses 29-30. However, Jesus is still simply presenting the

Rapture as that which delivers and protects the Body of Messiah from experiencing “the day” of God’s wrath, which will probably last for close to a year (give or take; cf. Isa. 34:8). The point is that believers (the *eklektos*) will be taken from the earth (raptured) right before God unleashes His divine sword of vengeance on the world. For Jesus, the Rapture occurs in conjunction with the start of the Day of the Lord, right “after the tribulation.” God does not rescue believers from all suffering during the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:3-28; Rev. 13:5-10). Rather, He rescues us from the “wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:9-10), the wrath of Isaiah 13, which Jesus says will not be poured out until sometime well into the latter part of the Antichrist’s reign. That’s the message of Matthew 24:29-31, which Paul echoes in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10:

You turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, **who rescues us from the wrath to come** [i.e. the wrath on the Day of the Lord].

PRE-TRIB MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE WRATH OF GOD

One of the most common errors espoused by proponents of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, is the idea that believers must be raptured before Daniel’s 70th week, because it will be during the entire 70th week that the earth will experience the wrath of God. In other words, Pre-Trib has historically equated the Day of the Lord with the entire 70th week of Daniel (Dan. 9:27).

However, this idea is not accurate. There is no verse in the entire New Testament that says God’s wrath will be poured out on the earth during the entire 70th week. There will be suffering during the entire 70th week, and a certain degree of refining judgment. But it is vital to understand that this suffering cannot automatically be equated with the actual wrath of God that will be poured out for no other reason than to punish and destroy sinners. Jesus said in Matthew 24:29-31 that the wrath of God will not be unleashed on the earth until the heavenly

signs of Isaiah 13 appear first, which will not take place until the Great Tribulation is “cut short” for the elect, sometime near the end of the 70th week (Matt. 24:22). In reality, the Great Tribulation is what will give believers an opportunity to finish the work of the Great Commission, and to lead sinners to repent. Then, after God has determined that the *ekklesia*’s time of suffering during the Great Tribulation has run its course, believers will be rescued through the Rapture, and those who have rejected the Gospel during the preceding years will be judged through the outpouring of God’s wrath on the Day of the Lord, during the tail end of Daniel’s 70th week (refer to Pre-Wrath Rapture Chart).

THE RAPTURE AND THE DAYS OF NOAH

This idea that that gathering of the elect in Matthew 24:31 is the specific means of rescuing believers from God’s wrath on the Day of the Lord, is even more emphatically reiterated by Jesus a few verses later, in Matthew 24:37-42. This text reads:

For the coming [*parousia*] of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them [*airo*] all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken [*paralambano*], and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken [*paralambano*] and one will be left. Therefore, be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.

In this passage, just like in Matthew 24:29-31, Jesus tells us that the Rapture and the start of the day of the Lord’s judgment will occur more or less in conjunction with one another. The events that take place at this time will mirror events that took place in “the days of Noah.” Noah and his family were not delivered years before the flood. Rather, it wasn’t until “the day that Noah entered the ark” that the flood came (v. 38). The point of this illustration is that just like Noah, believers

will also be rescued through the Rapture right before the outpouring of divine wrath, which we know from verse 29 will not occur until “after the tribulation.” The heavenly signs will appear, believers will be raptured, and the unrepentant will be left on the earth to experience the end-times flood of God’s judgment.

After the Noah illustration in verses 37-39, Jesus elaborates in verses 40-41 by telling us in more concrete terms what it will look like when the Rapture takes place. Two people will be standing together, but only “one will be taken and one will be left.” The Greek word for “taken” in verse 40 is *paralambano*, which in this context, implies a favorable reception into the presence of the Lord. The implication here is that those who are “taken” are rescued, like Noah, while those who are “left,” are left on the earth for judgment, just as sinners were left on the earth to experience the flood.

Some have suggested that the people “taken” in verses 40-41 could be those who are, in their words, “taken in judgment,” not those who are rescued through the Rapture. The reason they say this is because verse 39 mentions that the flood came and “took” away the sinners. So if the flood came and “took” away sinners, shouldn’t we understand those who are “taken” one verse later as the same group of people?

The problem with this view is that there are actually two different Greek words used in each of these verses (v. 39 vs. vv. 40-41), which many English translations do not communicate. As noted by New Testament scholar Alan Kurschner, the Greek term in verse 39 (*airo*) implies being taken or swept away in judgment in this context, whereas the Greek term in verses 40-41 (*paralambano*) almost always implies more of a favorable reception, or to receive something to oneself in a positive sense.³ The ESV gets this passage right and translates *airo* in verse 39 as “swept them all away.”

In his book, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord*, Kurschner writes:

3 Alan Kurschner, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord: What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Return of Christ* (Pompton Lakes: Eschatos Publishing, 2013), 219-220.

[T]he Greek term in verses 40-41 is *paralambano*, carrying the sense of intimate receiving. Some claim that *paralambano* does not always carry the sense of receiving in a positive sense. This is true, but misleading. Of the forty-nine times this term is used in the New Testament, it is used only three times negatively (Matt. 27:27, John 19:16, Acts 23:18). This rare negative sense is found in a specific narrow context of a prisoner being handed over to the jurisdiction of soldiers, a context not relevant to the parousia. It is a strained lexical argument to apply this unlikely meaning to [Matthew 24:40-41].⁴

Given these important linguistic details, we have to recognize that the original Greek speaking audience of Matthew would not have understood those who were swept away (*airo*) by the flood as representatives of the people who are “taken” in verses 40-41 (*paralambano*). These are two different groups of people, and the Greek text certainly supports this interpretation.

Those who are “taken” in verses 40-41 are being compared to Noah and his family, who were taken in the sense of being rescued. Those who are “left” in verses 40-41 are being compared to those who were swept away in judgment by the flood.

Furthermore, the parallel passage in Luke 17:22-37 also supports the idea that those who were swept away by the flood are being compared to those who will be “left” on the earth to experience God’s judgment after the Rapture. Of particular note, Luke 17:27 uses a different Greek word than Matthew 24:39 and speaks of how the “flood came and *destroyed* them all.” In other words, sinners who are “left” will be “destroyed,” just like the sinners at the time of the flood, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, but the righteous will be rescued and “taken” out of the judgment through the Rapture, just like Noah and Lot (see Luke 17:26-37).

In addition, because the emphasis in Matthew 24 beginning back in verse 31 is on the Rapture, also reading verses 40-41 as a reference

4 Ibid.

to the Rapture makes the most sense. The people who are “taken” in verses 40-41 represent the elect from verse 31, who will be gathered to meet the Lord in the sky, which is precisely why they are pictured in verses 40-41 as disappearing from the earth!

The point of Matthew 24:40-41 is that when the Rapture takes place, the unrepentant will literally see believers vanish into the heavens right before their very eyes, while they (the unrepentant) will be “left” on the earth to experience God’s wrath on the Day of the Lord. This is also why Jesus says in the following verses that we should always be prepared, so that the Rapture and the day of God’s wrath do not catch us off guard (Matt. 24:42-51).

THE RAPTURE AND GOD’S WRATH IN MATTHEW 24

To briefly summarize the message of Matthew 24, Jesus uses strategic repetition in verses 29-31 and 36-41 to emphasize that the Rapture is what delivers and protects the Body of Messiah from the outpouring of God’s wrath, which will be unleashed after believers endure the Great Tribulation, that is to say, the majority of the last half of Daniel’s 70th week. In verses 29-31, Jesus indicates that the Rapture occurs more or less in conjunction with the start of the Day of the Lord, which was spoken of in numerous passages in the Hebrew prophets, including Isaiah 13. (Paul also links the Rapture to the Day of the Lord in 2 Thess. 2:1-4). Then, in verses 36-41, Jesus uses an illustration from the life of Noah to explain how believers will be raptured and “taken” to be with the Lord right before He pours out His wrath on unrepentant sinners. In both of these individual passages, Jesus is reiterating the same message. Namely, that believers will go through the Great Tribulation, but be rescued prior to the time God punishes the world for its iniquity. This is why believers need to stay alert, and model our lives after the righteous example of Noah, who understood that his mission in life was to help save anyone who would listen from “the wrath to come” (Matt. 3:1-12).

Believers should be prepared to go through the Great Tribulation and face the Antichrist, but we should also be overflowing with hope

that after we have endured the Great Tribulation, our Lord will cut these days short for us, rescue us into His loving arms, and not allow us to suffer with the wicked on “the day” of His wrath. All who believe in Israel’s Messiah are destined for vindication and redemption, not punishment. By living in faith and obedience today, we can “build the ark” that will save us in the future.

THE END-TIMES PASSOVER IN THE BOOK OF REVELATION

“And judgment was passed in favor of the saints of the Highest One, and the time arrived when the saints took possession of the kingdom.”

—DANIEL 7:22

OVER THE YEARS, many scholars and laypersons alike have recognized that the book of Revelation presents the end times and the return of Jesus as a prophetic replay of the original Passover story. Once we realize how Israel’s earlier prophets, including Moses, Ezekiel, the Apostle Paul, and even Jesus Himself, also taught that there is a future fulfillment of Passover that will take place “in the kingdom of God,” the overt Passover themes and symbolism in Revelation begin to make a lot more sense. In essence, in the book of Revelation, John builds on the writings of the earlier prophets, and gives us one final glimpse into what the End-Times Passover will look like, when Jesus’ words in Luke 22:15-16 will finally be fulfilled.

In this chapter we will explore how the intrinsic relationship between Passover and the last days is highlighted in Revelation. What we will specifically focus on is how the book of Revelation connects the day of the Lord’s wrath, the actual return of Jesus, and possibly the Marriage

Supper of the Lamb to the Biblical feast of Passover.

THE DAY OF LORD & THE END-TIMES PASSOVER

In the last chapter, we discovered that after the Great Tribulation is “cut short” for believers, there will be a time when believers are raptured, which is what will protect us from the outpouring of God’s wrath during the final period of judgment, before the start of the Messianic Age (Matt. 24:29-31). This period of time “after the tribulation,” when believers will experience deliverance through the Rapture, and sinners will experience judgment, is called the Day of the Lord in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament (Isa. 13; 2 Thess. 2).

We also saw when we studied Ezekiel 38-39 in chapter 15, that this final period of judgment, which will include the time when Jesus defeats the Antichrist at the Battle of Armageddon (Ezek. 38:17-23; Rev. 16:17-21), is presented by Ezekiel as an eschatological replay of the historic Passover. Ezekiel presents Gog as the Final Pharaoh, and Jesus as the miracle-working New Moses who will unleash His plagues of wrath to defeat the powers of darkness. Throughout the book of Revelation, John picks up on this earlier prophetic tradition from the Torah and Ezekiel, and not surprisingly, also uses undeniable Passover symbolism to describe the day of God’s wrath and the return of Jesus.

THE BASIC CHRONOLOGY OF REVELATION

The first place we see overt Passover symbolism in the book of Revelation is with the introduction of the trumpet judgments in Revelation 8-9. Before we look at these trumpet judgments in more detail, I first want to cover a few aspects related to the basic structure and chronology of events in Revelation.

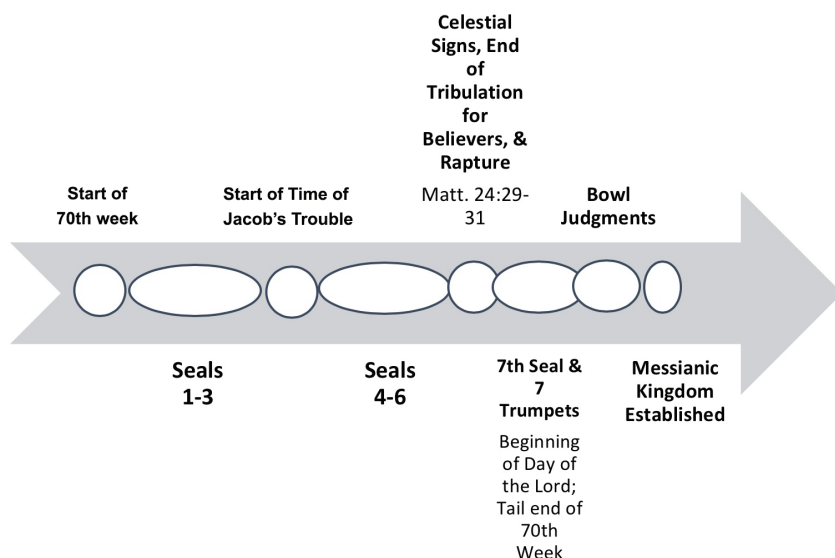
Although not all of the events in Revelation follow a strict chronological sequence, there is still a basic chronological framework that is used in this book, which thereby allows its broader storyline to move forward in a more or less linear fashion, albeit with some strategic parentheses and flashbacks along the way. The eschatological events

in Revelation begin with the opening of the prophetic scroll and the breaking of its seven “seals” (Rev. 5-6), which then leads to the various sequences of “trumpet” and “bowl” judgments.

The seals described in Revelation 6:1-12 are often understood to cover most of the seven-year 70th week period. It is likely that the opening of seals 1-3 takes place during the beginning of the 70th week (6:1-6), whereas the events connected to seals 4-6 take place during the last 3.5 years, after the Antichrist has turned on Israel, set up the abomination of desolation, and initiated the Time of Jacob’s Trouble.¹

After the sixth seal, the trumpet judgments are then unleashed on the earth, when the seventh seal is opened (8:1-2). In contrast to the first six seals, the seventh seal and subsequent trumpet judgments most probably mark the starting point of the Day of the Lord, the outpouring of God’s wrath on the earth, and about the last year of Daniel’s 70th week (give or take). The bowl judgments, which occur after the trumpets (16:1-21), represent a final cataclysmic episode of judgment that will bring the day of the Lord’s wrath to a close, which will then lead to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom.

1 This chronology is drawn from Alan Kurschner’s excellent book, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord: What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Return of Christ* (Pompton Lakes: Eschatos Publishing, 2013), 46-55. It is also worth mentioning that the first seal may not correspond directly to the start of Daniel’s 70th week, but could also encompass some events before the final seven-year period. We know that the sixth seal leads us to sometime towards the end of the 70th week and the Great Tribulation, and that the other seals also correspond to 70th week events as well. However, we cannot be overly dogmatic in terms of when the first seal is actually opened in relation to the 70th week.



REVELATION 6 AND MATTHEW 24

As we see in this chart, I tentatively place the Rapture before the seventh seal and its trumpet judgments are poured out. The reason I place the Rapture here in the sequence of events that unfold in Revelation, is because the sixth seal leads to various celestial signs and natural disasters, including “a great earthquake,” the sun turning “black as sackcloth,” the moon becoming “like blood,” the stars falling from the sky, and the sky being split open. It is also after the sixth seal is opened that the “great day” of God’s wrath is announced (6:17):

I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was **a great earthquake**; and **the sun became black as sackcloth** made of hair, and **the whole moon became like blood**; and **the stars of the sky fell to the earth**, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. **The sky was split apart like a scroll** when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in

the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and **from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come**, and who is able to stand?” (Rev. 6:12-17).

In chapter 19, we discovered that Jesus connected both the Rapture and the start of the day of God’s wrath to some of these precise celestial signs, including the sun being “darkened” and the stars falling from the sky (Matt. 24:29-31; cf. Joel 2:30-31). Given this connection between the signs in Matthew 24 and Revelation 6, what we are supposed to gather from these two texts is that the sixth seal leads to the heavenly signs that announce to believers that their Rapture deliverance is imminent, while simultaneously announcing to the wicked that they are about to experience God’s end-times flood of wrath. It seems that the Rapture will take place after the sixth seal, in connection with these heavenly signs, but before the seventh seal and its trumpet judgments, which begin “the great day” of God’s wrath (i.e. the Day of the Lord).²

THE RAPTURE AND THE JEWISH REMNANT IN REVELATION 7

This idea that the natural disasters and celestial signs in Revelation 6:12-17 (sixth seal) correspond to the same signs in Matthew 24:29-31, and therefore lead directly to the Rapture and the Day of the Lord, is confirmed in Revelation 7. After the signs of the sixth seal appear, there is an interlude in Revelation 7, which covers what takes place before the trumpet judgments

2 Some may wonder why I place the Rapture of believers before the trumpet judgments of Revelation 8-9 & 11:15-19, when Paul specifically says in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 that believers will be raptured at “the last trumpet.” In short, I am not convinced that the redemptive trumpet in 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16 corresponds to the trumpets of judgment in Revelation, nor am I convinced that when Paul speaks of this “last trumpet” in the Epistles he is speaking technically of the absolute last trumpet that will sound during the eschaton. Put simply, I believe the weight of evidence supports the theory that the Rapture trumpet actually precedes the judgment trumpets of Revelation (8-9). For example, in Revelation 7:9-17, the raptured multitude of believers appear in heaven before the first trumpet of judgment/wrath is even sounded. For further explanation see pages 216-217 in Alan Kurschner’s book, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord: What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Return of Christ* (Pompton Lakes: Eschatos Publishing, 2013).

of the seventh seal are unleashed. Notably, it is here in Revelation 7 that we are given a picture of the Jewish remnant that survives the Time of Jacob's Trouble being "sealed," while at the same time a "great multitude" of believers appears in heaven in the presence of God:

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads." **And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand from every tribe of the sons of Israel.** [...]

After these things I looked, and behold, **a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb**, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands [...] **"These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation** and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. **For this reason, they are before the throne of God;** and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them" (Rev. 7:1-17).

There is no need to allegorize or give a purely symbolic interpretation to either the 144,000 "from every tribe of the sons of Israel," or to the "multitude" who appears in heaven in Revelation 7. The 144,000 are definitely meant to be understood as ethnic Jews. Some within the Pre-Wrath Rapture camp believe these Jewish people represent the *entire* Jewish remnant that will be "sealed" after the Time of Jacob's Trouble, and supernaturally protected *on the earth* during the Day of the Lord, just as Israel was protected in the land of Goshen from God's wrath

against the Egyptians (Ex. 9:26). This is the position of Alan Kurschner, in his book, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord*. Others believe the 144,000 are a *select group* of Jewish people within the broader Jewish remnant (i.e. the “first fruits”), who will be saved and raptured at the beginning of the *parousia*, when Jesus first appears in glory to save His elect.³ This view is held by prophecy teacher Nelson Walters. Walters argues that the 144,000 are the Jewish people who will “call upon the name of the Lord” right at the start of the Day of the Lord, in fulfillment of passages such as Joel 2:31-32 and Zechariah 12:10.

I see the merits of both of these positions. But personally, I lean towards Kurschner’s view, that the 144,000 of Revelation 7 are unsaved yet protected Jews who will remain on the earth during the Day of the Lord (i.e. during the trumpet and bowl judgments; cf. Rev. 9:4).⁴ In any case, the next scene in Revelation 7:1-17, which describes the “great multitude” in heaven, refers to the resurrected and raptured believers. Just as Jesus promised in Matthew 24:36-41, Revelation 7:1-17 gives us a picture of how believers will be “taken” into God’s presence in heaven after the Rapture, and protected there for a time while God pours out His flood of wrath and judgment during the Day of the Lord. Revelation 7 completes the picture of the Rapture in Matthew 24:29-41.

Indeed, Revelation 7:9-17 is one of the first key texts that actually shows us where believers go after the Rapture. Contrary to the traditional Post-Trib view, and in agreement with the Pre-Wrath Rapture position, God will receive believers into His presence in heaven for a brief period, before we descend back to the earth with Jesus.

3 See Nelson Walters YouTube video “Who are the 144,000” for a summation of this view; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-weHxWlllI>.

4 I do also believe Walters is right to point out that some Jews will be saved and raptured right at the start of the Day of the Lord, with the rest of the *ekklesia*, in order to fulfill passages such as Joel 2:31-32 and Zechariah 12:10. I am just not convinced Revelation 7 is describing this group of Jews. To me, the textual indications in Revelation 7 communicate that this 144,000 is a group of Jewish people who remain on the earth during the Day of the Lord (cf. Rev. 7:3). This implies that they are probably not “saved” until after Jesus returns to the earth to initiate the End-Times Exodus. I could of course be wrong about this, but this is my position as of now (11.10.2019).

As noted by New Testament scholar Alan Kurschner:

This innumerable multitude [in Revelation 7] can be none other than the resurrected and raptured people of God. It is perfectly fitting to see them taken out of the great tribulation with glorified bodies to heaven at this point because it happens just before the seventh seal is opened, triggering the day of the Lord's wrath (Rev. 8:1). God is faithful, promising believers that they will not have to experience His wrath (1 Thess. 5:9). If you are a child of God, you can have confidence in being included in this "enormous crowd that no one could count...standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9). **In addition, both accounts in the Olivet Discourse and Revelation 6-7 show that this gathering of God's people happens just after the celestial disturbances (Matt. 24:29-31; Luke 21:25-28; Rev. 6:12-17).**⁵

THE END-TIMES PASSOVER PLAGUES AND THE DAY OF THE LORD

After we are given the picture of the sealed Jewish remnant and the multitude of raptured saints in heaven in Revelation 7, Revelation 8 then focuses on the actual judgments that will begin "the great day" of God's wrath. Not surprisingly, in both Revelation 8 and 16, the trumpet and bowl judgments that span the entirety of the Day of the Lord, are symbolically connected to the original Passover plagues that God inflicted upon the Egyptians in the book of Exodus.

The trumpet judgments contain somewhat less Passover symbolism than the bowl judgments. But this analogy is still there nonetheless, and each of the trumpet judgments are also called "plagues" (9:20). For example, the first trumpet brings about intense and destructive weather (8:7), while the second trumpet involves the sea becoming blood and a third of the sea creatures dying (8:8-9). The third and fourth trumpets make the earth's freshwater supply bitter, and also bring darkness over the earth. The fifth trumpet results in the release of tormenting wild

5 Alan Kurschner, *Antichrist Before the Day of the Lord: What Every Christian Needs to Know About the Return of Christ* (Pompton Lakes: Eschatos Publishing, 2013), 98.

creatures throughout the earth, whereas the sixth trumpet results in the death of a “third of mankind” (9:13-19).

After the first six trumpets sound, Revelation 9:20-21 then states, “the rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues did not repent of the works of their hands [...] nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.” The implication of these verses is that because mankind will not repent after the trumpet judgments, there will thus be more judgments to come, which we will see when the bowl judgments are poured out in Revelation 16.

THE RAPTURE IN REVELATION 14

Before John details the bowl judgments in Revelation 16 however, which will follow the trumpet judgments, it is important to note that he first gives us another picture of the Rapture and the victorious saints in heaven. This picture of the Rapture can be found in Revelation 14:14-17, which John describes through the metaphor of two distinct harvests that will occur towards the end of the 70th week:

Then I looked and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand. And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud. **“Put in your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.”** Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped (Rev. 14:14-16; cf. Mark 4:26-29).

And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle. Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.” So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and **threw them into the great**

wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles (Rev. 14:17-20; cf. Matt. 13:41).

The first harvest described in this text is analogous to the wheat harvest. The second is analogous to the grape harvest. In Mark 4:26-29, Jesus specifically described the harvest of the righteous at the end of the age in terms of the wheat harvest, and the idea of crushing grapes as a metaphor for judgment is also common in the Bible. Therefore, when all of the evidence is weighed, it is most logical to conclude that Revelation 14:14-20 is a concise picture of the Rapture (14:14-16) and the outpouring of God's wrath on the Day of the Lord (14:17-20).

This passage appears to be another angle on the events Jesus spoke of in Matthew 24:36-41, when He mentioned the righteous being "taken" and the wicked being "left" on the earth for judgment "after the tribulation." Furthermore, Revelation 14:14-20 should also be read as a prophetic elaboration on what will take place after the sixth seal of Revelation 6:12-17. In other words, in Revelation 6 we never actually see the Rapture taking place. We only see the mixed multitude in heaven. However, in Revelation 14:14-20, John doubles back to give us a more detailed picture of the Rapture, which is what will lead to believers being delivered into God's presence in heaven (i.e. Rev. 7:9-17), while the unrepentant are left on the earth to experience the day of the Lord's wrath.

THE VICTORIOUS SAINTS AND THE END-TIMES PASSOVER IN REVELATION 15

After John gives us a more in-depth picture of the Rapture in Revelation 14:14-16, the next major scene in Revelation 15 introduces the "last seven plagues," which will bring the wrath of God and the Day of the Lord to an end. However, before John elaborates on the actual plagues, he first recounts his vision of a "victorious" host of saints, standing before the throne of God in heaven.

As we saw when we looked at the trumpet judgments, there are definite links between the original Passover story and some of the earlier judgment events in Revelation (8-9). However, it is here in Revelation 15, as we draw closer to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom and the final victory of Jesus, that we see the most concentrated Passover symbolism in the entire New Testament, not surprisingly, right before John begins to fully expound on the Second Coming. In Revelation 15, John speaks of both the victorious saints who come out of the great tribulation, and the outpouring of God's wrath on the Day of the Lord, in terms drawn directly from the early chapters in the book of Exodus. Essentially, John presents the time right before the return of Jesus, as well as the Second Coming itself, as the eschatological fulfillment of Passover.

John's description of the End-Times Passover begins in Revelation 15:1-4 with these words:

Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because **in them the wrath of God is finished**. And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God. **And they sang the song of Moses**, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations! Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; for all the nations will come and worship before You, for Your righteous acts have been revealed."

Both the "plagues" of wrath, and the mention of the victorious saints in heaven who sing "the song of Moses" and the "song of the Lamb," give us a definite clue that the Holy Spirit intends for us to understand the time right before the Second Coming of Jesus through the lens of Passover. There is a noteworthy juxtaposition in the opening verses of Revelation 15 between those who are left on the earth to experience the Passover plagues of wrath on the Day of the Lord, and those who

celebrate their victory over the Antichrist in heaven by singing the song of Moses. This is the song that the Israelites sang in Exodus 15 after Pharaoh and his armies were drowned in the Red Sea. The actual words of the song of Moses and the Lamb in Revelation 15 are drawn from a number of texts in the Hebrew Bible, not only Exodus 15. However, this song is still meant to be understood as primarily analogous to the original song of praise in Exodus 15.

As many commentators have pointed out, John does not tell us exactly who these victorious saints in Revelation 15:2-4 are. However, the most logical option is that they are the same raptured saints who were harvested a few verses earlier, in Revelation 14:14-16, and also the same victorious saints who appeared standing in heaven in Revelation 7:9-17.

There are many reasons to conclude that the saints in Revelation 15 are the raptured saints who will be delivered from the earth before the Day of the Lord begins. First, we are told in Revelation 4:6 that before the throne of God there is a “sea of glass, like crystal.” Then here in Revelation 15:2 we are told that these victorious saints are “standing on a sea of glass mixed with fire.” The implication from this parallel language is that these victorious saints are worshipping the Lamb in heaven, around His throne, *in their physical bodies*.

Some have tried to say that perhaps these saints in Revelation 15 represent only the martyred saints of Revelation 6:9-11 and 13:7-10, who attain victory over the beast by remaining faithful to Jesus even unto death. However, this would not make sense because earlier in Revelation (Rev. 6:9-11), John saw the “souls” of the Great Tribulation martyrs underneath the heavenly altar, which implies that he saw the martyrs *without* physical bodies; a picture that contrasts what he sees here in Revelation 15:2-3. To stand on something requires a person to have an actual physical body, not merely a soul, and the only way a believer could be standing in heaven in their physical body, is if they had first been resurrected or raptured and then transported into heaven (i.e. 1 Thess. 4:14-17). This picture of the “standing” saints in heaven in Revelation 15 is also directly paralleled in Revelation 7:9-17, which

refers to the heavenly multitude “standing” before God’s throne multiple times. This implies that both of these texts are describing the same group of raptured and resurrected saints in heaven.

Once the identity of the saints in heaven is understood, it also becomes clear that Revelation 7:9-17 and 15:1-4 confirm the Pre-Wrath Rapture position, which argues that after we meet Jesus in the clouds, He will first take us up into the Father’s presence in heaven, where we will spend a portion of the Day of the Lord. In contrast to the traditional Post-Trib position, Revelation 7:9-17 and 15:1-4 do not support the idea that after we meet Jesus in the clouds, we will then do an immediate U-turn and come right back down to the earth with Him.

Even as Israel passed through the waters of the Red Sea at night, and then emerged victorious on the other side at the break of dawn (Ex. 14:21-30), the victorious saints of Revelation 15 will endure the darkness of the Great Tribulation by the grace of the Lord, and then be delivered into the light of His holy and glorious presence in the heavenly realm. In Revelation 14-15, the Rapture represents a kind of eschatological Red Sea crossing for the elect; those who make it through the waters of affliction in the last days, before attaining victory “over the beast” through their faith in Jesus.

After their victory over the Antichrist, these saints then lead an end-times Passover worship service in heaven. Through their worship and song of victory, they herald the coming of God’s kingdom that is about to invade and subdue the entire earth. They announce to heaven and earth that the arrival of the Passover King is imminent. They tell the world that Passover is about to reach its end-times fulfillment when the Messiah establishes His kingdom.

PRE-WRATH WEAKNESSES?

One of the alleged weaknesses of the Pre-Wrath position is that based on Matthew 24:29-31, it could be argued that the final descent of Jesus to the earth on the clouds of heaven, and the Rapture (v. 31), must occur at exactly the same time. Especially when refuting those in the

Pre-Trib camp, proponents of the traditional Post-Trib Rapture often say things like, “there is only one Second Coming, not two,” and, “it is not appropriate to separate the Rapture from the actual return of Jesus to this earth, because both of these things are always spoken of in the New Testament as though they are part of one single event.” This logic then leads those in the traditional Post-Trib camp to say that Jesus must descend from heaven after the 70th week, at which point believers will meet Him in the air, and then travel right back to the earth with Him.

I do agree that the Pre-Trib position violates Scripture by separating the Rapture and the Second Coming by a period of seven or more years, and that advocates of the traditional Post-Trib Rapture have rightly pointed this out. However, what proponents of the traditional Post-Trib theory have missed, is that the Second Coming (i.e. *the parousia*) of our Lord will still technically include a series of events that occur over a more elongated period of time, beginning with the Rapture and the Day of the Lord, which will then be followed by other prophetic events later on (i.e. a period of time when believers go to heaven, which will then lead to the final descent of Jesus with His saints).

Just as the “first coming” of the Messiah involved events spanning many years, the Second Coming (*parousia*) should also be understood as encompassing the entire complex itinerary of Jesus when He returns. In other words, the prophetic fulfillments related to the Second Coming (*parousia*) cannot be truncated into the space of a few hours, days, or even weeks, any more than the first coming of Jesus can be truncated into the space of a few hours, days, or weeks.

The *parousia* will include the Rapture, the Day of the Lord, the physical descent and return of Jesus with His saints, His military victories, the establishment of His kingdom, etc. Many people in the Post-Trib camp make the mistake of reducing the *parousia* only to the events that take place right when Jesus is initially revealed from heaven, which then leads them to the conclusion that because “there is only one Second Coming,” the Rapture and Jesus’ final descent must happen more or less simultaneously. I believe this is because the traditional Post-Trib camp

has not spent enough time working through the key Rapture texts in the book of Revelation, all of which pose significant challenges to their idea of a very abbreviated second *parousia*. If we gain an expanded understanding of the second *parousia* of Jesus, it becomes obvious that there is no inconsistency in saying that the Rapture will occur at one point, at the start of the *parousia*, whereas Jesus' final descent will occur at another later point during the *parousia*.

The *parousia* itself is an umbrella term that encompasses a vast span of time and events associated with Jesus' final victory and glorious reign in the Age to Come. Though the final *parousia* will include the return of Jesus to the earth, it does not necessarily refer exclusively to the actual return and descent of Jesus to this earth with His saints.

We need to take all of what Scripture teaches into account as we attempt to create a composite picture of what happens after the Great Tribulation ends for believers, during the initial phases of the Second Coming. When we do this, and especially when we compare Matthew 24:29-31 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 to certain texts in Revelation (Rev. 14:14-20; 15:1-4; cf. Rev. 7:9-17; Isa. 26:19-21), it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the raptured saints will be taken up into heaven by Jesus, where we will worship around His throne for a brief period of time as the day of the Lord's wrath begins:

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, **standing before the throne and before the Lamb**, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands [...] **“These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation** and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. **For this reason, they are before the throne of God;** and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them” (Rev. 7:9-17; cf 15:1-4).⁶

6 To date, I have never heard any adequate Post-Trib explanation of who these saints in heaven in Revelation 7 and 15 actually are. As a matter of fact, most books and articles by Post-Trib scholars completely ignore these key texts in Revelation. It is only the Pre-Wrath position that avoids the pitfalls of both the traditional Pre-Tribulation and Post-Tribulation Rapture theories.

These texts in Revelation 7 and 15, which show believers being ushered into the presence of God and the Lamb *in heaven*, before actually returning with the Messiah *to the earth*, also raise a very important practical point that the traditional Post-Trib scenario completely misses. Namely, that God the Father wants us to see Him and know Him, and to see Jesus and know Him, in all their heavenly glory before we reign with Jesus on the earth during the Messianic Age.

Remember, the *parousia* implies the full revelation of God and the Messiah to His people, and to the world. As a result, in order for us to know Jesus fully, we must not only know Him as a ruling and reigning king on the earth, but we must also see Him as the exalted and victorious High Priest in heaven, seated at the right hand of the Father.

This is part of the reason we must go into heaven after the Rapture, before we return to the earth. It is there that we will be guided directly into the presence of the Father by our Great High Priest, the Messiah, and it is there that we will experience heavenly fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which will then prepare us to reign with Jesus in the Age to Come.

The traditional Post-Trib scenario essentially has believers being raptured and returning to the earth with Jesus before they ever get to meet God the Father in heaven. This is not what the book of Revelation says will happen!

Being allowed into the presence of the Father in heaven is part of the inheritance of every believer, and God will not deprive any of His people of the right to be in His heavenly presence before the Messianic Age begins (cf. Jn. 14:1-3). Just as Jesus was resurrected and taken up into the presence of the Father, so too will the raptured saints be comforted by the Father in heaven, and we will see Him in all of His magnificent splendor, before He sends us back to the earth to conquer, rule, and reign with our Messiah.

THE WRATH OF THE LAMB

After the victorious saints in heaven announce the imminent arrival of

the Messianic Kingdom in Revelation 15:2-4, Revelation 15:5-8 and 16:1-21 then pivot to again focus on the actual outpouring of God's wrath on the Day of the Lord, which will follow the trumpet judgments of Revelation 8-9.

In keeping with the Passover theme of Revelation 8-9 and 15, the "bowls of wrath" that are poured out on the earth during the Day of the Lord are again described in this context as "plagues":

After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened, and the seven angels who had **the seven plagues** came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels **seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God**, who lives forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.

These seven plagues represent God's final judgments on the earth, which will be poured out before and shortly after the Second Coming of Jesus to the earth, as the Day of the Lord comes to an end. Basically, Revelation 15-16 gives an even more detailed picture of the "flood" of wrath Jesus spoke of earlier in Matthew 24:39, which was first introduced in Revelation 8-9 with the trumpet judgments.

When the first plague is poured out, people who take the mark of the beast and worship "his image" will experience "loathsome and malignant" sores (Rev. 16:2). This plague corresponds directly to the plague of boils in Exodus 9:8-12. When the second and third plagues are unleashed, the sea, rivers, and springs of the earth will be turned into blood, and all living creatures in the sea will die (Rev. 16:3-4). These plagues correspond to the plague that turned the Nile and the entire Egyptian water supply into blood in Exodus 7:14-25. With the fourth plague, the earth will be scorched with fire and "fierce heat," which will be so severe that those left on the earth will blaspheme and curse God

(Rev. 16:8-9). Interestingly, this particular plague does not have a direct parallel in the book of Exodus. After the fourth plague, the fifth plague will bring “darkness” over the kingdom of the Antichrist, which will in turn cause men to gnaw “their tongues because of pain” (Rev. 16:10-11). This plague corresponds directly to the plague of darkness in Exodus 10:21-29. The seventh plague is connected to the Battle of Armageddon in Revelation 16:17-21. As we saw when we studied Ezekiel 38-39, this will be the time when Jesus destroys the Antichrist (Gog) with hailstones, fire, and intense severe weather. This plague corresponds to the plague of hail and severe weather in Exodus 9:13-35.

What we can take away from Revelation 15-16 is that the final outpouring of God’s wrath on the earth, which will take place right before Jesus inaugurates His kingdom, on the Day of the Lord, is presented by John as a time when the wicked and those who have submitted to the Antichrist will experience God’s end-times Passover plagues of wrath. In simple terms, the Day of the Lord that was first introduced in the Hebrew prophets (Isa. 13), and in the teaching of Jesus (Matt. 24:29), corresponds in Revelation to the eschatological fulfillment of Passover that Jesus spoke of in Luke 22:15-16.

We know from Ezekiel 38-39 that it will be Jesus Himself who will destroy the Antichrist at the Battle of Armageddon (seventh plague; Rev. 16:13-21; 19:11-21). This means that Jesus will be back on the earth with us sometime before the Day of the Lord completely ends, that is, before all the bowls of wrath are completed. Of course, it is also important to recognize that Scripture does not tell us exactly when during this sequence of Passover plagues we will return with Jesus.

THE CONQUERING SAINTS & THE MESSIAH IN REVELATION 19

When thinking through the various end-time scenarios covered in this book, I have often wondered what role believers (the *ekklesia*) will play in the unfolding drama of events connected to the Second Coming. Most believers accept the idea that we will one day “rule and reign” with Jesus when He returns. However, what many do not realize, is that the

New Testament also says that we will make up the Messiah's kingdom invasion force at the time of His Second Coming.

This idea that we will be a part of Jesus' Messianic military force when He returns is found in Revelation 17:14. In this verse we are told that the Lamb who will "overcome" the Antichrist will also appear with "the called and chosen (*eklektos*) and faithful." This is undoubtedly a reference to believers. Furthermore, in Revelation 19:14, we are also told that Jesus will return with the "armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean," who will follow "Him on white horses":

And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. **He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood,** and His name is called The Word of God. **And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.** From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS." Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, "Come, assemble for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great." **And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army** (Rev. 19:11-19; cf. Ezek. 38-39).

The armies of heaven in Revelation 19:14 could refer to angels, believers, or both. Both angels and believers are described elsewhere in

the book of Revelation as being clothed in clean linen garments (15:6; 19:8). However, in the verses that immediately precede Revelation 19:14, it is the Bride of Messiah, the “saints,” who are said to wear “fine linen, bright and clean” (Rev. 19:7-8). Because of this, and because of the earlier text in Revelation 17:14, which does in fact speak of believers returning with Jesus, we can be certain that the Body of Messiah will be included in this host of heavenly armies that will accompany the “King of Kings” back to the earth.

New Testament scholar G.K. Beale summarizes why it is important to recognize that believers will in fact comprise Jesus’ army when He returns:

It is possible that these heavenly troops are angelic (as in 12:7). Elsewhere in the NT, angelic armies accompany Christ from heaven in executing the final judgement (Matt. 13:40-42; 16:27; 24:30-31; 25:31-32; Mark 8:38; Luke 9:26; 2 Thess. 1:7; Jude 14-15; cf. *Test. Levi* 3:3; *Apoc. Elijah* 3:4; *1 En.* 102:1-3; *2 En.* 17). [...] Nevertheless, 17:14 supports the initial suggestion that it is Christ himself who conquers the beast as a representative act on behalf of the “called and chosen and faithful” who accompany him. **17:14 also supports the identification of the armies as the saints, not angels, because there it is the saints who accompany Christ**, and there also Christ is called Lord of lords and King of kings (as in 19:16).⁷

Based on all of the New Testament evidence, we can conclude that Jesus will return in glory with an army of both believers and angels. This army will form the core of His military force as He defeats the powers of darkness, and ushers in the kingdom of God.

THE PRE-WRATH POSITION AND THE “ARMIES OF HEAVEN”

As a brief aside, I also want to discuss why the description of believers as part of the “armies which are in heaven,” who will return with Jesus

7 G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: W.m. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 960.

riding on white horses, is another piece of evidence that supports the more nuanced Pre-Wrath Rapture position. It is reasonable to argue that for us to be described as the “armies *which are in heaven*,” we would have to actually go up into heaven for a brief period of time after the Rapture. In other words, why would we be described as making up the “armies which are in heaven” if we don’t spend any time in heaven with Jesus before He establishes His kingdom on this earth? This Pre-Wrath reading of Revelation 19:14 would also further correlate with the picture of the saints in heaven in Revelation 7:9-17 and 15:1-4. Though some texts in the New Testament do condense many of the key events associated with the *parousia*, Revelation gives a more detailed picture and shows us that believers are taken up into the heavenlies to be in God’s presence as the Day of the Lord begins.

Additionally, it should also be pointed out that if believers do not go up into heaven after the Rapture, it would not make sense for Revelation 19:14 to say that we will ride back to the earth on white horses with Jesus. If we don’t go up into heaven, where would we get these white horses from?

If they interpret this imagery in a literal fashion, proponents of traditional Post-Trib would have to say that we will meet Jesus in the sky, at which point He will give us our horses, which we will then immediately ride back to the earth. I suppose this is technically possible, but it does strike me as going against the grain of Revelation 19:14.

Revelation 19:11 heralds the coming of the Messiah only after heaven has been “opened,” and then verse 14 says that a holy army of saints (i.e. His Bride) will be “following Him” as He comes out of heaven. The most natural reading of this passage is that believers are coming out of heaven with Jesus. This means that the Rapture has already happened (Matt. 24:29-41), and that Revelation 19 is describing a different event of the *parousia*. Namely, our descent back to the earth after we have spent some time in heaven with God.

While we will have to wait and see how all of this plays out, based on these details in Revelation 19, I am convinced that the *ekklesia* will spend a portion of the Day of the Lord in heaven, as the first Passover

plagues of wrath are being poured out. We will ascend into heaven after the Rapture to be prepared, and to receive our military instructions from Jesus, so that we can then take part in the eschatological events connected to His Second Coming with Him. Meanwhile, even as the *ekklesia* goes up into heaven at this time, the rest of the Jewish remnant will be protected *on the earth* from experiencing God's wrath on the Day of the Lord (cf. Ex. 9:26; Rev. 7:1-8).

REVELATION 19 IN RELATION TO THE END-TIMES EXODUS

In earlier chapters of this book, we saw how Jesus will return to the Middle East to fight a series of battles against the armies of the Antichrist, while simultaneously setting the Jewish captives free and leading them in a victorious military procession back into the Promised Land (Num. 24; Deut. 33; Isa. 11; 27; Hab. 3; Zechariah 9). Since discovering Revelation 19, I have often wondered where this particular text fits into the sequence of these other prophetic events connected to Israel's End-Times Exodus.

Does Revelation 19 indicate that we will return with Jesus and take part in the entirety of Israel's End-Times Exodus and final military triumph with Him? Or, could it be that some of the events connected to Israel's End-Times Exodus take place while we are still in heaven (during the trumpet judgments?), and that Jesus comes to retrieve us (the *ekklesia*) only after He has already spent some time engaging in certain battles across the Middle East by Himself? Furthermore, if this second scenario is more accurate, how much or how little of Israel's End-Times Exodus will have taken place before the time we return with Jesus as part of His military entourage (i.e. Rev. 19)?

These are very difficult questions to answer, because there is no singular text in Scripture that lays all of this out for us in a precise chronological fashion. But at this point, I do want to note a few observations that have informed my own personal, albeit tentative, understanding of where believers fit into the broader sequence of events that will transpire during Israel's End-Times Exodus.

First, Revelation 19:13 mentions that Jesus is “clothed with a robe dipped in blood” when He comes out of heaven with us, His army of saints. Some within the Pre-Wrath camp have noted that this could imply that Jesus has already been engaged in some type of military conflict on the earth prior to our own personal return with Him (Rev. 19).

It could be that after Jesus takes the *ekklesia* into heaven (i.e. after the Pre-Wrath Rapture), He will be with us there for a time, but then also spend some time on the earth by Himself, as He begins to judge the nations, before ultimately retrieving believers in heaven. In other words, Jesus may be “clothed in a robe dipped in blood” in Revelation 19 because by the time He makes His final descent with the saints, He has already started treading the winepress of God’s wrath without us, threshing across the Middle East, and regathering the Jewish captives (perhaps at some point during the trumpet judgments or early bowl judgments). Personally, though I see the logic of this position, I am still not convinced that it is accurate.”⁸

The reason I actually believe we will be on the earth throughout the duration of Israel’s End-Times Exodus, is because Revelation 19 emphasizes that believers are coming back with Jesus to help Him as “He treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God” (19:15). In other words, Jesus does not return with us after the nations have already been subdued, and probably not even after Israel has already been delivered. Instead, Jesus returns with us and then the nations are subdued (Rev. 19:15-16). When the initial events of Revelation 19:11-19 take place, there will be many future battles that still have to be fought. The Body of believers will definitely be a part of the Messiah’s end-times cavalry charge against the powers of darkness.

One of these future battles that is specifically highlighted in Revelation 19:17-19 is the Messiah’s battle with the Antichrist. This

8 It is also possible that Jesus being “clothed in a robe dipped in blood” in Revelation 19, is simply a prospective look forward at what He will do after He returns with His saints, not a retrospective look back at what He has already done.

text indicates that the Antichrist will not be destroyed until after the saints return with Jesus on white horses, which means that the Messiah's victory over Gog in Numbers 24 and Ezekiel 38-39 is not only something that we will witness, but also something that we will participate in.

Having considered all of these details, I believe that many, and likely even all, of the events connected to Israel's final deliverance and End-Times Exodus will involve the Body of Messiah, functioning alongside Jesus as His army of holy saints. We will return to the Middle East with Jesus, take part in the eschatological Passover deliverance of Israel with Him, and play a strategic role in leading the Jewish remnant back into the Promised Land.

It is important to realize that in both passages in Revelation where Jesus is pictured as returning to wage war (Rev. 17:14; 19:11-19), He is not alone, but rather, He is with us, His saints. Though I suppose it is not impossible that Jesus could engage in some conflicts alone while we are still in heaven, the emphasis in Revelation is on Him going to battle with His army of saints and angels. Revelation 19 in particular evokes the Messianic Warrior motif of Numbers 24, Deuteronomy 32, Habakkuk 3, and Zechariah 9. Many of the same concepts and themes from these earlier texts appear again in Revelation 19. This is another reason I believe we will be with Jesus when He is fulfilling these prophecies, and marching on a war path with Israel through the southern wilderness (see ch. 12). The salvation of the Jewish remnant, the journey through the desert, the parting of the Red Sea, the ascent up to Jerusalem, the Messiah's triumph over His enemies, we are going to see it all. In a beautiful way, Revelation 19 incorporates the Body of Messiah into the epic eschatological drama of the Hebrew Bible.

Though again, I cannot say exactly what all of this will look like at the grassroots level, or when exactly during the sequence of trumpet and bowl judgments all of the events connected to the End-Times Exodus will take place. But what I am sure of is this: unlike many of the more one-dimensional presentations of the Second Coming, which depict Jesus coming down from heaven, rapturing the saints, returning

immediately with them to Jerusalem, and then beginning His Millennial reign, the actual *parousia* will include a much more dramatic finale of multi-faceted events happening on many different fronts over an extended period of time. Jesus will be manifest in the sky, the saints will be resurrected and raptured, there will be victorious worship in heaven around the throne of God, there will be Passover plagues and judgments being poured out on the earth, the saints will return in glory with Jesus riding on white horses, the Body of Messiah will fight a series of battles with our King, Israel will be delivered, Jesus will come out of Egypt leading an End-Times Exodus, the Jewish people will join the Lord's army, the Antichrist will be destroyed, and the Messianic Kingdom will finally be established over all the earth.

Just think of the finale of a great action movie or trilogy like *The Lord of the Rings* or *Star Wars* and multiply it by about a million. That's the level of plots, sub-plots, and even sub-sub plots that will characterize the final transition into the Messianic Age. This is when God is finally going to reveal Himself to the entire world without holding anything back. And when we look at all of the relevant Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation, it becomes apparent that He has quite an elaborate program of end-time events in store for the world. We may not be able to put all of these events into a precise chronological timeline. But whatever God has in store for us, I certainly won't complain!

THIS IS YOUR DESTINY

Hashing out the chronological details related to how all of these end-time events will unfold is important. At the same time, it is equally as important to also consider their practical significance when it comes to our own personal and collective relationships with the Lord. In simple terms, eschatology is not only about understanding the events that will take place during the end times at an intellectual level. It is also about helping us understand our destiny, so that we can press into and live in light of our truest calling as followers of the Messiah.

After spending some time studying the book of Revelation, I recently

said to my wife, “hey baby, did you know when Jesus returns you are going to appear with Him in glory, riding on a white horse, and then you are going to help Him wage war against the powers of darkness, as He rescues Israel, and establishes His kingdom and government over the entire earth?”

Like most people, my wife had never heard of such a thing! Unfortunately, most believers are not aware of what their ultimate destiny in the Messiah actually is, or of how they are being trained in this life to serve alongside their King when He returns. But this is precisely what Scripture says will happen in the future. God has more responsibilities in store for you in the Age to Come than you can probably even imagine. You could literally end up being a general in the Lord’s army. You could literally end up subduing entire nations. This is why Jesus said to believers in Revelation 2:26, “He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS; AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON.”

This life is bootcamp for the future. The Lord is training His army. When He asks us to overcome various obstacles today, He is not only preparing us for our next “season” of life. At a more fundamental level He is also preparing us to wage war with Him, and to reign with Him in the Age to Come. How we respond to adversity, hardships, disappointment, persecution, temptation, and unanswered prayers now, will determine our rank, position, and responsibilities in the kingdom of God. Don’t be surprised by adversity. This life is your job interview for the future. So dear brothers and sisters, let us strive to be faithful and worthy of the honor the Lord will bestow upon us in the Messianic Age. Let us seek His grace and keep His deeds until the end. Please pray for me, and I will pray for you.

When Jesus returns, we will travel with Him on His war campaign throughout the Middle East, as He sets the Jewish captives free, carries out Israel’s End-Times Exodus, and then ultimately defeats the Antichrist once He has entered the Promised Land. As members of the

Body of Messiah, you and I will be with our Passover King as He strikes down the nations, and “treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty” (Rev. 19:15). We will see Jesus’ robe “dipped in blood,” which will not be His own blood, but the blood of His enemies who will be slain at the time of His Second Coming (Rev. 19:13; Isa. 63:1-6). We will be with our New Moses when He performs miracles and unleashes His plagues of wrath against Gog and His armies.

This is your destiny and calling as a follower of the Messiah. We are going to conquer, rule, and reign with Jesus when He returns. If we stay faithful to Him in this life, neither suffering, nor tribulation, nor sickness, nor imprisonment, nor martyrdom, nor even all the powers of hell, will be able to thwart the plans He has for us. For as Paul says, Jesus will come back to be “glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed [...]” (2 Thess. 1:10).

THE MARRIAGE SUPPER OF THE LAMB

After the End-Times Passover is initiated through the outpouring of the final plagues of wrath, and the return of Jesus with His holy saints and angels, it will then reach its climax with the Marriage Supper of the Lamb. The passage that speaks of this marriage supper (Rev. 19:7-10) is technically situated before the account of Jesus and His bride returning to conquer the earth in Revelation 19 (Rev. 19:11-19). However, this does not mean the marriage supper chronologically precedes the Second Coming. In other words, first Jesus will return with His saints to conquer the earth and defeat the Antichrist. Then, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb will be the celebratory feast that marks the beginning of the Messianic Age. I am not overly dogmatic on this, but a case can be made that the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is the same Passover feast Jesus originally said He would eat with His disciples “in the kingdom of God” in Luke 22:15-16.

Unfortunately, there is still a well-entrenched interpretive tradition in evangelical prophecy circles that maintains that the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is a feast that takes place between Jesus and His bride *in*

heaven, before He returns to the earth. However, if we thoroughly study Revelation 19:7-10, we will see that the Marriage Supper of the Lamb does not take place before the Messianic Kingdom is established. Rather, it is only announced at the time Jesus is about to return to the earth:

Let us rejoice and be glad and give glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God" (Rev. 19:7-9).

As we can see, there is no mention in Revelation 19 that the marriage supper has already occurred before the Second Coming of Jesus. Revelation 19:7-9 heralds that this marriage supper will take place as the reign of God begins *on the earth* (see Rev. 19:1-6), and that those who are invited to this supper in the future will be blessed.

The next scene in Revelation 19:11-21, which speaks of the return of Jesus and His defeat of the Antichrist, is presented as that which sets the stage for the marriage supper to take place. In other words, the Lamb returns and conquers in 19:11-21, which leads to the previously announced feast of Revelation 19:7-9.

Another reason we can be sure that the Marriage Supper of the Lamb does not commence until the Messianic Age has already begun, is because it is only after Jesus comes back to the earth that Passover will finally be "fulfilled in the kingdom of God," which will also be the time when Israel is redeemed at the dawn of the Age to Come. As we have seen throughout this book, it is only after Jesus returns that He will deliver Israel from captivity, bring them "out of Egypt," and defeat the Antichrist as the miracle-working New Moses. If the Marriage Supper of the Lamb were to take place in heaven, before the Passover is even completely fulfilled at the time of Jesus' Second Coming, that would be utterly anticlimactic and somewhat absurd. It would be like celebrating the victory before the battles that will lead to the victory

have even been won. Such an understanding of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb does not even fit the entire context of Revelation 19, which is all about events that take place after the Second Coming, not events that take place in heaven during the 70th week.

Many New Testament scholars have also argued that in Revelation 19, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb is a celebratory feast that takes place on the earth, at the start of the Messianic Age. A few examples:

- G.K. Beale in *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*: “The concept of a sacred meal shared by Israel and the Messiah is common in Jewish thought. According to 3 Enoch 48:10 this banquet takes place in Jerusalem. The idea is found in apocalyptic settings as well. According to the *Apocalypse of Elijah* the righteous are to feast with the Messiah between this age and the age to come. In Luke 13:29 Jesus speaks of those from all points of the compass who will come and take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Later in his ministry he foretells a day when he will drink the fruit of the vine anew with his disciples in the kingdom of his father (Matt 26:29). Such promises cause the believer to anticipate the long-awaited marriage of the Lamb and his bride the church.”⁹
- Michael Brown and Craig Keener in *Not Afraid of the Antichrist: Why We Don't Believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture*: “Some have argued that believers must be raptured before the Tribulation so that they can participate in the Marriage Supper of the Lamb during the Tribulation. Yet no text actually says that we eat with Christ during the Tribulation. On the contrary, it is only as Jesus is about to return to judge the earth in Revelation 19:11-16 that the Marriage Supper of the Lamb has come and the Bride has made herself ready (see verse 7). Such announcements about what

9 Beale, 348.

“has come” can precede the event (see Revelation 14:7, 15). [...] This is also what we would expect. Jewish people expected the Messianic banquet (cf. Isaiah 25:6-8) to begin with the consummation of God’s Kingdom (cf. Luke 14:15). Jesus also spoke of eating and drinking with us “in the kingdom” (Mark 14:25; Luke 22:30) and of Gentile believers joining the banquet “in the kingdom” (Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:29). The banquet belongs not to the Tribulation but to the Kingdom [...].”¹⁰

- Paige Patterson in *The New American Commentary: Revelation*: The view that the marriage supper takes place at “the outset of the millennium, seems to be more in keeping with the chronology of the text.”¹¹
- Ben Witherington III in the Cambridge commentary on *Revelation*: “This feast does not precede the return [of Jesus to the earth], either in heaven or on earth. The author is prophesying about the future [i.e. the Messianic Age].”¹²

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19 represents the Messianic banquet that celebrates 1) the victory of believers over the Antichrist, 2) Israel’s national redemption and reconciliation with God, and 3) Jesus’ completed work of ushering in the Messianic Age. This will be the time when Jesus will once again break bread with Israel and His disciples, and once again drink of the fruit of the vine in the kingdom of God, just as He anticipated in Luke 22:15-18. The Marriage Supper of the Lamb will mark the time when the work of the Messiah as both our Passover Lamb, and our Passover King, will be complete. It will be the

10 Michael L. Brown & Craig S. Keener, *Not Afraid of the Antichrist: Why We Don’t Believe in a Pre-Tribulation Rapture* (Minneapolis: Chosen Books, 2019), 138-139.

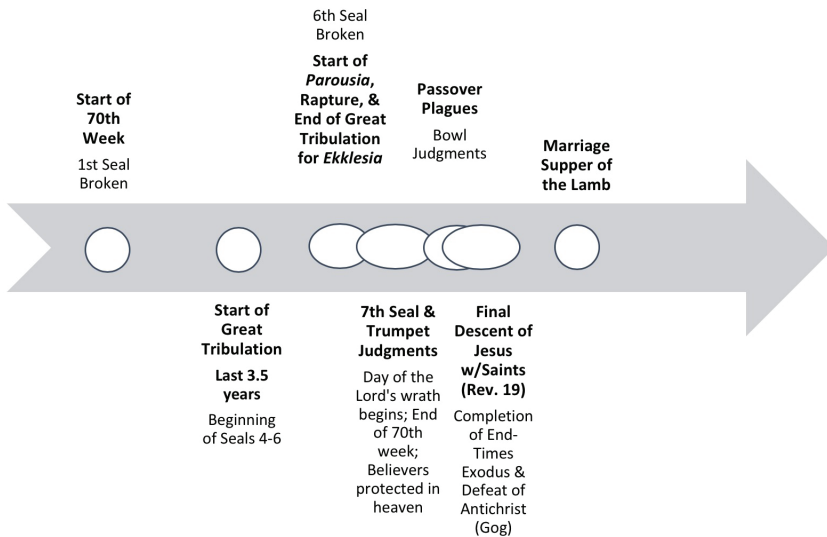
11 Paige Patterson, *The New American Commentary: Revelation, Volume 39* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2012), 344.

12 Ben Witherington III, *Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 233.

climactic celebration of God’s work of redemption on our behalf. It will be our family reunion with believers and saints from across the ages. Old friendships will be renewed, and new ones will be forged that will last for all eternity. There will be feasting, and joy, and singing, and exultation.

And believe me, it’s going to be quite the party.

CHRONOLOGY OF THE END-TIMES PASSOVER IN REVELATION¹³



SCRIPTURE INDEX AVAILABE AT SHILOHMEDIA.ORG

13 This is a working model, not drawn to precise scale, which I believe synthesizes many of the end-times events we have covered in this book into one simple timeline. However, please understand that this timeline is tentative, and may need to be tweaked in certain areas in the years to come.

WAYS TO HELP SHILOH MEDIA

Thank you for reading this book. I truly hope it was a blessing to you in your walk with the Lord!

If you believe that the message of our soon returning Passover King is a message worth sharing with others, I want to ask if you would consider taking a few practical steps to help our ministry.

1. Please leave a review of *The Passover King* on Amazon. This will help us immensely in our marketing efforts with this book and in pursuing the prophetic ministry the Lord has put on our hearts in this critical hour of history. Please also consider recommending this book to others through your social media accounts.
2. Follow me on Instagram and Twitter, subscribe to Travis M. Snow on YouTube, and sign-up for our ministry email list at www.shilohmedia.org. This will ensure that you stay up to date with forthcoming book releases, ministry projects, and prayer requests. We also produce regular devotional and Bible teaching content on our social media platforms as well.
3. Consider making a tax-deductible donation to *Shiloh Media*. We depend on the Lord's provision through His saints to do the work of the ministry and to fulfill the Great Commission before the return of Jesus. We are so grateful for any gifts or prayers that the Lord lays on your heart.

Many blessings to you friend, and I hope to see you at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb!

—TRAVIS SNOW

