

The Sunday School Times

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President and Editor

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Dr. Charles C. Ryrie, President
Philadelphia College of Bible
1800 Arch Street
Philadelphia, Pa.

Dear Dr. Ryrie:

Mr. Fletcher spoke to me the other day about your willingness to write something for the Sunday School Times if there was an opportunity. I am therefore enclosing herewith a post card from a reader asking questions about the well-known prophecy in Ezekiel 38 and 39 with particular reference to Russia.

Would you mind giving his questions some thought to see whether they might appeal to you as the basis for a not-too-long article for the Times. If you felt you could handle this in, say, 700 or 800 words, it might be something quite appropriate for our "Notes on Open Letters." If we used what you wrote, we would, of course, give you credit for it and also pay for it.

If you care to try your hand at this, will you please send it along to me at your convenience? I probably do not need to tell you that we like to have all manuscripts typewritten with double spacing throughout, even where material is quoted, and as a rule we like to have Bible quotations taken from the King James Version, although the American Standard Version (1901) is also acceptable. If you do not care to write on this subject, will you please return the card to me?

Cordially yours,

Philip E. Howard, Jr.

PHJr/ke

Enclosure

Note: The post card is from John H. Greening, R. D. #1, Saugerties, New York

THE SUNDAY SCHOOL TIMES
NOTES ON OPEN LETTERS
Charles C. Ryrie, Th.D., Ph.D.

The recent visitor from Russia is reported to have said, "We will bury you." Questions: Who will do the burying? Who will be buried? Where will they be buried?

All of these interesting questions are answered in Ezekiel 39:11-13: "And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will give unto Gog a place there of graves in Israel, the valley of the passengers on the east of the sea: and it shall stop the noses of the passengers: and there shall they bury Gog and all his multitude: and they shall call it The valley of Hamongog. And seven months shall the house of Israel be burying of them, that they may cleanse the land. Yea, all the people of the land shall bury them; and it shall be to them a renown the day that I shall be glorified, saith the Lord God". The answers are clear. The people of the land of Israel will do the burying, the multitude of Gog will be buried, and the graves will be in Israel.

Some further questions might also be asked and answered in order to throw additional light on the matter.

1. Who are the multitude of Gog? Ezekiel identifies Gog as the "chief prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal" (38:3). The word chief might well be a name and could be translated (as the revision does) "the prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal." The territory of his control is called Magog (38:2), and this comprises lands north of Palestine. Concerning Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal: "There is hence great probability in the opinion, that the people referred to were the Russi, from whom the modern Russians derive their name. The other two names connected with them, Meshech and Tubal, are the Meschi and Tibareni, inhabitants of the regions about Caucasus. . . . So that

the people mentioned are northern tribes; and Jerome gives it as the opinion of the Jews in his day, that Magog was a general name for the numberless Scythian tribes" (Patrick Fairbairn, Ezekiel, Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1863, p. 415). Aligned with Gog will be Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, Togarmah, and the multitudes beyond them that people the regions of the north (38:5-6).

2. What will Gog do? Again the prophet is quite explicit: "Thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land" (38:16). The forces of Gog will attempt an invasion of Palestine with the purpose of taking a spoil (38:12).

3. What will be the result of this battle? The invader will be destroyed on the mountains of Israel (39:2-4) as a result of divine intervention through a convulsion of nature (38: 20-22). So great will be the slaughter that seven months will be required to complete the burying of the dead (39:12) and seven years to dispose of the debris (39:9-10). Thus, contrary to the recent statement by the visitor from Russia, it will be the hordes of the north who will be buried as a result of their defeat in battle.

4. When will all this occur? Ezekiel's only answers to this question are "the latter years" (38:8) and "the latter days" (38:16). From the general teaching of prophecy various suggestions have been made in order to give a more definite answer to this question.

(a) Some have said that this invasion takes place prior to the rapture of the church.

(b) Others place it in the first half of the tribulation.

(c) Some suggest that it occurs at the beginning of the millennium.

(d) Others hold that it happens at the end of the millennium.

(e) To this writer's mind it is more reasonable to expect that the invasion by Gog will either mark the beginning of the second half of the tribulation period or at least that it will occur during that last half of Daniel's seventieth week. Or it may even be that both ideas under (e) give the true picture. That is, the invasion will begin at the middle of the tribulation just as the man of sin breaks his covenant with the Jews (Dan. 9:27), for Ezekiel 38:11 states that the people of Israel are dwelling in peace in their land when the battle starts; and the war will rage well into the last half of the tribulation period. It would then be followed very quickly by the events which culminate in the battle of Armageddon and the return of Christ. This suggestion is substantiated by the fact that the phrases "latter days" or "latter years" are related in the Old Testament to the time prior to the millennium (cf. Deut. 4:27; Dan. 2:28; 10:14). This would seem to point to the battle's taking place in the last part of the tribulation period.