EZEKIEL

Chapter 39

**“Son of man, prophesy against Gog and say: ‘This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.  2 I will turn you around and drag you along. I will bring you from the far north and send you against the mountains of Israel.  3 Then I will strike your bow from your left hand and make your arrows drop from your right hand.  4 On the mountains of Israel you will fall, you and all your troops and the nations with you. I will give you as food to all kinds of carrion birds and to the wild animals.  5 You will fall in the open field, for I have spoken, declares the Sovereign LORD.  6 I will send fire on Magog and on those who live in safety in the coastlands, and they will know that I am the LORD. 7 ”‘I will make known my holy name among my people Israel. I will no longer let my holy name be profaned, and the nations will know that I the LORD am the Holy One in Israel.  8 It is coming! It will surely take place, declares the Sovereign LORD. This is the day I have spoken of. 9 ”‘Then those who live in the towns of Israel will go out and use the weapons for fuel and burn them up—the small and large shields, the bows and arrows, the war clubs and spears. For seven years they will use them for fuel.  10 They will not need to gather wood from the fields or cut it from the forests, because they will use the weapons for fuel. And they will plunder those who plundered them and loot those who looted them, declares the Sovereign LORD. 11 ”‘On that day I will give Gog a burial place in Israel, in the valley of those who travel east toward the Sea. It will block the way of travelers, because Gog and all his hordes will be buried there. So it will be called the Valley of Hamon Gog. 12 ”‘For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land.  13 All the people of the land will bury them, and the day I am glorified will be a memorable day for them, declares the Sovereign LORD. 14 ”‘Men will be regularly employed to cleanse the land. Some will go throughout the land and, in addition to them, others will bury those that remain on the ground. At the end of the seven months they will begin their search.  15 As they go through the land and one of them sees a human bone, he will set up a marker beside it until the gravediggers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon Gog.  16 (Also a town called Hamonah will be there.) And so they will cleanse the land.’ 17 “Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Call out to every kind of bird and all the wild animals: ‘Assemble and come together from all around to the sacrifice I am preparing for you, the great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. There you will eat flesh and drink blood.  18 You will eat the flesh of mighty men and drink the blood of the princes of the earth as if they were rams and lambs, goats and bulls—all of them fattened animals from Bashan.  19 At the sacrifice I am preparing for you, you will eat fat till you are glutted and drink blood till you are drunk.  20 At my table you will eat your fill of horses and riders, mighty men and soldiers of every kind,’ declares the Sovereign LORD. 21 “I will display my glory among the nations, and all the nations will see the punishment I inflict and the hand I lay upon them.  22 From that day forward the house of Israel will know that I am the LORD their God.  23 And the nations will know that the people of Israel went into exile for their sin, because they were unfaithful to me. So I hid my face from them and handed them over to their enemies, and they all fell by the sword.  24 I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their offenses, and I hid my face from them. 25 “Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will now bring Jacob back from captivity and will have compassion on all the people of Israel, and I will be zealous for my holy name.  26 They will forget their shame and all the unfaithfulness they showed toward me when they lived in safety in their land with no one to make them afraid.  27 When I have brought them back from the nations and have gathered them from the countries of their enemies, I will show myself holy through them in the sight of many nations.  28 Then they will know that I am the LORD their God, for though I sent them into exile among the nations, I will gather them to their own land, not leaving any behind.  29 I will no longer hide my face from them, for I will pour out my Spirit on the house of Israel, declares the Sovereign LORD.”**

**39:1-2** With only slight and inconsequential variation, these verses repeat 38:1–3. Yahweh is the real subject of the action for reasons already stated and soon to be repeated and expanded upon. (CC)

**39:1** *Gog, chief prince of Meshech.* See note on 38:2. While vv. 1–16 add new details, the same basic events as those in ch. 38 are described. (CSB)

**39:2** *from the far north.* As in 38:6, 15. (CSB)

**39:3-6** These verses expand on what was asserted in 38:1–9. There the invaders were described as horsemen, and here, also as archers. Since Scythians were among the invaders, this is not surprising because also extrabiblical sources (e.g., Xenophon) attest to Scythian expertise with bow and arrow. But somehow Yahweh will disarm them so they are incapable of fighting (cf. Ps 37:15; 46:9). Second, their defeat will be so swift and widespread that they will not even be accorded burial; their corpses will be left in the field to be devoured by scavengers of any sort. Finally, Yahweh declares, “I will also send fire” upon them (39:6). The idiom שִׁלַּח אֵשׁ occurs only here in Ezekiel, but is repeated in Amos’ Gentile oracles, as Yahweh makes the same declaration (Amos 1:4, 7, 10, 12; 2:2), which he also makes against Judah in Amos 2:5 and against Israel in Hos 8:14. “Fire” to destroy walls, chariotry—anything of use or value to the enemy—is always a major part of the predations of war, and as mentioned in 38:22 already, has overtones of destruction inflicted directly by God. Rev 20:9 alludes to this: when “fire came down from heaven and consumed them.” (CC)

Ezek 39:6 and its “fire” is targeted not only for Gog, but also to the outer reaches of his imperium. It incinerates not only “Magog,” which, according to 38:2, was Gog’s place of origin, but also the “coastlands,” that is, the Mediterranean islands, which in 38:13 had been represented by Tarshish. The proximity of Tarshish to Javan (Ionia; Greece) in the trade list of 27:12–13 (cf. Gen 10:4, where Tarshish is among the sons of Javan) indicates what a wide area the prophet has in mind. In 38:13 it might have seemed that these distant groups were only envious spectators, but here it is plain that they are fully involved in the invasion of Israel. That they lived “in security” (39:6), the same phrase used earlier of God’s provision for Israel (לָבֶטַח, 38:8, 11, 14; in fulfillment of the Christological promise in 34:25, 27, 28), is ironic. Those who attack Israel with such levity must learn who alone provides real security: “the Holy One in Israel” (39:7). (CC)

**39:3** *bow.* Cf. Jer 6:23. The Lord will disarm Israel’s enemies before they can shoot an arrow. (CSB)

**39:4** *food to all kinds of carrion birds.* A theme expanded in vv. 17–20. (CSB)

**39:6** *I will send fire.* See 30:8 and note. (CSB)

**39:7** The verse functions as a sort of commentary on the recognition formula at the end of 39:6, “then they will know that I am Yahweh.” It emphasizes that that recognition will not simply be a coincidental result of the defeat of Gog, but that it has been Yahweh’s purpose all along. “Knowing” that he is Yahweh means a recognition or confession of his very being or character: “I am Yahweh, the Holy One in Israel.” His dynamic attribute of holiness is emphasized by the triple use of the root קדשׁ, “holy,” in the verse. First, in 39:7a, Yahweh declares, “I will make my holy name known among my people Israel”; the covenant people will be the first to make confession of him. Second, 39:7b emphasizes its permanence: “I will not let my holy name be profaned any more.” Third, in 39:7c, other nations will be brought to confess Yahweh’s holiness: “the nations will know that I am Yahweh, the Holy One in Israel.” (CC)

It is not repeated here, but in the background stands the earlier disastrous history of Israel, which had almost habitually profaned Yahweh’s holy name (cf. 20:9, 14, 22, 39; 36:20–23). Yahweh had specifically spoken of Israel profaning “my holy name” in 20:39 and 36:20–22. Positively, he will again refer to “my holy name” in 39:25 and 43:7–8. By Yahweh’s defeat of the universal conspiracy of evil, the Gog debacle will signal the final triumph of God’s long struggle to keep his name holy in Israel. What is more, this will reveal his holy name also among the nations, who will know him by a new name, “the Holy One in Israel.” This phrase is unique in the OT, but one cannot help but compare it to Isaiah’s frequent epithet for Yahweh, “the Holy One *of* Israel,” and the recognition by the demons and by Jesus’ disciples that he is “the Holy One of God” (ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ, Mk 1:24; Lk 4:34; Jn 6:69). Ezekiel may well be prophesying the eschatological achievement of the meaning of Isaiah’s earlier label, which will be fulfilled when Christ has defeated all the human and demonic powers of evil, and his redeemed people are radiant with the holiness of God (Rev 21:1–11). Ezekiel the priest (Ezek 1:3), in his characteristic liturgical way, here refers to the Holy One as located “in Israel,” as God had been at the temple and will be again in the eschatological vision (43:1–12; cf. Rev 21:22–26). Similar is the locative affirmation at the end of the book about the new Jerusalem: “Yahweh is there” (Ezek 48:35; cf. Rev 21:2–3). (CC)

The NT affirms that already at the first advent of Christ, the heathen Gentiles together with unbelieving Israelites conspired to attack God’s Anointed, but were defeated by his atoning death and victorious resurrection (see, e.g., Acts 4:26–30). During the church age, the proclamation of the Gospel reveals the holy name of Jesus, to the salvation of all who believe. The church militant uses no literal weapons, but relies on God’s Word and Sacraments (cf. Eph 6:10–20). Thus Jesus is the Holy One who now is in his Israel, the church, through his means of grace. Yet we await the final defeat of all evil at Christ’s second coming and the consummation, when all spiritual warfare will have ceased, and the triune God shall dwell in the midst of his people in a far more intimate way (Rev 21:3). (CC)

**39:8** The double assertion “It is coming! It will surely take place” occurred already in 21:7, but there it referred to the impending destruction of Jerusalem (in summer 586 b.c.). Here it asserts the inevitability of the coming salvation even more strongly because of the absence of the necessity of any intervening judgment on Israel. But there will be judgment—on Gog—and here it is finally asserted that the judgment on Gog is the day of which Yahweh has previously spoken. Commentators debate whether the reference is to Ezekiel’s own prophecy of Gog’s defeat or to a continuation of 38:17, where Ezekiel had spoken of the prophecies of his predecessors. But there is surely no reason to decide between the two; it is a case of “both … and.” The key word הַיּ֖וֹם, “the day,” often refers to some decisive intervention by Yahweh, as classically in “the day of Midian” (Is 9:4). In the context here, it probably also evokes the eschatological “Day of Yahweh.” (CC)

**39:9** *burn them up.* Cf. Ps 46:9, where God does the burning. (CSB)

The Israelites suddenly emerge and burn the weapons of the defeated troops. Apparently they simply were passive spectators until God annihilated Gog and his horde (cf. 2 Kings 7 and 19), perhaps with literal fire from heaven (see the commentary on Ezek 39:6), or perhaps the attacking armies killed each other off in a kind of civil war (cf. Judg 7:22). The total of *seven* weapons (including the general term נֶשֶׁק, “weapon, weaponry,” used in Ezekiel only in 39:9–10) is complemented by the “seven years” it takes to complete the task of burning them as fuel. Obviously, we have symbolism here, expressing the completeness of the divine judgment. This also hints at the eschatological theme of the elimination of armaments from the earth, as in Is 9:4 and Ps 46:10 (cf. Is 2:4 || Micah 4:3). (CC)

*seven.*† A symbolic number signifying the finality of defeat, as well as indicating the size of the invading armies. (CSB)

**39:10** The eschatological theme of the great reversal, the turning of the tables, is again implied, but in terms of the normal aftermath of wars: “they will despoil those who had despoiled them and plunder those who had plundered them.” This could be a sort of “second exodus” theme since Israel plundered the Egyptians in the first exodus (Ex 3:22; 11:2–3; 12:36). Again, the NT applies this already to the first advent of Christ, the “stronger man” who has despoiled the devil (Lk 11:22; cf. Eph 4:8; 1 Jn 3:8) by freeing us from his tyranny, though again, the final vanquishing of all the powers of evil will not come until the second coming of Christ, and “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:54, quoting Is 25:8). (CC)

**39:11** *toward.* The NIV text note reading “of” seems preferable, since the other three times this preposition occurs “east of” is meant (see Ge 2:14; 4:16; 1Sa 13:5). (CSB)

While no certainty on the location is possible, if Ezekiel is thinking in terms of pre-eschatological topography, the north side of the Dead Sea would seem most plausible, both because it, as the broadest part of the valley, would be (and still is!) a principal crossing point, and because it would be spacious enough for all the bodies. (CC)

Finally, a suggestion by Zimmerli merits consideration. The first two words of the construct chain גֵּ֖יא הֲמ֥וֹן גּֽוֹג, literally, “*the Valley of the Horde* of Gog,” are intended by loose assonance to recall גֵּיא הִנֹּם, “the Valley of Hinnom,” that is, Gehenna, the site of child sacrifice and burial site of criminals and animals (e.g., Jer 7:31), to remind the reader of that locus of all sorts of abominations. The burial of Gog there thus represents the complete end of all such evils. (CC)

**39:12** *seven.* As in v. 9, the number seven symbolizes totality, completeness and finality, and it also reveals the large number of invaders. (CSB)

*cleanse the land.*† Corpses were especially unclean according to Israel’s ceremonial laws (see Lev 5:2; 21:1, 11; 22:4; Nu 5:2; 6:6–12; 19:16; 31:19). (CSB)

In addition to the “seven years” spent burning the enemy’s armaments (39:9), it will take “seven months” to bury all the dead. Unburied bodies would defile the land (cf. Num 19:11–12), so they must be interred “to cleanse the land” (Ezek 39:12). When Ezekiel speaks of the Holy Land in this way, it is not touristy, market-oriented language, but the same literal, priestly picture of the new heavens and new earth (Isaiah 11 and 65; Revelation 21–22) that will pervade all of Ezekiel 40–48. (CC)

**39:13** *people of the land.* See 7:27 and note, though here a special class may not be implied. (CSB)

Gog’s fall is regarded as complete after all the people of God have joined in and completed the burial. That will be the day, says Yahweh, “when I display my glory.” The Niphal of כָּבַד could be translated as a passive, “be glorified,” but as in 28:22 (its only other occurrence in Ezekiel), a reflexive meaning, synonymous with a Hithpael form, is preferable: Yahweh is not merely a recipient of glory, but effects his own glorification by the annihilating victory, which he himself accomplishes for the sake of his people. Yahweh was the subject of the same verb when he described how he would achieve glory through his exodus triumph (Ex 14:4, 17–18; see also Lev 10:3; Is 26:15; Hag 1:8). The NT fulfillment in Christ is a theme in the Gospel of John. (CC)

Israel, however, does not receive “glory,” but a שֵׁם, literally, only a “name,” that is, “honor” (as I have translated it), fame, and a good reputation by God’s grace. That is, the victory over and destruction of Gog remain entirely Yahweh’s work; Israel’s job is limited to clearing up the battlefield. But by God’s grace, his people receive the salvation he alone has accomplished. (CC)

**39:14** *Men will be regularly employed.* After the seven-month burial period observed by all the people, special squads will be hired full time to ensure total cleansing of the land—by marking for burial any human bones that may have been missed. Total ritual purity is the aim. (CSB)

Certain details are unclear (see the textual notes), but the general gist is clear. After the heptad of months of mass burials is finished (39:12), “permanently employed men” will be appointed to scour the entire land again for any corpses that may have escaped earlier attention. No effort is spared to insure the total cleansing of the land; no unclean thing shall remain. This priestly concern is reflected in Rev 21:27, where “no unclean thing” (including the unbelievers listed in the verse) shall ever enter the new Jerusalem, the eternal habitation of all God’s redeemed in Christ. (CC)

**39:15** *marker.* Probably of stone, either a large one or a heap of smaller ones. (CSB)

The verse clarifies and adds details to the preceding verse. It makes plain that the men appointed in the previous verse are further divided into two distinct groups. One consists of “those who go through the land” and search intensively for any unburied bones, then erect a “marker” beside them. צִיּוּן is used in Jer 31:21 of a “road sign,” but in 2 Ki 23:17 it denotes a “grave marker,” similar to its use here. We probably must not think of any permanent gravestone, but of a cairn or a single upright object that would not be overlooked. The second group, “the buriers,” then will inter the remains. (CC)

**39:16** Yet a further detail is that “the name of a city will be Its Horde [*Hamonah*].” Block recalls earlier uses of הָמוֹן, “horde,” in Ezekiel. In 5:7 and 7:12–14 it had referred to Israel in verses that summarized her riotous and rebellious behavior, which was not all that different from its application to other nations in the Gentile oracles, especially the final oracle against Egypt in chapter 32. Then, by associating the statement here about the city’s name with the somewhat similar naming of the eschatological city at the conclusion of the book, “Yahweh is there” (48:35), Block suggests that this one too intimates a “new Jerusalem”:

In the present context *Hamonah*’s primary function is to memorialize the demise of Israel’s last and greatest enemy, but by association it also memorializes the transformation of the city, and with it the nation. … Once the city (and the entire land) has been purged of every vestige of defilement, the stage is set for Yahweh to return (43:1–7) and to replace the retrospective name with a new, forward-looking (*mîyyôm* [48:35]) one. Hamonah is gone, Yahweh is there! (CC)

Top that if you can! The thought is congenial and agrees with the general gist of the last chapters of the book. (CC)

“And so they will cleanse the land” (39:16) is plainly the conclusion of the unit (39:11–16) and reiterates the purpose, “in order to cleanse it,” from 39:14. (CC)

**39:17** *Call out to every kind of bird … to the sacrifice.* Various interpretations are: 1. Since the enemies are all dead and buried, this section (vv. 17–20) is perhaps to be understood as poetic imagery. 2. However, if the passage reverts back to v. 4, a more literal interpretation is possible—the dead bodies were not all buried at once. 3. Verses 17–20 involve a restating of vv. 9–16, employing a different figure (see Isa 34:6; Jer 46:10; Zep 1:7). The metaphor of sacrifice suggests a consecration to the Lord in judgment, as with Jericho (see Jos 6:17 and NIV text note). (CSB)

The citation formula, “thus says the Lord Yahweh,” begins a new unit. Following pictures of the burning of weapons (39:7–10) and burial of the dead (39:11–16), this verse begins an imaginative account of the third and last (39:17–20) of the three tableaux Ezekiel presents to describe the total destruction of Gog’s forces. This one describes a huge banquet literally called a “sacrifice” (see the second textual note on 39:17), where the menu is the fallen unbelievers and their horses, and the guests are the birds and wild animals. Logic might inquire how this is possible after the previous section had recounted the meticulous care taken that no corpses remain unburied. But it is really one of the clearest indications among many that literal, chronological considerations were not among Ezekiel’s priorities. Block labels these verses a “literary cartoon” and observes that, as we have gone along, “the scenes have become increasingly bizarre, climaxing here in a scene more fantastic than all.” This becomes even clearer if one reflects on the scene in the light of Israelite ceremonial law in the Torah of Moses. Here Yahweh hosts unclean creatures and even serves them blood, in contrast to the dietary laws, which specified that blood was to be drained off completely before any meat was eaten (e.g., Lev 7:26–27; 17:10–14; 19:26). All this indicates that Ezekiel 38–39 does not depict a literal series of events, but is a figurative description of the continuing war of unbelievers against the church, which will climax in the most intense persecution before the second coming of Jesus Christ. (CC)

The picture of Yahweh’s victory celebrated as a sacrificial feast (זֶבַח) is not at all unique to Ezekiel, but he develops it to an extreme degree, as he typically does with many previous OT motifs. Perhaps the earliest appearance of the theme of a sacrificial feast comes in Isaiah in the eighth century b.c.Is 34:5–8 (with זֶבַח in Is 34:6), celebrates Yahweh’s victory over Edom. Jer 46:10 mentions such a זֶבַח after the defeat of Pharaoh Neco by Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish (Jer 46:2). Another possible parallel appears in Zeph 1:7–8, but there the “sacrifice” (זֶבַח) is in a judgment oracle against Judah. (CC)

All these prophetic applications suggest that there was an eschatological component in all of Israel’s sacrificial rituals, even though the ritual texts in Leviticus articulate little explicit eschatology. But typologically, via Christ, the OT sacrifices—and especially the “peace” or “communion” sacrifice, which furnished a meal for the worshiper—relate to the celebration of the Eucharist, a feast in which our crucified and risen Lord furnishes us his body and blood, given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins, in a way that both proclaims his past death and anticipates his future return (1 Cor 11:23–26). Even the common table prayer “Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest, and let thy gifts to us be blessed” alludes to the continuing prayer of the church, *Marana tha*, “Come, Lord (Jesus)” (1 Cor 16:22; Rev 22:20). (CC)

Because alimentation of the deity played such a prominent role in the pagan rituals of Israel’s neighbors, the OT usually does not highlight the picture of Yahweh as the host of Israel’s regular sacrifices, but this and other texts make plain that the picture was not absent. In paganism, the god was depicted as being fed, but mortals were not invited to participate. In contrast, the Bible is not at all adverse to portraying Yahweh as hosting banquets for earthly guests. One had climaxed the sealing of the Sinaitic covenant (Ex 24:9–11), and the motif surely underlies much of the imagery pervading Psalm 23, whose “you prepare a table before me” has eucharistic implications. In Is 25:6–9, the feast is clearly described in eschatological terms: it is not a slaughter of enemies, but a banquet of rich food and aged wine, furnished by Yahweh himself in celebration of the day when he will “swallow up death forever” and “wipe away tears from all faces,” to be fulfilled upon the return of Jesus Christ (the wedding feast of the Lamb in Revelation 19; see also Rev 21:4). (CC)

Here in Ezek 39:17, Yahweh calls the meal זִבְחִ֗י, “*my* sacrificial meal,” and in 39:20 he refers to the spread as שֻׁלְחָנִי֨, “*my* table.” Already in 39:4, Yahweh had announced that he would give Gog as food to wild creatures, but here he sends his prophet officially to invite them to come and enjoy the feast he has personally prepared for them (39:17, 19). (CC)

But here, Ezekiel, a priest (1:3), grossly caricatures any ordinary זֶבַח, “sacrifice.” Instead of a human worshiper slaughtering animals in the presence of Yahweh for expiatory and eucharistic purposes, here Yahweh slaughters people for the sake of animals, who are invited to come from all over the world to “the mountains of Israel” to join him in his gigantic victory celebration (39:17). (CC)

The final clause of 39:17, which will be described further in the next verse, gives the menu for the banquet, בָּשָׂ֖ר, “meat,” and רָּֽם, “blood,” a common biblical merism for the entire body or carcass. When humanity is contrasted with divinity, “flesh” is an appropriate translation of בָּשָׂר (e.g., in Gen 6:3; Is 40:6), but when it is simply a matter of food to be eaten, “meat” is more natural. (CC)

**39:18** *You will eat the flesh of mighty men.* A gory description of what birds of prey commonly do (see previous note and Rev 19:17–21). (CSB)

Ezekiel describes the famous warriors and aristocracy of Gog in metaphors derived from the fare that might normally be found at a sacrificial meal. אֵילִ֨ים, “rams,” and עַתּוּדִים֙, “goats,” were already used metaphorically for abusive leaders in Israel in 34:17. The Hebrew itself does not state that the animals listed are descriptive comparisons of the slain people, but this is implied. (CC)

*as if they were.* The bodies of the victims are compared to animals commonly used for sacrifices. (CSB)

The final phrase, describing them all as “fatlings of Bashan” (מְרִיאֵ֥י בָשָׁ֖ן) is transitional to the next verse. That exact phrase appears only here in the OT, but מְרִיא, “fatling,” is common enough and is sometimes used specifically for desirable sacrificial animals (e.g., 2 Sam 6:13; Is 1:11; Amos 5:22). Bashan, fairly equivalent to the modern Golan Heights, east of the Sea of Galilee and north of the Yarmuk River, was famous for its fertility and suitability for agriculture and grazing cattle, and hence it has spawned innumerable wars between Israel and Syria for control of the territory. After the defeat of Og (Num 21:33–35), Moses assigned the territory to the half-tribe of Manasseh (Deut 3:13). It had been annexed by Assyria about a century and a half before Ezekiel’s day (early sixth century b.c.). (CC)

*Bashan.* Rich pastureland east of the Sea of Galilee, known for its sleek cattle (Dt 32:14; Ps 22:12; Am 4:1) and its oak trees (27:6; Isa 2:13). (CSB)

**39:19** *eat fat … drink blood.* Further indication that this is the Lord’s sacrificial feast, in that fat and blood were normally reserved for God (see 44:15; Lev 3:17). (CSB)

The banquet loses all decorum as Yahweh encourages unrestrained gluttony. Until the modern era, when our high-fat diets have made cholesterol a worry, fat was a desirable part of a meal, and even Yahweh’s eschatological banquet celebrating the death of death features “fat things full of marrow” (Is 25:6). In Israel’s sacrifices, the internal fat and suet around the vital organs was burned on the altar (e.g., Lev 3:3–5), not eaten, but a well-fattened animal would still provide an ample quantity of other fat that could be eaten. Drunkenness was an entirely different matter, of course, and is universally condemned in the Scriptures. (CC)

**39:20** *my table.*† Sacrificial altar. See 40:38–43 and 41:22 for description of the tables in the future temple. (CSB)

This grotesque scene closes with a reminder of the referent of the metaphor: all those involved in the battle against God’s people are slain (cf. Is 66:24), not excluding their horses. (CC)

**39:21** *my glory.* God’s visible presence in the world (see note on 1:28). Here that visibility is due to divine intervention in history. (CSB)

The remainder of the chapter is not so much an appendix to chapters 38–39 as a summary of their total import, although Gog and his troops disappear from the picture from here on. Ezek 39:21–29 may be subdivided in many ways, although, contrary to some critics, the overall unity of these verses is not hard to defend. A weak division into 39:21–24 and 39:25–29 can be supported by noticing that לָכֵ֗ן, “therefore,” begins 39:25, and that both 39:23–24 and 39:29 refer to Yahweh “hiding his face” (a phrase otherwise absent from the book). Block convincingly observes a chiastic construction of both halves: each half both begins and ends with divine action, and in between describes human responses. Ezek 39:21–24 is mostly retrospective, reviewing the results of God’s judgmental activity on Israel, while 39:25–29 summarizes the blessings promised as a result of his saving activity.

Both of those perspectives are present in the transitional 39:21. The immediate declaration, “Thus I will establish my glory among the Gentiles,” indicates that the primary purpose of the Gog oracle (like most of Ezekiel’s oracles) is revelatory. The Hebrew phrase (נָתַן כָּבוֹד בְּ) is not a common Ezekelian formulation, and the verb נָתַן is multivalent enough that it is hard to settle on any one adequate English equivalent. Taking its force as “establish, put in place,” Ezekiel seems to express a semi-objective and personal aspect of Yahweh’s “Glory” (כָּבוֹד), that is, the same sort of “incarnational” and “Christological” vision as he had witnessed when the “Glory” first appeared to him in chapter 1; when he saw the “Glory” forsake the temple in 10:4, 18–19 and 11:22–23; and which he will observe again when the “Glory” returns to the eschatological temple in 43:1–5. That may also be evidenced in Ezekiel’s verb in the next clause, “all the nations will *see* [רָאָה] my justice” (39:21), instead of the usual יָדַע, “to know” (found in the modified recognition formula in 39:23), although its immediate object is מִשְׁפָּט, “justice,” not the כָּבוֹד, “Glory.” And here the revelation is more to the nations than to Israel. (CC)

Ezekiel does not pursue that line of thought, however—and, of course, it would be hard to do until the “Glory” became incarnate in our Lord Jesus (Jn 1:14). In the OT era generally, the “Glory” was largely tied to the temple, although Ezekiel 1 and 10–11 prepare for its greater mobility in the person of Jesus Christ, the new temple (e.g., Jn 2:19–22; cf. Jn 4:20–24). But with the ascension of Christ and the gift of the Spirit on Pentecost, the church’s missionary outreach began to be extended in earnest to all nations, revealing the glory of God in the one Savior, Jesus Christ (e.g., 1 Cor 2:7–8; 2 Cor 3:7–18; 4:4–6; Col 1:27). (CC)

Through Ezekiel, what Yahweh emphasizes is that “my Glory” has been manifested to the Gentiles by “my justice,” rendering מִשְׁפָּט (39:21), another notoriously elusive word for translators. “Judgment, punishment” upon the unbelieving enemies of God’s people is surely involved. In 5:8 Yahweh used מִשְׁפָּטִיםעָשָׂה to say that he would “perform judgments” on unfaithful Israel, and he used עָשָׂה with a plural of שֶׁפֶט for (literally) “performing judgments” against heathen nations in 25:11 and 30:14, 19. In 38:22, speaking of Gog, Yahweh used the Niphal of שָׁפַט to say he would “enter into judgment with” or “punish” him. The point here is that the attacking nations’ cowardly attempt to take advantage of God’s vulnerable people deserved to be punished. Yahweh has the authority to vindicate his name and cause the offenders to acknowledge his justice. The result of Yahweh showing himself as a God of justice in the forensic finding of guilt and subsequent punishment seems to be the point of the following expression, “my hand, which I have laid upon them” (39:21). The Hebrew expression (שִׂים יָד בְּ) occurs only here in Ezekiel (and elsewhere in the OT only in Ps 89:25), but “hand” is clearly anthropomorphic for God using his power to put Gog in his proper place. To be sure, this will apply to the return of Christ, which will accomplish the final defeat of all the forces of evil arrayed against the church, but it has also applied already to God’s defeat of the unbelieving Jewish and heathen Gentile forces that attempted to do away with Christ and his church—forces overcome by the resurrection of Christ and the church’s ongoing witness to him during the present era (e.g., Acts 3:13–26; 4:25–30; 13:27–41). (CC)

**39:22–23** *the house of Israel will know … And the nations will know.* As God had made himself known to Israel and the nations through his saving acts in Israel’s behalf (see Ex 6:7; 7:5, 17; 10:2; 14:18; 16:6–7, 12; Jos 3:10; 4:24; cf. Jos 2:9–11; 5:1), so now Israel and the nations will see him again at work as he judges his people for their sin (see v. 27). (CSB)

Before he returns to consider the nations further, Yahweh adds this declaration that is similar to the common recognition formula, “(then) you/they will know that I am Yahweh” (see 39:6–7, 28). This verse is the only time in the book when Israel is expressly the subject of the verb יָדַע, “to know,” and the reference is to knowledge of God. Possibly we should even contrast Israel “knowing” God (in the pregnant sense, connoting true saving faith) with the nation merely “seeing” what God has done (cf. 39:21). The chronological notice “from that day on” implies again that Ezekiel is referring to an era in earthly history (although the true “Israel” certainly will retain faith and knowledge of God after the parousia of Christ). This verse points to the beginning of the new era that Christians know as the “new testament,” the present church age, when God’s true “Israel” consists of all Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ, the One through whom God has revealed his glory and established his justice through forensic justification (e.g., Romans 4–5). (CC)

The Gentiles, who will know God through the revelation of his glory in Christ (Lk 2:32), also will know that Yahweh had applied his justice to Israel. The OT people of Israel had not been exiled because Yahweh had been unable to defend them or had abandoned his covenant with them, but because of their faithless attitude and behavior. A number of expressions are used to describe the dimensions of their guilt. The first and last are major expressions of sinfulness: “their iniquity” (עָוֹן in this context might be translated “perversion”) and “their rebellion” (פֶּשַׁע). In between come the verb מָעַל, “were unfaithful,” which implies infidelity or treason against Yahweh, their Lord, and the noun טֻמְאָה, “uncleanness,” both abstract and concrete, that is, a state of uncleanness as well as acts (both immoral and liturgically perverse) that cause or manifest that state. (CC)

**39:23** *I hid my face.* Expression of divine displeasure (see Ps 30:7; Isa 54:8; 57:17). (CSB)

Both 39:23 and 39:24 describe the punishment as God “hiding his face” (הִסְתִּיר פָּנִים), which occurs only in this context in Ezekiel (also in 39:29), but is frequent elsewhere in the OT (twenty-six times), especially in the Psalms. Throughout the Near East this was a common idiom indicating divine disfavor. Its opposite is well-known from two clauses in the Aaronic blessing: “Yahweh cause his face to shine toward you” and “Yahweh lift up his face toward you” (Num 6:25–26). (CC)

What was evident by Yahweh hiding his “face” was shown experientially by his delivering his people into the power (literally, “hand,” יָד again) of their “adversaries” (צַר, elsewhere in Ezekiel only in 30:16, but frequent in the Psalter). That is, the fall of Jerusalem had been the result not of the might of the Babylonian army nor of Marduk’s superiority over Yahweh, but of Yahweh’s own deliberate reaction to his faithless people. The Gentiles will recognize Yahweh’s justice in how he had treated his people in the past, as well as in how he is now treating them—graciously in Christ, yet with the warning of everlasting judgment upon all unbelievers. (CC)

**39:24** *their uncleanness and their offenses.* Spelled out especially in ch. 22, but also throughout chs. 6–24. (CSB)

**39:25** *Jacob.* The nation of Israel, as in 20:5. The parallelism within the verse supports this identity. (CSB)

*my holy name.* See note on 20:9. (CSB)

Easter comes after Good Friday, and for those who repent and believe, death is followed by resurrection to eternal life. Now that Israel’s “Good Friday” is past, Yahweh turns to the resurrection. The idiom “bring about the restoration of” was also used for Sodom and Samaria and in a salvation oracle for Egypt in 29:14. Rather than merely indicating that the Judean exiles will return, as some translations render it (see the textual note), it is much more comprehensive and indicates a complete restoration to God’s original intent for humanity, a reversal of all that human sin has caused, including rupture of communion with God and physical death itself. As in chapter 37, the message is eschatological, pointing to what will be fully accomplished only at the return of Christ: “the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting” (Apostles’ Creed). (CC)

“I will *have mercy* on the whole house of Israel” uses the verb רָחַם, not used elsewhere in Ezekiel, although frequent elsewhere in the OT for God showing mercy. Ezekiel had used the synonym חָמַל, “have pity, compassion,” but except in 36:21 it was always negated (e.g., 5:11; 7:4, 9). The affirmative “have mercy” parallels the force of the preceding expression, “bring about the restoration of.” We should also note the parallelism of “the whole house of Israel” here with “Jacob” in the previous clause, pointing to a restored people broader than just the Judean exiles. (Just “Israel” was parallel to “the house of Jacob” in the judgment oracle of chapter 20 [20:5]; “Israel” and “Jacob” are often parallel elsewhere in the Bible.) Surprisingly, the expression “be zealous for my holy name” is unique in Ezekiel, although both components, “be zealous” and “my holy name,” have appeared separately before. What Yahweh’s zeal for his name consists of is evident from 39:7 and, in more detail, from 36:21–23, namely, that by means of his just judgment he shows himself to be the holy God. (CC)

**39:26** *They will forget their shame.* The remembrance of shame previously called for (6:9; 20:43; 36:31) is here erased. (CSB)

We have heard this refrain, “bear (their) shame,” before in Ezekiel (first in 16:52), and we will meet it again (44:13). It addresses a perennial, endemic problem in God’s Israel—the OT people and now the Christian church. If the repentance described by this verse does not correspond to reality, it means that in those people a substitute faith (what Bonhoeffer famously labeled “cheap grace”) has replaced the genuine article. The temptation is to understand grace as a birthright or entitlement, rather than sheer, unmerited divine favor: “while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). We must constantly remember the fact that, in spite of ourselves, “we daily sin much and surely deserve nothing but punishment.” Or the problem can be formulated in Law-Gospel terms: the Gospel of plenary forgiveness in Christ should increase our awareness of our unworthiness according to the Law, but for some, it becomes a source of pride, exclusivism, and even a license to flout God’s Law, to engage in sins condemned by Scripture, as is evident in many denominations today. (CC)

**39:27** *I will show myself holy through them.* God will reveal himself anew in a restored, holy people (cf. 20:41; 28:25; 36:23). (CSB)

The verse is largely an expansion of 39:26b, and the language is heavily dependent on previous pronouncements. The enemies led by Gog are no longer specifically in the picture, but in 38:16 and 39:7, God had asserted that he would manifest his holiness through his judgment of them. Here, however, he manifests his holiness through his people, whom he regathers. “The lands of their enemies” appears only here in Ezekiel and appears to depend on the covenant curses in Lev 26:36–39. Thus God will have carried out his curses upon his unfaithful OT people, but then will regather a new Israel that will manifest his own holiness (1 Pet 2:5–9; 3:15). (CC)

**39:28** *Then they will know.* See note on v. 22. (CSB)

One final recognition formula is expanded with a reiteration of the fact that not only will the nations acknowledge God’s holiness (39:27), but above all, the new Israel to be gathered will recognize and confess who “Yahweh” is and what his actions mean—both by their recollection of the well-deserved exile and by their repatriation to their homeland. The promise “I will never again leave any of them behind,” that not a single straggler will be left behind in the restoration of God’s people, is without parallel in the OT. The NT issues similar promises in terms of election by God’s grace in Christ: not one believer in Jesus will be lost (Jn 10:28–29; 17:12; 18:9). (CC)

**39:29** *I will pour out my Spirit.* The gift of God’s enabling Spirit (see 11:19; 36:26–27; 37:14). (CSB)

The final and climactic message of chapters 38–39 links the permanence of Yahweh’s presence in his new Israel with the pouring out of his Holy Spirit. In the context of Ezekiel’s usual language, this promise is all the more surprising because Ezekiel has so often used God’s wrath as the object of שָׁפַךְ, “pour out” (e.g., 7:8; 14:19; 20:8). (CC)

This is the only occurrence of the “outpouring of the Spirit” in Ezekiel. The triune God had spoken of giving “my Spirit” in 36:27 and 37:14, but in the idiom (קֶרֶב) נָתַן רוּחַ בְּ, “put my Spirit within” his people. The idioms are related, but not entirely synonymous, at least not in their original contexts. The earlier formulations expressed in the context of the rebirth of the nation, which only God could accomplish. Here the context is rather a sealing of the eternal covenant and of Yahweh’s salvific activity on behalf of his chosen people. That accent is also present in the other OT passages with the idiom שָׁפַךְ, “pour out,” with רוּחַ, God’s “Spirit” (Joel 2:28–29; Zech 12:10; cf. the similar idiom in Is 44:3). (CC)

Of course, the best known of those parallel passages is Joel 2:28–29, part of the OT text upon which St. Peter based his sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:17–21). This text provides a classical case for faithful exegesis. On one hand, we must refrain from reading *into* the OT text by assuming that the original audience perceived all the Trinitarian fullness revealed with such language after the advent of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. At the same time, we must be diligent in reading *out* of the ancient text all that God himself would reveal about its full meaning in the fullness of time (cf. Gal 4:4). (CC)

Since the Christian church is “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16), we confess ourselves, by God’s grace, to be among the beneficiaries of this and similar promises. The end-time event prophesied by Joel and Ezekiel took place already at Pentecost and recurs every time a person is baptized in the triune name of God (Mt 28:19) and so receives the promised gift of the Holy Spirit, along with the forgiveness of sins and everlasting salvation in Christ (e.g., Acts 2:38–39; 22:16; Rom 6:1–4; 1 Cor 12:13), becoming an heir of all God’s OT promises (Gal 3:26–29). Therefore we are already in the “latter days” (e.g., Ezek 38:16) envisioned by the OT prophets, the interim between Christ’s first and second advents. During this time, God’s people are called, gathered, and preserved in the faith by the Holy Spirit, until the parousia comes, when we will understand fully, even as we have been fully understood (1 Cor 13:12). (CC)