

EZEKIEL

Chapter 39

“And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. 2 And I will turn you about and drive you forward, and bring you up from the uttermost parts of the north, and lead you against the mountains of Israel. 3 Then I will strike your bow from your left hand, and will make your arrows drop out of your right hand. 4 You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you and all your hordes and the peoples who are with you. I will give you to birds of prey of every sort and to the beasts of the field to be devoured. 5 You shall fall in the open field, for I have spoken, declares the Lord GOD. 6 I will send fire on Magog and on those who dwell securely in the coastlands, and they shall know that I am the LORD. 7 “And 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 shall know that I am the LORD, the Holy One in Israel. 8 Behold, it is coming and it will be brought about, declares the Lord GOD. That is the day of which I have spoken. 9 “Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and make fires of the weapons and burn them, shields and bucklers, bow and arrows, clubs and spears; and they will make fires of them for seven years, 10 so that they will not need to take wood out of the field or cut down any out of the forests, for they will make their fires of the weapons. They will seize the spoil of those who despoiled them, and plunder those who plundered them, declares the Lord GOD. 11 “On that day I will give to Gog a place for burial in Israel, the Valley of the Travelers, east of the sea. It will block the travelers, for there Gog and all his multitude will be buried. 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 it will bring them renown on the day that I show my glory, declares the Lord GOD. 14 They will set apart men to travel through the land regularly and bury those travelers remaining on the face of the land, so as to cleanse it. At the end of seven months they will make their search. 15 And when these travel through the land and anyone sees a human bone, then he shall set up a sign by it, till the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon-gog. 16 (Hamonah is also the name of the city.) Thus shall they cleanse the land. 17 “As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD: Speak to the birds of every sort and to all beasts of the field: ‘Assemble and come, gather from all around to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel, and you shall eat flesh and drink blood. 18 You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth—of rams, of lambs, and of he-goats, of bulls, all of them fat beasts of Bashan. 19 And you shall eat fat till you are filled, and drink blood till you are drunk, at the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you. 20 And you shall be filled at my table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all kinds of warriors,’ declares the Lord GOD. 21 “And I will set my glory among the nations, and all the nations shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid on them. 22 The house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God, from that day forward. 23 And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt so treacherously with me that I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword. 24 I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions, and hid my face from them.

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.* In accord with a Hbr literary convention, the onslaught and defeat of Gog are repeated (vv 1–6) in a brief summary of ch 38 in order to dwell more at length on features previously mentioned more or less in passing. (TLSB)

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

Cf Ps 46:8–11. (TLSB)

39:4 *I will give you to the birds of prey.* A theme expanded in vv. 17–20. (CSB)

39:6 *who dwell securely in the coastlands.* All people will be affected by the conflict and God’s judgment. (TLSB)

39:9 *burn them.* 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 *קֶשֶׁת*, “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 *seize the spoil.* Any losses the people experienced from Gog will be returned to them, as well as the goods of the attackers. (TLSB)

39:11 *Valley of the Travelers.* On the route from east of the Salt Sea. Burial of Gog and his multitude was to be made beyond the borders of the Holy Land. (TLSB)

block the travelers. Pile of corpses will be so great. (TLSB)

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)

Illustrates the enormous size of Gog’s army. (TLSB)

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)

Unburied corpses made the land ceremonially unclean (cf Nu 9:6; 19:11; 35:33–34). (TLSB)

39:14 *set apart men ... bury.* Unclean profession. (TLSB)

travel through the land regularly and burt. 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)

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

Such a marker would warn people against defiling themselves by stumbling onto the remains (cf v 12) and would also guide the burial team's work. (TLSB)

39:16 *Hamonah*. Both valley (v 11) and city derive from Hbr *hamon*, "multitude." (TLSB)

39:17 *birds of every sort ... 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. (CSB)

In judgment, God shows His greatness and holiness and so makes Himself known "in the eyes of many nations" (Ezk 38:23). By the horrible outcome of their sinister plan, Gog and every like-minded enemy of the Lord are to know how futile it is to try to destroy His kingdom. Instead of dethroning Him, they end up becoming a sacrificial feast, helplessly slaughtered like the animals offered on Israel's altars (39:17–21). (TLSB)

39:18 *You shall eat the flesh of mighty men*. A gory description of what birds of prey commonly do. (CSB)

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)

Transjordan grazing area, known for producing herds of strong, fat cattle. (TLSB)

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)

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

Cf 38:15. The best-equipped and mightiest warriors will not escape becoming the prey of the birds and the beasts invited to the feast at the table set for them by the Lord. (TLSB)

The Final Battle and the Defeat of Gog

All commentators seem to agree that chapters 38 and 39 are really a unit and their division into two chapters is artificial.... But there is no agreement on how best to outline the chapters....

The oracle is undated and leaves no clues as to any historical occasion that might have elicited it. Closely related is the question of the positioning of the sermon at just this point in the book, especially because initially it appears to interrupt the sequence of chapters 33–37 and 40–48. Those earlier chapters promise the advent of the new David, Jesus Christ, and the regeneration of God's people (e.g., 34:23–25; 36:25–28; 37:22–28). The later chapters (40–48) give us an eternal picture of a golden age of everlasting peace security, and proper worship in the transformed promised land—the new heavens and new earth—parallel to the portrait of the eternal state in Revelation 21–22. (TLSB)

But here in Ezekiel 38–39 we have a description of a fearsome, climactic battle between the forces of evil and the people of God, who have already been redeemed and restored (e.g., "gathered" in 38:8; "peaceful

... resettled ... regathered" in 38:11–12). If we read Ezekiel 33–48 as presenting a chronological end-time sequence, this means that after the first advent of Jesus Christ (as prophesied in chapters 33–37), those who believe in him will be raised to new spiritual life already now. Thus the resurrection in Ezek 37:1–14 corresponds to dying and rising with Christ in Baptism (Rom 6:1–4) and to the "first resurrection" in Rev 20:5–6. Baptized believers in Christ have already undergone this spiritual "first resurrection," though we still await the bodily resurrection at the return of Christ. (TLSB)

Yet during this N[ew] T[estament] era, the powers of darkness are still present on earth and they continue to wage war against the church. Eventually they will mount a final attack against God's redeemed in Christ, but they will be overthrown (Ezekiel 38–39) before the dawning of the eternal state (Ezekiel 40–48)... This chronological sequence fits the common biblical picture that persecution shall increase in intensity during the present church age and reach its peak before the coming, presence of Christ. That biblical picture is presented by Christ himself in Matthew 24 and is the gist of the entire book of Revelation. Thus both Ezekiel 38–39 and Rev 20:7–9, which alludes to these Ezekiel chapters by way of "Gog and Magog" (Rev 20:8), describe the warfare that Satan and his minions now wage against the church, with a final all-out battle coming before the end. (TLSB)

Therefore Ezekiel 33–48 supports the traditional understanding of biblical eternalness. In particular, chapters 38–39 offer no support for any of the complicated dispensational schemes involving a seven-year tribulation and a rapture of believers to be followed by an earthly reign of Christ on the present earth for a literal millennium. (TLSB)

Since Ezekiel 38–39 has some similarities with the Gentile oracles (chapters 25–32), some ask why they were not placed there. However, one will note that those oracles dealt with close and easily identifiable neighbors of Jerusalem, who were her enemies during the OT era. These chapters deal with enemies who are more distant, both geographically (see the commentary on 38:2–3) and temporally ("in the latter years/days," 38:8, 16)... (TLSB)

The first major biblical reuse [of chs 38–39] occurs in Revelation 19. Preparations are being made for the celebration of the marriage feast of the Lamb: at the return of Christ, all believers, who comprise his church and bride, will dine with him (Rev 19:7–9). The counterpart to that feast is the scene of the birds gathered for their great feast on the carnage of the enemies of God and his people in Rev 19:17–21, which is clearly a reworking of Ezek 39:17–20. Gog is never mentioned by name here, but plainly the "beast" ([Gk *therion*] Rev 19:19–20) represents him. Like Gog, he leads a worldwide coalition against God's church, accompanied by a false prophet and his various charms. At the conclusion of the last great battle, in which the beast and his coalition are defeated, the beast and the false prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire (Rev 19:20). (TLSB)

"Gog and Magog" figure explicitly in the account of the defeat of the beast in Rev 20:7–10. Yahweh putting hooks in Gog's jaws and summoning him from the far north to wage war on Israel (Ezek 38:4–23) is OT language for the same event now described as God releasing [Gk *ho satanas*], "Satan," the adversary, from his prison for a short time after the millennium (toward the close of the church age) so that he can assemble his army, consisting of "Gog and Magog." One should note that while Ezekiel describes God as orchestrating the whole scenario, Revelation gives prominence at this point to Satan. This is, of course, no ultimate contradiction, and [commentator C. F.] Keil nicely compares this contrast to the famous one between 2 Sam 24:1 and 1 Chr 21:1 (on who prompts David to take a census). Again, the miraculous defeat of the army coincides with the return of Jesus Christ. Ultimately, the deceiver of the nations, now identified as [Gk *diabolos*], "the devil," is recaptured and thrown into the fiery lake to join the beast and his false prophet (Rev 20:10; cf. Rev 19:20). (TLSB)

What has happened is that Ezekiel's prophecy of a penultimate event in human history ("the latter years/days," 38:8, 16) has become a prophecy of the final, ultimate, universal victory by the Messiah over the cosmic forces of evil. In NT context, this means that the victory Jesus won on Calvary over our sin, death, and the devil is in principle complete ("it is finished," Jn 19:30), but still awaits its consummation at the end of human history. Every time we partake of the Eucharist, we proleptically join the celestial victors in "a foretaste of the feast to come." Horace D. Hummel, *Ezekiel 21–48*, CC (St. Louis: Concordia, 2007), 1099–1103. (TLSB)

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)

My hand that I have laid on them. Judgment on the nations will contribute to His glory because they will understand the character of God's justice. (TLSB)

39:22–23 *the house of Israel will know ... And the nations shall 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)

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

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

38:1–39:24 Gog represents the evil forces arrayed against Christ's Church. God's Word seals the doom of this unholy alliance. His powerful Word, through Ezekiel and through Christ, provides comfort to Christians today. "The gates of hell shall not prevail" (Mt 16:18). Judgment on His enemies is mercy for His people. God makes His holy name known to the nations and vindicates His holiness before their eyes (Ezk 38:16). • Lord, we take comfort in Your Word. Protect us and guard our faith through Your Holy Spirit. Amen. (TLSB)

The LORD Will Restore Israel

25 "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob and have mercy on the whole house of Israel, and I will be jealous for my holy name. **26** They shall forget their shame and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they dwell securely in their land with none to make them afraid, **27** when I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies' lands, and through them have vindicated my holiness in the sight of many nations. **28** Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God, because I sent them into exile among the nations and then assembled them into their own land. I will leave none of them remaining among the nations anymore. **29** And I will not hide my face anymore from them, when I pour out my Spirit upon the house of Israel, declares the Lord GOD."

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

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

Or, "bear their shame." Cf 6:9; 16:61; 20:43; 36:31. (TLSB)

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

Though Ezekiel foretold things in ages to come, the vindication of God’s holiness is not a utopian dream. It will begin in the near future—in the deliverance from the Babylonian captivity. Physical resettlement in their homeland will be followed by spiritual renewal (cf 36:22–32). (TLSB)

39:28 *leave none.* Although some exiles did not want to return, God made it possible for all to do so. (TLSB)

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

39:25–29 Israel will return to “dwell securely in their land with none to make them afraid” (v 26). Israel’s return under the reign of Cyrus the Persian vindicates God’s holiness and makes Him known to many nations. On Calvary’s cross, God most fully revealed the character of His justice—He ransoms all by Christ’s blood. No longer exiles, believers receive the blessings of His promises. • Father, we humbly thank You for our salvation, guaranteed by Christ’s own blood. Guard us in our faith. Amen. (TLSB)