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## **Gog, Magog, and God**

(Ezekiel 38:1-39:29)

### **Introduction**

We have come to another one of the "top ten" difficult passages in Ezekiel and in the Bible. There are two dangerous extremes often taken in the interpretation of this and similar passages. One extreme is to tell more than you know by trying to supply all the answers in minute detail. The opposite extreme would be to see nothing more than a symbolic presentation of the struggle between good and evil. This is the same caution that applies to all such apocalyptic passages in Daniel, Zechariah, and Revelation, as well as here in Ezekiel, especially in 38 and 39.

Before the restoration described in chapters 34-37 can proceed, there is the lingering question of Babylon. Remember that the fate of Babylon was left unmentioned in the messages against the nations. This is somewhat surprising in light of the fact that it received prominent mention by Ezekiel's contemporary, Jeremiah (Jer 50:1-51:64). There is good evidence that this passage could be the missing message of judgment against Babylon. It was placed here to answer the question before the final section on restoration in Ezekiel 40-48.

Chapters 34 to 37 are about the immediate restoration with prophetic overtones of a more full and final restoration. Chapters 40-48 are clearly beyond anything that has ever been seen in Israel since the restoration began in 535 BC. The case of the identity of Gog is a crucial point in sorting out these issues and will be addressed below.

### **An Analysis of the Sequence of Events**

It will be helpful to review the sequence of events along with the basic content of the two chapters as we seek to understand their meaning and purpose. The sequence of events is as follows:

- **38:1-7 - The Mobilization of Forces**  
A confederation is formed of northern nations (38:15; 39:2) that will include at least eight nations; Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Persia, Ethiopia,

- Lybia, Gomer, and Togarmah. These nations form an alliance and prepare for battle by gathering and equipping an army (v. 4) and mobilizing them for battle (v. 7).
- **38:8 - The Purpose of Mobilization**  
The object of these preparations for battle is to come against those who have returned after many years from among many nations to the land of Israel. These people will be dwelling in safety in the land that formerly had been desolate.
  - **38:9-17 - The Evil Plan for Gog's Conquest of Israel**  
The confederation troops swarm, covering the land "like a cloud" (v. 9). Gog, the leader of the confederacy, devises an evil plan to attack the "unwalled" villages and the people who dwell in peace (vv. 10-11). From them he will take great plunder (vv. 12-13). The next verses 14-15 are a repetitive review of the mobilization and occupation described in the previous verses. God will be hallowed by Gog's evil plan (v. 16) and by the fulfillment of the prediction of Gog's invasion that was predicted by the prophets (v. 17).
  - **38:18-23 - The Defeat of the Armies of Gog**  
The miraculous intervention of God will be evident as He intervenes to protect the people and the land (vv. 18-19a). There shall be a great earthquake that will be felt globally on the land and sea (vv. 19b-20). All the enemies will fall by the sword, pestilence, and plagues (v. 21-22). As a result, God will be magnified in the eyes of the nations and they will know that He is Yahweh (v. 23).
  - **39:1-24 - The Details of the Destruction of Gog's Army**  
The destruction and defeat of the army of Gog is described in great detail in these verses. This defeat includes the following elements:
    1. In emphatic language, God announced, "I myself am against you" indicating His personal direction of Gog's defeat, v. 1.
    2. God is the one who motivated Gog to come against Israel and insure his defeat, v. 2.
    3. God will dislodge the weapons of Gog, and they will fall in defeat on the mountains of Israel, vv. 3-4a.
    4. Gog will become a meal for the birds of prey, v. 4b.
    5. Gog's army in the open field also shall be destroyed, v. 5.

6. God will send fire as destruction against Magog, v. 6a.
7. The enemies of Israel will know God is Yahweh; the Holy One in Israel is vindicated, vv. 6b-7.
8. This is the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the destruction of the enemies of the people of God, v. 8.
9. The weapons of Gog will furnish fuel for fires in Israel for a period of seven years, vv. 9-10.
10. It will take seven years to locate and bury all the bodies of the slain army of Gog, vv. 11-13.
11. A special commission will be appointed to locate and identify bodies for the funeral brigade, vv. 14-15a.
12. The name of the valley will be called "Hamon-Gog," meaning "the hordes of Gog," v. 15b.
13. The city in the valley will be called "Hamonah," meaning "a multitude," v. 16.
14. The birds of prey will be invited to the Lord's supper at which the meal will be Gog's fallen army, vv. 17-24.

### **39:25-29 - The Epitaph of the Destruction of Gog**

This epitaph affirms that God will restore Israel because of His grace and mercy, and because of His name and reputation, v. 25. As a result, all people everywhere will know that Yahweh is the Lord, the one true God, v. 26. God will demonstrate His holiness through their deliverance, v. 27. God will gather the Hebrews into the land and pour out His Spirit on them, vv. 28-29.

### **Seven Purposes of God Achieved by Ending the Exile in Babylon**

1. God demonstrated the discipline of His love by chastening His people, Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-8, 39:21-24.
2. God makes a new beginning in His relationship with Israel indicated by the use of "now" in verse 25a.
3. God will be zealous for the sake of His holy name, reversing 36:20-23 and extending mercy to the house of Israel, 39:25b. Passages acknowledging the vindication of God's name and reputation also include 38:16, 23; 39:6-8, 31-24; 39:25-29.

4. The people of Israel would forget their shame and unfaithfulness, v. 26.
5. God will gather them to establish His holiness, v. 27.
6. All Hebrews would be delivered and all would know that Yahweh is the one true God, v. 28.
7. God will pour out His Spirit on the House of Israel as He promised (36:27; Joel 2:29). This promise was associated with the advent of the messianic era, v. 29. (Cooper, *Ezekiel*, pp. 345-346)

### The Identity of Gog

There are seven messages in these two chapters, each introduced with the formula, "This is what the Sovereign Lord says." These seven are (1) 38:1-9, cf. Rev 16:13-14; 20:7-8; (2) 38:10-13; (3) 38:14-16; (4) 38:17-23; (5) 39:1-16; (6) 39:17-24; and (7) 39:25-29. Gog is the central figure addressed in these messages.

The name *Gog* appears only here, 1 Chronicles 5:4, and in Revelation 20:8. Five of the most prominent suggestions as to the identification of *Gog* are: (1) *Gugu* or *Gyges*, a ruthless ruler of Lydia; (2) *Gagu*, a ruler of the land of Sakhi, an area in northern Assyria; (3) an unidentified Sumerian ruler whose name was *Gug*, a Sumerian word that means "darkness;" (4) an official title of a ruler like Pharaoh, king, Jabin, etc.; and (5) a general term that could mean any enemy of God's people.

Two reputable scholars suggest *Gog* may be a cryptogram for Babylon (see Cooper, *Ezekiel*, p. 331, n. 90). This solution to the identity of *Gog* fits the apocalyptic character of chapters 38 and 39. It would allow Ezekiel, writing from Babylon, to present the ultimate overthrow of the nation necessary for the restoration of Israel/Judah to occur.

In addition, the apocalyptic character of such a prophetic word could also include clues to help our understanding of "Mystery Babylon" and the destruction of Babylon in the end time as presented in Revelation 17, 18, and 19. Nebuchadnezzar's marriage to princess Amytis made him chief prince (Heb. *rosh*) of Meshech and Tubal. It is not accidental that Revelation

16:13-14 identifies the location of the forces of Antichrist as the Euphrates River, which was in the heart of Babylon. In addition, John mentions Gog and Magog by name in Revelation 20:8 as the enemies of God and partners of the Antichrist in the end time (see Cooper, *Ezekiel*, pp. 330-333).

Like Daniel (see Dan 9:1-27), Ezekiel's immediate concern was Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. But Daniel was also given the message of the defeat of the enemies of God down to the end of time (9:24-27). These seven messages of Ezekiel in chapters 38-39 could well serve as a prelude to the Temple and restoration visions in Ezekiel 40-48 that relate to the end time.

### **The Time of This Event**

Ezekiel's vision of Gog presents a time when Israel has returned to their land and the people dwell in prosperity and security (see 36:33-36; 38:8-12). It is evident that this passage refers to an end time event based on statements in 38:8 which place the battle "after many days" and "in the latter years," "on that day," in 38:14, "it will come to pass at that time," in 38:18, and "it will come to pass in that day," in 39:11. In addition to these statements, there is the repeated use of the Hebrew imperfect as future, "I will . . ." and "it shall be . . ." "it shall or will come to pass . . ." etc. In addition to these observations, there are at least seven prominent views of how to place this event on the prophetic calendar (Cooper, *Ezekiel*, pp. 335-337):

1. The first view is to take this passage as symbolic of the ongoing battle between good and evil. In this view, the event has no place on a literal calendar but simply represents the moral struggle against the forces of evil.
2. A second view presents this as a literal battle and places this event prior to the seven years of tribulation and just prior to or just after the rapture of the church. This view focuses on the mention of seven years in 39:9.
3. Another view places this event at the middle of the tribulation and relates the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 to Daniel 11:40-41 and Revelation 14:14-20.

4. Some believe that the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 are the same as those described in Revelation 19:11-21 and that it will occur at the end of the tribulation.
5. A view similar to number 4 is that the events of Ezekiel 38 and 39 occur after the tribulation in an undefined transitional period between that which separates the tribulation from the millennium.
6. Still another view is that Ezekiel 38 and 39 occur at the end of the millennium and compares this to Revelation 20:7-8.
7. A final view is really a combination of number 4 and 6. In this view, the battle of Ezekiel 38-39 begins at the end of the tribulation based on Revelation 19:17-21, but is put on pause for a thousand years beginning with the binding of Satan in Revelation 20:1-3. After the thousand years is over, Satan is loosed and the battle is concluded as in Revelation 20:7-8.

None of these suggestions is without difficulty. For a complete discussion of the problems related to each of the above see Cooper, *Ezekiel*, p. 336. The interpretation with the least problematic approach is number 7. This event probably begins at the end of the tribulation period when Satan is bound, based on Revelation 20:1-3. The battle will continue when Satan is loosed as in Revelation 20:7-8, and is concluded with the final defeat of Satan and the casting of those who chose to reject Christ into the lake of fire as in Revelation 20:11-15.

### **The Message of This Event**

Whatever one's eschatological position on Ezekiel 38 and 39, there are some unmistakable lessons to be learned. It is important that in the midst of trying to decipher, date, and deduce the meaning of this cryptic passage, that we do not forget the significant lessons that are found here. We can argue over details and miss the clear message. There are at least three prominent lessons in these two chapters:

1. **God Will Triumph in the End of Things**
  - Whenever men or nations have set themselves against God, they have ultimately failed. The Russian people are very much aware that the decline and fall of the Soviet Union occurred because

they "tried to force God out of their culture." The lesson for America is clear. Unless we get back to God, our nation will not last! We are not immune to God's judgment (See Rom 2:1-29).

- God's judgment against sin is real, awesome, and unrelenting for both men and nations. All mankind is without excuse in the face of both our individual and corporate accountability to Him (see Rom 1:16-32).
- Human history rapidly is moving toward an awesome and grand climax. In that day, there will be personal and corporate accountability for everyone, for all will stand either before the judgment seat of Christ if one is saved (2 Cor 5:9-11), or the great white throne of judgment if one is lost (Rev 20:11-15).

## **2. God's Will Is to Provide Redemption**

- It is not coincidental that this passage follows the message of redemption and restoration in Ezekiel 34 to 37, including the promise of a "new heart," "new spirit," 11:19; 36:26-27, and new life in 37:1-14. Chapters 38 and 39 are a reminder that judgment awaits those who set themselves against God and His redemptive purposes.
- Ezekiel 38-39 also precedes the future restoration presented in 40-48 and is a reminder that God's redeeming grace will only provide eternal redemption for those who trust Him (John 3:16-18). The shadow of the cross and Christ's efficacious death is cast in the past from Calvary to creation and includes all those saved by faith looking forward to His redeeming grace (see e.g. John 8:56-58). That shadow also is cast in the future and extends to the end of human history and after that, judgment for all those in all time who have rejected Him (Heb 9:27-28).
- The mercy and grace of God has provided all a person needs for salvation as a free gift (Eph 2:8-9). Satan, in rebellion against God, has set himself as the adversary of both God (Gen 3:1-24) and all humanity (Job 1:8-11; 2:3-5) as well as Jesus (Matt 4:1-11).

3. **God Will Be Glorified Both in Judgment and Redemption**

- Ezekiel 38:23 states, "Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord." Also in 39:27-29, "When I have brought them back from the people and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and I am hallowed in the sight of many nations, then they shall know that I am the Lord their God . . . and I will hide My face from them no more . . ." God is glorified in redemption and deliverance.
- God told Habakkuk that He would use the Babylonians as His own instrument of chastening and judgment against Israel (Hab 1:7-11). Only those who choose Him by faith will be justified (2:2-4). Like Gog and Magog, those who oppose Him will be lost eternally.
- Some will repent one step too late. Philippians 2:9-11 reminds us that the day will come when every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. This is a solemn reminder that while many reject Him now, when He returns, all will confess Him.

**Conclusion**

This passage presents the judgment of Israel's immediate foe, which was Babylon under the leadership of Nebuchadnezzar. But Ezekiel has a longer look down to the end time when a new foe known as "Mystery Babylon" (Rev 17:1 - 18:24) will be the enemy of the people of God. The battle in these two chapters presents the final victory of God over the forces of evil that open the way for the beginning of the Millennium and lay the foundation for the final confrontation and defeat of Satan in Revelation 20:7-8.