

Ezekiel 38-39 "Gog and Magog"
Psalm 46
Revelation 20

February 13, 2011

What on earth are chapters 38-39 doing here?

The key is found in 38:16 –

*In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me,
when through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.*

Gog's purpose is plunder and spoil.

God's purpose is to vindicate his holiness before the eyes of the nations.

In other words, it is not enough for Yahweh to be known as the God of Israel.

It is not enough for Yahweh to be faithful to his promises to Israel and Judah.

The restoration of his chosen people to the promised land with the holy sanctuary
so that they will be my people and I will be among them as their God,
is only the beginning of God's purposes!

The nations must come to know Yahweh.

And so therefore Yahweh will bring the nations against his chosen people in the promised land,
so that through Gog, God will vindicate his holiness before their eyes.

We saw at the end of chapter 36 that restored Israel was to be like a flock of sheep for sacrifice.
Now we will learn why!

1. The Defeat of Gog (38)

¹The word of the LORD came to me: ²"Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him

Who is Gog?

The most likely candidate is Gyges – the 7th century king of Lydia –
which is in modern-day Turkey.

This fits well with the theme of a northern invader.

Of course, Gyges had died fifty years before Ezekiel's prophecy,
but his dynasty continued to be the dominant northern power.

If you want to understand what the name Gog would mean to Israel –

think about someone like Napoleon –

a famous warrior king from the past,

but we really don't remember all that much about him!

Magog was mentioned in Genesis 10 as one of the sons of Japheth,
along with Meshech and Tubal.

Magog can simply mean "the land of Gog"

and Lydia was the powerful neighbor of the ancient kingdoms of Meshech and Tubal,

both of whom are well attested in Assyrian and Babylonian records.

A century later, the Greek historian Herodotus will record these stories of Gyges for posterity.

So what we have in verse 2 is a clear description of a powerful northern alliance.

But this northern alliance was not especially well-known in Judah.
No doubt they had heard of the wealth and power of Gyges (Gog),
and the fabled wealth of the Phrygian King Midas of Meshech,
but the peoples of the north were shrouded in mystery.
Assyria – Babylon – Egypt – these were the powers of the present day.

The northern peoples had a reputation for being barbaric and brutal –
but little was actually known about them.

And so Gog of the land of Magog becomes the perfect symbol of the archetypal enemy
who rises up against the people of God.

This is why the book of Revelation uses Gog and Magog
as the nations from the ends of the earth that will arise at the end of history!

a. “I Am Against You”: Gog Conscripted to Bring War (v3-9)

³and say, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I am against you, O Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. ⁴And I will turn you about and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in full armor, a great host, all of them with buckler and shield, wielding swords. ⁵Persia, Cush, and Put are with them, all of them with shield and helmet; ⁶Gomer and all his hordes; Beth-togarmah from the uttermost parts of the north with all his hordes— many peoples are with you.

And Yahweh summons Gog to bring a great host into battle.

And Yahweh says “I will” do this.

Gog is not the one in control of the situation – whatever he may think!

Verse 4 describes the equipment of the army.

Verses 5-6 reports the nations that are gathered.

Persia – from the east

Cush and Put – from the south

Gomer and Beth-togarmah from the far north

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah had spoken of foes coming from the north.

Ezekiel now describes what this will look like.

In earlier chapters Ezekiel had dealt with all of Israel’s traditional enemies –
the local foes whom they knew well.

These nations that are named here are located on the fringes of Israel’s world.

Seven nations have joined Gog in bringing together a mighty army.

All the ends of the earth are gathering under Gog.

In chapter 37 the breath blew from the four winds to bring life to Israel.

In chapter 38 it looks as though the four corners of the earth are gathering to destroy Israel!

⁷ "Be ready and keep ready, you and all your hosts that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them. ⁸ After many days you will be mustered. In the latter years you will go against the land that is restored from war, the land whose people were gathered from many peoples upon the mountains of Israel, which had been a continual waste. Its people were brought out from the peoples and now dwell securely, all of them. ⁹ You will advance, coming on like a storm. You will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your hordes, and many peoples with you.

In verse 8 God says that this will happen “in the latter years” – after Israel is restored from war – once Israel is dwelling securely in the land once more.

Why is Yahweh doing this?

Why is God bringing the hosts of hell against his people?

He has brought them back in safety to the land.

Why would he now bring the ends of the earth against them?

Ezekiel does not answer this question yet!

He is still focused on Gog.

b. What Does Gog Seek? Plunder and Spoil! (v10-13)

¹⁰ "Thus says the Lord GOD: On that day, thoughts will come into your mind, and you will devise an evil scheme ¹¹ and say, 'I will go up against the land of unwalled villages. I will fall upon the quiet people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having no bars or gates,' ¹² to seize spoil and carry off plunder, to turn your hand against the waste places that are now inhabited, and the people who were gathered from the nations, who have acquired livestock and goods, who dwell at the center of the earth. ¹³ Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all its leaders will say to you, 'Have you come to seize spoil? Have you assembled your hosts to carry off plunder, to carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to seize great spoil?'

Why is Gog coming against Israel?

We already know the answer to that question:

because Yahweh has dragged him with hooks and brought him here!

But Gog does not know this!

Gog has his own motives: plunder and spoil.

He seeks to plunder those who dwell securely,

“who dwell at the center of the earth.” (v12)

And the merchants of the world eagerly greet the oncoming armies –

because with the plundering of Israel, their business will doubtless increase!

Revelation also connects the military and economic powers of this age.

And not surprisingly, Revelation has a similar message to Ezekiel 38-39:
life as the redeemed people of God will be hard;
your enemies will still come after you;
trouble will not “go away”!

But don't be afraid!

c. The Coming of Gog as a Cloud against My Land (v14-16)

¹⁴“Therefore, son of man, prophesy, and say to Gog, Thus says the Lord GOD: On that day when my people Israel are dwelling securely, will you not know it? ¹⁵You will come from your place out of the uttermost parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great host, a mighty army. ¹⁶You will come up against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the land. In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.

Verses 14-16 then describe the coming of Gog from “the uttermost parts of the north”
“like a cloud covering the land.”

Again – this will only happen when Israel is dwelling securely.

God is not going to continue to beat up on his battered flock.

He will wait until they dwell securely!

And then – when they have great faith and confidence in their covenant God –
then God will bring the nations against them!

And only here in verse 16 do we begin to learn *why* Yahweh is doing this:

“In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.” (v16)

Think of the hosts of Rome seeking to destroy the Christian church
at the beginning of the 4th century.

They had no chance.

The church's faith was robust and strong.

They knew that this persecution was only coming

because God intended to vindicate his holy name before the eyes of the nations.

And sure enough, a decade later the emperor himself bowed the knee
before the cross of Christ.

I wonder if we are beginning to see the same sort of thing happening in China...

d. Sodom and Pharaoh: Gog Raised Up for Judgment (v17-22)

¹⁷“Thus says the Lord GOD: Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel, who in those days prophesied for years that I would bring you against them?”

It is worth pointing out that Ezekiel's reference to “my servants the prophets” in verse 17
indicates that Ezekiel was well aware of the prophetic tradition
that dated back several generations in Israel's history.

The Lord Yahweh reminds us of the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah
“my servants the prophets” who prophesied that Yahweh
would bring a northern foe against Israel.

But all of those prophecies spoke of how God would bring foes from the north
in judgment against Israel for their sin!

As the exiles in Babylon are hearing this account of another massive army coming from the north
they are preparing for trouble again.

“Here we go again” –
we are doomed!
defeat and destruction!

But verses 18-22 suggests to us that the proper answer to the question in verse 17 is *no!*
Gog is *not* the instrument of God’s judgment against Israel.
Gog is the instrument of God’s vindication of his holiness before the eyes of the nations!

*¹⁸But on that day, the day that Gog shall come against the land of Israel, declares the Lord
GOD, my wrath will be roused in my anger. ¹⁹For in my jealousy and in my blazing wrath I
declare,*

Verses 18-22 recounts the judgment that will fall against *Gog!*
No longer will the coming of the nations signal God’s judgment against his people!
Now, because the new creation has come,
because God has poured out his Spirit upon his people,
we may look upon the onslaught of the nations with confidence
that God will vindicate his holiness and deliver his people from their foes!

God will arise in anger and wrath, in jealousy and blazing wrath!
How *dare* you attack my people!

[Gog might wish to respond: uh, because you dragged me out here with hooks!
We see here again the same question of divine sovereignty and human responsibility
that we have seen often in Ezekiel.
It is true that Gog would not be here
if it were not that Yahweh dragged him out of his cave, as it were;
but at the same time, Gog has come full willing –
with eager lust for plunder and spoil.
God has raised up Gog – very much as he raised up Pharaoh –
so that his glory might be displayed in the judgment of Pharaoh.]

And in verses 19-20 we hear of how God’s judgment has cosmic consequences:

*On that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. ²⁰ The fish of the sea and the
birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field and all creeping things that creep on the ground,*

and all the people who are on the face of the earth, shall quake at my presence. And the mountains shall be thrown down, and the cliffs shall fall, and every wall shall tumble to the ground.

Creation itself will tremble before God!

There will be a great earthquake which will cause all created things to tremble:

the fish of the sea – the birds of the heavens –

the beasts and creeping things of the earth –

all the people who are on the face of the earth shall quake at my presence!

All walls of every kind –

the man-made walls of the cities,

and the mighty cliffs and mountains – God’s own walls! –

will tumble to the ground.

The judgment of Gog is no ordinary judgment.

Gog brings together the armies of the nations,

so that all of humanity is coming against the people of God.

And so the judgment that comes against Gog

comes against the earth itself.

And in verses 21-22 we hear strong echoes of God’s judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah:

²¹ I will summon a sword against Gog on all my mountains, declares the Lord GOD. Every man’s sword will be against his brother. ²²With pestilence and bloodshed I will enter into judgment with him, and I will rain upon him and his hordes and the many peoples who are with him torrential rains and hailstones, fire and sulfur.

As God had judged Sisera at Kishon’s brook,

bringing the rainstorms upon him,

and as God had judged Sodom and Gomorrah

bringing fire from heaven,

so now God will bring judgment upon Gog.

e. Then the Nations Will Know that I Am the LORD (v23)

²³So I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD.

Verse 23 reaffirms what we heard in verse 16:

God’s purpose in this is that the nations would know that he is Yahweh.

People have tried to connect Ezekiel’s narrative to world events:

Ambrose argued that Gog was the Goths who were coming from the north against the (Christian) Roman empire in the late 4th century.

Others claimed that the Arab tribes were Gog in the Islamic invasion of (Christian) Palestine in the 7th century.

Many dispensationalists argued that it was Russia in the 20th century.

But I think Augustine was on the right track when he warned that Ezekiel 38-39 cannot be taken as a prophecy of literal, detailed events.

Ezekiel is describing what the God of Israel will do once he restores and renews his people.

Gog is what *you* must face –

and Ezekiel’s message is that you can have confidence in the face of Gog because *God* is the one who raised him up – and *God* is the one who will destroy him!

2. The Destruction of Gog (39)

Chapter 38 explained how God would raise up Gog and enter into judgment against him. Chapter 39 then turns to the details of the judgment against Gog.

And then a second time God says to Gog,
“I am against you.”

a. “I Am Against You”: The Slaughter of Gog (v1-8)

¹“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.

First, there is the slaughter of Gog in verses 1-8.

Again God emphasizes his sovereign work in the destruction of Gog.

“I will turn you about...and lead you against the mountains of Israel.

Then I will strike your bow from your left hand,

and will make your arrows drop out of your right hand.”

God has brought Gog to this place –

and having brought him here, he will destroy him

and give him to the birds of prey and the beasts of the field to be devoured.

Verses 7-8 emphasize that God is doing this for the sake of his holy name – and therefore in order to protect his people.

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.

Notice in verses 7-8 that God does not do this so that *Israel* will know that he is Yahweh.

They already know!

God has demonstrated his holiness to them by restoring them –

as he promised in chapters 34-37.

They are firmly and utterly convinced of the steadfast love and faithfulness of Yahweh.

But the nations do not yet know –

and so God will make known his holy name in the midst of his people

so that the nations might know that Yahweh is the Holy One in Israel.

Too often when affliction comes, we ask,

what are you trying to teach me?

Self-centered people!

Haven't you learned that you are not the center of the universe?!

What makes you think that God is trying to teach you something!

You already know that Jesus is Lord!

When Gog rises up against you –

when you face affliction and distress –

remember that one of God's purposes is to reveal himself to the nations.

This is why I often say that the true mark of the Christian

is *not* that you are honest and upright people.

(anyone can be honest and upright).

The true mark of the Christian is how you handle unjust suffering!

The true mark of the Christian is how you bear the cross!

And very rarely will God ever let you know what he is doing.

When my mother died, we took the children to the hospital to identify her body.

The nurses were a little skittish about letting the children in –

they've had lots of bad experiences with how people handle death.

But I was adamant: we were all going in!

When I saw my mother lying there, dead,

I was stunned and immediately fell to my knees

and I gathered the children around me

(they were already shrinking back from the bed:

we had told them what to expect,

but there is nothing that prepares you for that!).

I said to them,

Children, that is grandmamma –

that's her body.

Her soul is already with Jesus,

and her body is still united to Christ,

and will rest in the grave until the resurrection.

As far as I knew, that was that.

But the next day, we went to the church where my mom had worshiped.
One of the women came up to me and said that she worked at the hospital,
and was good friends with the nurse who was on duty – who was not a believer.
She said that her friend had told her that evening that she had never seen anything like it.
Gog had visited us that day,
so that the nations might know that Jesus is Lord.

As long as you think that Gog and Magog is just about some distant future,
you will miss the great comfort – and the great challenge – of Ezekiel’s vision of Gog.

b. What Does Gog Get? The Spoiling of Gog (v9-10)

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, ¹⁰so 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.

In verses 9-10 we then hear of how Israel is involved in the battle against Gog.

Israel does not fight in the battle.

Rather, after God fights the battle,

Israel simply plunders their enemies!

In the song of Deborah from the book of Judges,

Sisera had gone forth in search of plunder and spoil –

but in the end he winds up “plundered and spoiled” by Jael.

Now Gog faces the same fate.

Psalm 46 uses similar language to speak of how the nations will know that Yahweh is God
when he breaks the spear and bow and burns their chariots.

Likewise Revelation 19 portrayed the armies of Christ prepared for battle –
and then Jesus conquers his enemies all by himself, without any help!

The importance of the number 7 grows in chapter 39.

In chapter 38 we saw seven nations.

Now in 39:9 we hear of seven words for weapons,

and seven years of firewood supplied by the weapons of the nations!

c. The Burial of Gog (v11-16)

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. ¹²For seven months the house of Israel will be burying them, in order to cleanse the land. ¹³All 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. ¹⁴They 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. ¹⁵And 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.

The importance of the number seven continues in verses 11-16
with a seven month period of burial in order to cleanse the land.
(the unburied dead renders the land unclean)

Normally the period for cleansing was seven days –
but given how huge a task this is, it will take a week of months!
They will go through the land looking for all the dead bodies,
and whenever anyone finds a human bone
(remember Ezekiel's valley of dry bones!)
he will put up a sign to mark the spot
until the burial crew can get to it.

But where will they be buried?

The Valley of Hamon-gog.”

Where is that?

It is said to be the city of Hamonah (the city of the multitudes).

This is the word used frequently in Ezekiel to refer to the multitude of Israel's rebellion.
There is only one city in all of Israel worthy of being called the city of Hamonah –
and that is Jerusalem!

d. Gog: the Sacrificial Feast (v17-20)

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. ¹⁸You 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. ¹⁹And 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. ²⁰And you shall be filled at my table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all kinds of warriors,' declares the Lord GOD.

Verses 17-20 may seem a little out of order:

after all, the *burial* of Gog has already happened!

But strict chronological order is not important here.

Verses 1-16 are all part of the oracle to Gog.

But 17-29 are no longer addressed to Gog –

because Gog is now dead!

Now God speaks to Ezekiel and commands him to speak to the carion birds and beasts (v17-20)
and finally to Israel (v21-29)

Sacrificial feasts were common in the ancient world.

Israel had them regularly in the peace offerings that were connected with every feast.

Here Yahweh invites the scavengers of air and the scavengers of the field
to come to a sacrificial feast –

and eat the flesh of the mighty and drink the blood of princes.

It is this passage that Revelation 19 echoes

with its call to the carrion birds and scavenger beasts

to come to the “great supper of our God”

where they will feast on human flesh.

The wicked will be destroyed.

But what is the purpose of all this?

e. Then Israel (and the Nations) Shall Know that I Am the LORD (v21-24)

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.”

Verses 21-24 remind us of what God was doing in the exile.

Israel will know that I am the LORD *their God* –

in other words, “if God be for us, who can be against us?!”

and the nations shall know that Israel only went into exile

because of their treachery, uncleanness and transgressions.

But – all that is changed.

Verses 25-29 then talk about the new order:

Conclusion: Then Israel Will Forget Their Shame and Treachery (v25-29)

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.”

We need to hear this as those who have already received the promised Holy Spirit.

Jesus has brought about the great restoration of the fortunes of his people
through his resurrection from the dead.
And because God has raised Jesus to his right hand,
therefore the Father's face now shines upon his beloved people.

Unfortunately, I had not checked the Hebrew before making my outline this week!
Verse 26 does not say "They shall forget their shame"
Verse 26 very clearly says "and they shall *bear* their shame
and all the treachery they have practiced against me."
As we have seen repeatedly in Ezekiel,
there is "no contradiction between experiencing God's full restoration
and yet at the same time having an acute consciousness of the sin
which brought us under his wrath.
The effect of such salutary memory is only to increase the gratitude and joy
with which we praise our Saviour for his infinite patience and mercy."
(Wright, 323)

So when Israel is restored,
God will deliver them from their enemies,
and protect them from their foes.

But, he will also bring trials and tribulations –
Jesus said that the disciple is not greater than his master.
If they hated me, they will hate you!

What are reasons for why you suffer?
Is God trying to teach you something?
Maybe – maybe not.
Is God preparing you for something better?
Possibly.
Is God rebuking you for your sin?
He could be.

I can't answer those questions.
Part of the problem with those sorts of reasons
is that they are all focused on some "greater good" here and now.

But what God is doing in suffering
is conforming you to the likeness of his Son.

Gog and Magog are too big, nasty, and ugly for you to defeat them!
Your enemies are too powerful.
You can't win.

But notice that Israel isn't worried about that!
Because they know that God's purpose in this is to vindicate his holy name!
End with the Song of Deborah