

# GOD'S FINAL DEFEAT OF EVIL

## Lesson 6

### Ezekiel 38–39

#### RECAP

Take a moment to share about your experience with last week's "Spiritual Practice" and "On Mission" sections.

#### GOD'S FINAL DEFEAT OF EVIL

As Ezekiel pivoted from judgment to restoration, a significant question lingered—what about Israel's future enemies? If, through His restoration, God's people were to enjoy blessing, peace, and permanent residence in the land, what would God do about the enemies that remained in the world and in the spiritual realm? **Ezekiel 38–39** appears to describe a future battle that takes place after the return and restoration of Israel with the opposition being led by "Gog,"<sup>1</sup> of the land of Magog."<sup>2</sup> This vision functions as a symbol of God's final battle against His enemies in the end times. An ancient reader would have identified this battle vision as a reference to future and supernatural events.<sup>3</sup> Using vividness, gruesome imagery, hyperbole, and satirical language, Ezekiel created a heightened awareness of God's sovereign defeat of evil.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Gog could be a person (he sometimes is identified with Gyges, king of Lydia in 660 BC), or Gog could also be a symbol of all the evil in the world. Whether symbolic or literal, Gog represents the aggregate military might of all the forces opposed to God." *Life Application Study Bible: New Living Translation*. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2016. 1360

<sup>2</sup> "Magog is likely a Hebrew form of Akkadian Mat Gugu, 'the land of Gog', which Josephus identified as Lydia in western Anatolia." Walton, John H., et al. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary Old Testament*. InterVarsity Press, 2004. 722-723.

<sup>3</sup> Heiser, Michael S. *Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*. Lexham, 2019. online copy

<sup>4</sup> Daniel Block describes **Ezekiel 38–39** in this way: "For sheer vividness, imagery, and hyperbole, this oracle has few equals, which cautions against over literalism in interpretation. One may best appreciate the intention of this text by approaching it as a satirical literary cartoon strip consisting of eight frames. As the unit progresses the images become increasingly caricature, climaxing in a bizarre picture of predatory birds and wild animals seated around a table, gorging themselves on human flesh (**39:17–20**). Block, Daniel Isaac. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Ezekiel Chapters 25–48*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998. 431

## READING PLAN

We encourage you to read the entire section of Scripture using the following reading plan.

Day 1: Ezekiel 38:1–13

Day 2: Ezekiel 38:14–23

Day 3: Ezekiel 39:1–8

Day 4: Ezekiel 39:9–16

Day 5: Ezekiel 39:17–29

## OVERVIEW

The questions in this lesson will focus on **Ezekiel 38–39**.

While all chapters are covered by questions in this lesson, the following outline may be helpful to your understanding:

**Ezekiel 38:1–39:29** is composed as a series of seven revelations against Gog, the enemy of Israel. These revelations may be literal or symbolic. Each revelation starts with, “*This is what the Sovereign LORD says.*” These revelations are:

1. God will bring Gog<sup>5</sup> and his allies against Israel. (**38:1–9**; see also **Revelation 16:13–14**; **20:7–8**)
2. Gog’s evil thoughts and intentions will lead him to invade Israel. (**Ezekiel 38:10–13**)
3. Gog will advance against Israel from the north. (**38:14–16**)
4. God will display His judgment against Gog. (**38:17–23**)
5. It will take seven years to plunder and seven months to bury Gog’s fallen army. (**39:1–16**)
6. The birds of the air and beasts of the field will be invited to a great feast at which Gog is the meal. (**39:17–24**)
7. Through this deliverance, God will conclude the salvation and restoration of Israel as foreseen in **33:1–37:28**. (**39:25–29**)

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<sup>5</sup> “Gog is called the ‘chief prince’ of Meshech and Tubal. Meshech and Tubal were provinces of Asia Minor ... The geographical area would today include parts of Iran, Turkey, and southern provinces of Russia. These were the locations of Gog’s allies but still furnish no conclusive evidence of Gog’s identity.” Cooper, Lamar Eugene. *The New American Commentary: Ezekiel*. Vol. 17, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. 331

Above all else, these complex divine oracles express God's determination to reveal to the nations His holiness and to His own people His covenant loyalty.

## QUESTIONS

### Day 1 & 2: Ezekiel 38

1. How does Ezekiel initially describe the preparation for war? Who is involved? Who is being attacked? (**Ezekiel 38:1–9**)
2. The nations of Meshech, Tubal,<sup>6</sup> Gomer, and Beth Togarmah to the north,<sup>7</sup> Ethiopia and Put to the south and west, and Persia to the east, collectively represent the four corners surrounding Israel. Both the position and number<sup>8</sup> of nations surrounding Israel speaks to Israel's vulnerability and the magnitude of the attack by all the enemies of God. Why might Israel's situation and physical location be important to the drama unfolding in Ezekiel's vision? (**Ezekiel 38:7–9**)

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<sup>6</sup> "The two names of Meshech and Tubal were listed earlier (**27:13**) as nations with which the city of Tyre traded. They are mentioned in the records of the Assyrians and the Persians. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus likewise mentions them. These references place their location in central and eastern Turkey. The Assyrians referred to Meshech as 'Mushku,' and in the eighth century BC the king of Mushku was Mita, known in Greek literature as Midas, the legendary king with the golden touch." Duvall, J. Scott, and J. Daniel Hays. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. Baker Books, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020. 602

<sup>7</sup> "Beth-togarmah (RSV) is probably Armenia (cf. **27:14**), and [the people of] Gomer ... came originally from north of the Black Sea. With these allies, Gog prepares to assemble his vast hordes against the tiny nation which has been gathered together and now dwells securely on the mountains of Israel." Taylor, John B. *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*. InterVarsity Press, 2009. 239

<sup>8</sup> Just as the number seven is used throughout Scripture to represent wholeness, "The appearance of seven nations (Meshech, Tubal, Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, Beth Togarmah) suggests 'totality' and 'completeness.'" Chisholm, Robert B. *Handbook on the Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Minor Prophets*. Baker Academic, 2009.

3. Why is Gog attacking Israel? What sin will the armies commit against Israel? (**Ezekiel 38:10–13**)

How is Gog taking advantage of Israel's vulnerability?  
(**Ezekiel 38:14–16**)

4. How is God's sovereignty affirmed in this chapter?  
(Examples can be found in **Ezekiel 38:3, 10, 17–23**.)
5. How did God protect<sup>9</sup> and enact justice on the nations who were against Israel in this war? (**Ezekiel 38:17–23**)
  - a. What does God's response tell us about His care for the nation of Israel?

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<sup>9</sup> "The earthquakes in Israel in **verse 19** are similar to ones described in **Exodus 19; Judges 5:4–5; Isaiah 30:27–28; Habakkuk 3:3–7; and Psalm 68:8–9 and 114.**"  
Walton, John H., et al. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary Old Testament*.  
InterVarsity Press, 2004. 723

b. What does God's response tell us about His character?

c. God protects and enacts justice in this passage. Is the way He does this something that scares you or makes you uncomfortable? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

### **Day 3, 4, & 5: Ezekiel 39**

6. It is important to note that many of Ezekiel's prophecies are echoed and find fulfillment in the prophecies of John found in Revelation. Since we have the fullness of Scripture to contemplate, what is your response to knowing the full story? (For further information, compare **Ezekiel 39:1–24** with **Revelation 19:11–20:15**.)

7. What is the people of Israel's involvement in the disarming of the armies and nations who were against them? (**Ezekiel 39:1–10**)

Do you think it's noteworthy that the people of Israel were not used as soldiers in the war? Why or why not?

8. How is Israel involved in the burial process<sup>10</sup> after the war?  
(**Ezekiel 39:11–16**)

a. What's the significance of Israel cleansing the land?

b. How does this imagery contrast with **Ezekiel 37** about the Valley of Dry Bones?

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<sup>10</sup> One commentator notes: "This cleaning-up operation will take seven months, so great will have been the slaughter; and at the end of that time a permanent commission will be set up to search for any unburied remains, to make sure that no cause of pollution is left remaining in the land (**14, 15**). The repeated reference to the number 'seven' is a reminder that we are here dealing with apocalyptic symbolism, and that therefore literal fulfillment of these details is not to be sought." Taylor, John B. *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*. InterVarsity Press, 2009. 241.

9. The dramatic, though not the chronological, climax comes in **39:17–20**. Here, the birds and the beasts are invited to join in a gruesome banquet.<sup>11</sup> What does this image tell you about how much God hates sin?

What tension do you feel in this picture?<sup>12</sup> (**39:17–24**)

10. What are the promises God gives in the concluding verses of **Ezekiel 39**?<sup>13</sup> (**Ezekiel 39:25–29**)

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<sup>11</sup> "In the ancient Near East the practice of throwing slaughtered corpses out into the open field to be eaten by birds and wild animals was viewed not only as humiliating punishment but also as a curse. The practice is well attested in ancient Near Eastern texts, and it often occurs as a punishment (and curse) for treaty violations." Duvall, J. Scott, and J. Daniel Hays. *The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*. Baker Books, a Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2020. 603

<sup>12</sup> "The literary image sketched here must have been shocking for a person as sensitive to [priestly] matters as Ezekiel. Even worse than the lack of restraint is the skewing of roles. Yahweh, the sovereign Lord, hosts foul scavenging creatures. Instead of serving clean, edible food, the divine host offers his guests human flesh, thereby violating the most serious taboo of all: the desecration of human life. **Genesis 9:1–7** sanctions animal flesh as food for humans, but no one, neither human nor animal, was to shed human blood, let alone consume it! How the priestly prophet reacted to this horrifying image one may only speculate." Block, Daniel Isaac. *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Chapters 25-48*. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998. 477

<sup>13</sup> "Long ago [the prophet] Habakkuk wrestled with the question of why God would use the wicked Babylonians as an instrument of judgment on Israel. He discovered that even the wicked will bring glory to God either by receiving the life-transforming gift of a new heart and new spirit or by receiving judgment to establish his holiness, righteousness, and name (**Habakkuk 1:1–2:20**)." Cooper, Lamar Eugene. *The New American Commentary: Ezekiel*. Vol. 17, Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994. 347–348.

How do you find comfort and hope in these promises?

11. “Ezekiel only uses the term ‘pour out’ with a negative connotation, such as pouring out wrath or the like, except in **Ezekiel 39:29**.”<sup>14</sup> Instead of pouring out “His wrath,” **Ezekiel 39:29** says, “I will pour out my Spirit upon Israel.” What do you find significant about the fact that God is pouring out His Spirit instead of His wrath?

- a. What does pouring out His Spirit look like today?

- b. How have you experienced Holy Spirit being poured out in your life?

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<sup>14</sup> Schnittjer, Gary Edward. *Old Testament Use of Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide*. Zondervan Academic, 2021. 337



## SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

Consider Tim Keller's connection of Lord of the Rings to the Lord's Table as you take communion together:

In the final book of Lord of the Rings, many "enemies and dread weapons pummel the walls of the city of Gondor. As the city gates begin to give way, death, doom and the bitterness of defeat take hold. The evil dark lord grimly claims the city for himself. But in that moment of bleak despair the Riders of Rohan come charging, their horn blowing.

"J.R.R. Tolkien writes ... 'Pippen rose to his feet ... and he stood listening to the horns, and it seemed to him that they would break his heart with joy. And never in years could he hear a horn blown in the distance without tears starting in his eyes.'

"The Lord's Supper and the practice of communion reminds us that **when all hope of victory is gone and 'all is lost,' Jesus steps in** and says 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. ... This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you.' Indeed it is hard to see the bread and the wine without tears starting in [our] eyes. (Luke 22:19–20)."<sup>15</sup>

As a group, take communion together. Remember Christ's ultimate victory over the forces of death and the powers of the world. After this, discuss the battles Jesus has personally won in your life.

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<sup>15</sup> Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. InterVarsity Press, 2015. 34 (emphasis added)

## ON MISSION

Reading through **Ezekiel 38–39** we see the protective and supportive response God has for Israel even to the very end. In the rest of Scripture this continues to be a theme not only for Israel but for all marginalized communities in society.

Where in your spheres of influence, neighborhoods, or the nations, do you see the marginalized in need of protection and support?

Individually and/or as a group consider how God might be asking you to support, be a voice, and fight for the marginalized in these places. What next step might Holy Spirit be asking you to take?

## TAKEAWAY SUMMARY

When you think about God's final defeat of evil, what is one key takeaway from this lesson?

Write a brief summary of your takeaway on page 106.

The image shows a completely blank white rectangular area. It is surrounded by a thin, solid black border that frames the entire composition. There are no markings, text, or illustrations on the white surface.

SERMON NOTES