

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION
ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

Yechezkel: The Book of Ezekiel
By Dr. Tova Ganzel

In memory of Rebbetzin Miriam Wise, Miriam bat Yitzhak veRivkah z”l,
whose *yahrtzeit* is on 9 Tevet.
By Rav Yitzchak and Stefanie Etshalom

**Shiur #28: Yechezkel’s prophecy about Gog from the Land of Magog
(38-39)**

Chapters 38-39 comprise a unit that describes God’s war against “Gog from the land of Magog”. Along with Gog’s downfall and the manner in which God wages war against him, the prophet also describes his special strength and the sanctification of God’s Name that comes about with his defeat. This prophecy complements the other revival prophecies discussed in previous chapters. So far, the prophecy has climaxed with the nation’s return to its land and its purification from sin. Now we discover that the process remains unfinished. The nation’s revival occurs hand-in-hand with the strengthening of God’s status in the world. But God’s status is only fully anchored after His war against Gog from the land of Magog: a war that ends with the Divine promise that God will not hide His face from His people.

This prophecy deals with God’s role, distinguishing between good and evil and between past and future – in a manner similar to *Yishayahu* 34-37 and *Zekharia* 9-14.¹ At the center of the prophecy is God’s judgment against the nations that have rebelled against Him, as a necessary stage on the road to Am Yisrael’s revival. The uniqueness of this prophecy in *Yechezkel*, compared to the above-mentioned prophets lies in its scope, the explicit naming of the aggressors, and the timing of the war as specified in the prophecy: *after* the nation’s return to its land.

Description of God’s war with Gog

Chapters 38 and 39 share many common motifs, but there is a clear division between them. Chapter 38 deals mainly with Gog’s might and strength, while Chapter 39 centers on his anticipated downfall. At the beginning of Chapter

¹ These prophecies, too, are related to the Day of God that is mentioned by other prophets, too, including *Yishayahu* 13; *Yirmiyahu* 30; *Mikha* 4; *Yoel* 4; *Zekharia* 12:14; *Daniel* 11; *Tehillim* 2:83.

38, God commands Yechezkel to prophecy to “Gog of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshekh and Tuval” (v. 2). Over the course of this prophecy we learn of the military preparations by the army of Gog. Gog arrives in the land at the head of an army that includes other nationalities, but he and his army are actually led by Divine guidance:

“And 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 in complete attire – a great company with buckler and shield, all of them handling swords: Paras (Persia), Ethiopia (Kush) and Put with them, all of them with shield and helmet; Gomer, and all his bands, the house of Togarma of the far sides of the north, and all his bands, and many people with you. Be well prepared, and prepare for yourself – you and all your company that are assembled to you, and be a guard to them.”² (38:4-8)

This war takes place after Israel has returned to their land. This is stated explicitly. For this reason, these chapters in the *Sefer* follow chronologically after Chapters 34-37, which address the process of return:

“After many days you shall be called upon; in the latter years you shall come against the land that is brought back from the sword, and is gathered out of many peoples against the mountains of Israel, which have been a continual waste, but it is brought out of the nations, and they dwell safely all of them.” (v. 8)

Although the arrival of Gog is described as a Divine initiative, God’s response indicates that Gog plans a quick military campaign aimed at taking spoils and grabbing prey before the people have been able to fortify themselves in the cities to which they have returned to live:

“So says the Lord God: It shall come to pass on that day, that things shall come into your mind, and you shall think an evil scheme, and you shall say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to them that are at quiet, that dwell in safety, all of them dwelling without walls, and having neither bars nor gates, to take a spoil, and to take a prey; to turn your hand against the waste places that are now inhabited, and against a people that are gathered out of the nations, that have acquired cattle and goods, and that dwell at the center of the earth...” (vv. 10-12)

What ends up happening is quite different. In fact, the opposite:

² The commentators are divided about the meaning of the closing words of the verse – “*ve-hayita lahem le-mishmar*”. Rashi understands it in the literal sense - that Gog protects his army and ensures its welfare and safety, while Radak maintains that the army protects him, since a king needs protection and bodyguards.

“Therefore, son of man, prophesy and say to Gog: So says the Lord God: ... I will bring you against My land, that the nations may know Me, when I shall be sanctified by you, O Gog, before their eyes.” (vv. 14-16)

Later on we learn that God’s war against Gog is the realization of prophecies that came to other prophets, too (perhaps this refers to Yirmiyahu, who also spoke of a nation that would come from the north):

“So says the Lord God: Is it you of whom I spoke in earlier times, by My servants, the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you against them?” (vv. 17)

Now the prophet moves on to a description of the punishment meted out to Gog, including many eschatological elements (i.e., pertaining to the End of Days):

“And it shall be on that day, when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, says the Lord God, that My fury shall glare out. For in My jealousy and in the fire of My anger I have spoken, saying, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; so that the fishes of the sea, and the birds of the sky, and the beasts of the field, and all creeping things that creep upon the earth, and all the men that are upon the face of the earth, shall shake at My Presence, and the mountains shall be thrown down, and the steep places shall fall, and every wall shall fall to the ground. And I will call for a sword against him throughout all My mountains, says the Lord God; every man’s sword shall be against his brother. And I will contend with him by pestilence, and by blood, and I will rain down upon him, and upon his bands, and upon the many peoples that are with him, a torrential rain, and great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.” (vv. 18-22)

This prophecy contains a newness like that of the Creation. Evidence of this can be found in the similarity between the description of the animals in these verses, and their description in Bereishit 7:21-22. In this manner, the eschatological elements of this prophecy point to a renewal of all of the order of Creation- a trend that is further reinforced in Chapters 40-48.

The purpose of the prophecy as a whole is emphasized in the final verse of this chapter: “Thus will I magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord.” (v. 23) This verse underlines the aim of God’s war against Gog, as well as its result – knowledge of God among the nations. Thus, this prophecy is a

response to the desecration of God's Name represented by the exile of the nation from its land and the destruction of the Temple, as we shall see below.³

In Chapter 39, the prophet addresses Gog again, setting forth his punishment:

“And I will turn you about, and entice you on, and will cause you to come up from the far sides of the north, and will bring you against the mountains of Israel, and I will smite your bow out of your left hand, and will cause your arrows to fall out of your right hand. You shall fall upon the mountains of Israel – you and all your bands, and the peoples that are with you; I will give you to the ravenous birds of every sort, and to the beasts of the field, to be devoured. You shall fall upon the open field, for I have spoken it, says the Lord God. And I will send a fire on Magog, and among them that dwell securely in the coastlands, and they shall know that I am the Lord.” (vv. 2-6)

The meaning of the description of Gog's fallen as food for the birds and beasts of the field, is clarified fully at the end of the chapter, where we find its realization. Now, the prophet foretells for the first time the actions of the inhabitants of the cities of Israel, who are not involved as combatants in the war between Gog and God. All that they are able to do is to gather up the weapons, which will serve for the coming years as an accessible source of combustible material, and to benefit from the spoils left from Gog's army:

“And they that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall set fire to the weapons, and burn them, both shield and buckler, bow and arrows, and the staves, and the spears, and they shall make fires with them for seven years. So that they shall take no wood out of the field, nor cut down any out of the forests; for they shall make fire with the weapons, and they shall spoil those who spoiled them, and rob those who robbed them, says the Lord God.” (39:9-10)

Thereafter, the prophet describes the burial of Gog and all his company, which is carried out in order to purify the land:

“And it shall be on that day that I will give Gog a place for burial in Israel, the valley of those who travel to the east of the sea; and it shall block the path of the travelers, and there shall they bury Gog and all his multitude, and they shall call it The Valley of Hamon-Gog [the Multitude of Gog]. And seven months shall the house of Israel be burying them, that they may cleanse the land. And all the people of the land shall bury them, and it shall be for them a renown on the day that I shall be glorified, says the

³ The placement of these verses within the prophecy fits a common trend we have noted in *Sefer Yechezkel*: the conclusion of the prophecy contains an addition in which the main message takes a significant turn.

Lord God. And permanent officers shall dispatch men to range the land and with these rangers they shall bury those that remain above the earth, to cleanse it. After the end of seven months they will make their search. And the rangers that pass through the land, when any sees a human bone, then he shall set up a sign by it, until the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon-Gog. And also the name of the city shall be Hamona. Thus shall they cleanse the land.” (vv. 11-16)

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish