

**EZEKIEL 38 AND 39**  
Part XVII  
by Thomas Ice

*Thus says the Lord GOD, "Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days through My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you against them? And it will come about on that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel," declares the Lord GOD, "that My fury will mount up in My anger. And in My zeal and in My blazing wrath I declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel."*

—Ezekiel 38:17–19

As we move into a new section in the prophecy, the Lord once again speaks to Ezekiel about God's future victory over Gog and his allies (38:17–23). For the fifth and final time in chapter 38, the prophecy is said to be the word of the Lord. "Seven times in Ezekiel 38–39 we read the same words, 'Thus says the Lord God' (38:2, 10, 14, 17; 39:1, 17, 25)," notes Mark Hitchcock. "Another eight times the refrain, 'declares the Lord God,' appears. Obviously, God doesn't want us to miss the point—this is His Word."<sup>1</sup> This prophecy begins with the Lord asking a question to Gog. This question stems from the previous verse (38:16) and is about how God will sanctify Himself in the eyes of Gog and the nations.

**WHAT'S THE QUESTION?**

It is as if God is taunting Gog with this question that reveals God's absolute confidence in the outcome of this encounter. In this section (38:17–23), God answers the questions of "what" and "how." First, the question "what" is answered in verses 17 and 18, while the question of "how" in verses 19 through 23. The question that God confronts Gog with is as follows: "Are you the one of whom I spoke in former days through My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you against them?" The Hebrew grammar causes the reader to expect an affirmative answer.<sup>2</sup> So where are the other Old Testament prophecies that the Lord is referring to in this passage? Randall Price answers that question as follows:

The opening statement of this defeat (verse 17) seems to imply a there has been prior prediction in other prophets of Gog's invasion. However, the ambiguity in the expression "are you the one" (even though Gog is understood from verse 16) spoken of by God in the distant past reveals that the reference is open to representative "Gogs" whose actions against Israel have invited a divine demonstration. Gog's army will be a multi-national force and some of these nations have had prophecies specifically directed against them by former Israelite prophets: Cush/Ethiopia (Isaiah 18:1-7), Arabia (Isaiah 21:13-17). However, no direct reference to Gog in any of the former prophets is necessary, since all previous invaders have been types leading to Gog and his allies as the antitype.<sup>3</sup>

The Lord continues the "what" in verse 18 in relation to Gog's invasion of the land of Israel, by noting that His "fury will mount up in My anger." The Lord uses three

Hebrew words to describe His reaction to Gog's invasion of the land of Israel. In the order in which they appear in the Hebrew text, the first word is the common verb *'alah*, which occurs over 1,200 times in the Hebrew Old Testament<sup>4</sup> and means to "go up, ascend, or climb,"<sup>5</sup> is translated "will mount up."

Second, the Hebrew noun *chemah*, which means "heat, poison or venom (of animals), rage, wrath,"<sup>6</sup> is translated "fury" in this passage. This word is used 120 times in the Hebrew Bible and most of the usage relates to human or Divine wrath (110 times).<sup>7</sup> The use of *chemah* to refer to human wrath only occurs 25 times, while it is used 85 times to reference Divine wrath with the most occurrences found in Ezekiel (31 times).<sup>8</sup> Thus, we see the righteous anger of the Lord that builds up and is released as His wrath in history.

Third, the final Hebrew word is the noun *'af*, which means "nose, anger, nostrils"<sup>9</sup> is used 155 times in the Hebrew Old Testament<sup>10</sup> and is translated in the passage as "My anger." Hebrew nouns not only occur in the singular and plural modes, but also have a dual use. "When the reference is to the nose, the singular form is used, while the dual form is used for either the face or nostrils."<sup>11</sup> Here the Lord's anger is expressed with in the dual mode, thus, emphasizing the nostrils, which is seen in some animals when they get upset they start breathing through the nostrils like a snorting anger. Then *chemah* and *'af* are grouped together in reference to God, as occurs here, the expression denotes the strongest kind of anger by God that leads to action. Keil describes this as an "anthropopathic expression, 'my wrath ascends in my nose,' . . . The outburst of wrath shows itself in the vehement breath which the wrathful man inhales and exhales through his nose."<sup>12</sup> The clear message of the passage is that God has reached the limit of His patience and He will now spring forth in wrathful action against Gog and his allies.

#### HOW IT WILL HAPPEN?

The final section in chapter 38 (verses 19–23) begins with the Lord revealing His attitude with which He will defend His people Israel. The first part of verse 19 says, "And in My zeal and in My blazing wrath . . ." Once again, this phrase contains three important Hebrew words demonstrating that the lexicon was not exhausted in the previous verse when it comes to describing God's great anger toward Gog and the other invaders. First, the noun translated "zeal" is *qinah*, which occurs 17 times in the Hebrew Old Testament and it is found the most times in Ezekiel (7 times).<sup>13</sup> The basic meaning is that of "zeal" for something (in this case God's zeal for His prized earthly possession Israel) and the "jealousy" and "wrath" that is exhibited when another attempts to move in and take away that possession.<sup>14</sup> We gain insight into the Lord's attitude toward His people and His land—the land of Israel—two chapters earlier in Ezekiel that reads as follows:

Therefore, thus says the Lord GOD, "Surely in the fire of My *jealousy* I have spoken against the rest of the nations, and against all Edom, who appropriated My land for themselves as a possession with wholehearted joy and with scorn of soul, to drive it out for a prey." Therefore, prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and say to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the valleys, "Thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I have spoken in My *jealousy* and in My wrath because you have endured the insults of the nations.'" (Ezek. 36:5–6, italics added)

The same jealousy that God expressed in chapter 36 is carried into 38:19 concerning the wife of Jehovah—Israel. “God’s patience would be exhausted with the repeated attempts of Israel’s enemies to annihilate her,” declares Charles Feinberg. “The Lord Himself will undertake the destruction of Israel’s enemies, choosing to use no secondary agent, for this is to be a final and irrecoverable judgment.”<sup>15</sup>

The second noun we find in this passage is the Hebrew word *‘esh*, which means “fire” and in this verse is translated as “blazing.”<sup>16</sup> The third word in the Hebrew text is *‘evra*, which is translated “wrath”<sup>17</sup> in verse 19 and in construct relationship to blazing. Taken together they produce the strongest possible statement about the wrath of God—it is blazing, it is on fire. “These words express the intensity of God’s display of vengeance against the invaders of His Land (‘My mountains,’ 38:21).”<sup>18</sup>

So what does the burning zeal of the Lord cause Him to declare? God will “declare that on that day there will surely be a great earthquake in the land of Israel.” “That day” refers to the day in which Gog and his gang will invade the land of Israel. Then God will counterstrike the outsiders by inflicting a great earthquake upon the land of Israel. Price tells us:

According to verses 19b-21 a divinely appointed earthquake will be so severe as to disorient Gog’s multi-national forces and cause them in the confusion to fight each other. The earthquake will apparently set off volcanic deposits in the region, bringing down on Gog’s army a hail of molten rock and burning sulfur (volcanic ash) with the result that the enemy troops are utterly destroyed before they can strike a blow against Israel (verse 22).<sup>19</sup>

Maranatha!

**(To Be Continued . . .)**

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Hitchcock, *After The Empire: Bible Prophecy in Light of the Fall of the Soviet Union* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers 1994), p. 174.

<sup>2</sup> C. F. Keil, *Ezekiel, Daniel, Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin (Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1982), p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> Randall Price, *Unpublished Notes on The Prophecies of Ezekiel*, (2007), p. 42.

<sup>4</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (London: Oxford, 1907), electronic edition.

<sup>6</sup> Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, electronic version (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> G. Johannes Botterweck, & Helmer Ringgren, editors, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. IV (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 462.

<sup>8</sup> Botterweck & Ringgren, *Theological Dictionary*, vol. IV, p. 464.

<sup>9</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>10</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

<sup>11</sup> Willem A. VanGemeren, gen. editor, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, 5 vols., (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), vol. 1, p. 463.

<sup>12</sup> Keil, *Ezekiel*, p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> Based upon a search conducted by the computer program *Accordance*, version 7.4.2.

<sup>14</sup> Definition derived from Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>15</sup> Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 225.

<sup>16</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>17</sup> Koehler and Baumgartner, *Hebrew Lexicon*, electronic version.

<sup>18</sup> Randall Price, "Ezekiel" in Tim LaHaye & Ed Hindson, editors, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> Price, *Unpublished Notes on Ezekiel*, p. 42.