

October 18

Scriptures: Read Ezekiel 38 & 39

Key Verse: “Thus I will magnify Myself and sanctify Myself, and I will be known in the eyes of many nations...” (Ezekiel 38:23)

Overview

When reading the remarkable prophecy contained in chapters 38 & 39, it helps to remember that it is given following the promise of the restoration of Israel, when the Messiah Himself reigns over the new, united, purified, and peaceful land of Israel (34:27-29; 36:24-30; 37:22-28). Since Ezekiel’s prophecies are arranged chronologically according to the dates he received them from God, it is likely that the future events prophesied are also in chronological order. It is significant that in the Apostle John’s prophecy, he specifically names Gog and Magog in reference to the rebellion against God instigated by Satan after the 1000 years of peace (the Millennium — when the saints of God will reign with the Messiah, see Rev. 20:7-9).

There has been much speculation about the location of Magog and the other places in the north ruled over by the prince Gog, but their exact identification cannot be ascertained. The inhabitants of these places were descendants of Japheth, coming from Europe and some parts of Asia (cf. Gen. 10:2-5). From the reference in Revelation and the question of 38:17, it appears that “Magog” is representative of all the earthly evil powers that are opposed to God, for any nation that takes up arms against God’s people is actually fighting against Him. Gog’s coalition army comes not only from the far north (38:15) but from the east (represented by Persia), the south (represented by Ethiopia), and from the west (represented by Libya; 38:5). These were the extremities of the then-known world and represent a general gathering of the world against the people of God.

The apparent reason for the planned attack on Israel was because of jealousy and greed for the riches within the Messiah’s flourishing kingdom (38:10-12). Since the Lord is Sovereign over the affairs on the earth and He allowed the wicked coalition to march on Israel, Ezekiel repeatedly says that the Lord Himself led them (38:4, 16; 39:2), since He had plans of His own: to bring the wicked to judgment, to bring glory to His name among the nations and His own people, and to cause His people to also be honoured (38:16, 23; 39:7; 13). God’s people did not have to fight; the Lord fought for them by destroying the enemy with the elements of nature He controls, such as earthquakes, plagues, flooding rains, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone (38:19, 22). Another method, which the Lord had used before, was to confuse the enemy so that they might fight against each other (38:21; Judges 7:21-22; 1 Sam. 14:15, 20; 2 Chron. 20:17, 23). Not only would the invading army be destroyed, but the Lord would also send His fire to destroy their homelands (39:4-6).

To illustrate the vastness of the enemy army, Ezekiel tells us that after the Lord’s fury had rested upon them, it would take seven months for the people of the Lord to bury the dead; and their burial place, located east of the Dead Sea, would be so large that it would obstruct the thoroughfare (39:11-12). Also, their weapons would provide Israel with fuel for seven years (39:9). The number seven is significant in symbolizing completeness and finality. There would be specially appointed people to organize the burial and ensure that all the dead bodies and bones

had been properly buried. This would not be done, however, to honour the dead, for their corpses would be left out as prey for the scavenger birds and beasts (39:4; 17-20); it was done to maintain the purity of the land of Israel, for according to the Mosaic law, corpses or bones left out in the open would bring defilement upon the land (cf. Lev. 5:2; 21:1, 11; Num. 5:2; 6:6; 19:16; 31:19). As a true priest, Ezekiel, was especially concerned with the importance of ritual purity (e.g. 22:26; 24:13; 36:25, 33; 37:23), for it symbolized the inner purity that God demands of His people as individuals and as a Church. This points forward to the time when the Church, the body of Christ, will be cleansed “with the washing of water by the word” from all defilement, that it might be glorious, holy, and without blemish, spot, or wrinkle (Eph. 5:26-27; Rev. 21:27).

From 39:23 until the end of the chapter, it appears that Ezekiel’s prophecy is no longer apocalyptic, but he is foretelling of the near future event of Israel’s restoration after the seventy-year captivity. With the witness of the remnant of the Jews, the Gentiles were to come to understand that the destruction of Judah and the captivity of God’s people were not because God was too weak to save them, but it was a punishment of God because of their disobedience (39:23). As Ezekiel had stressed before, when the Lord restores His people to their land and all the nations see that they serve and hallow Him, then it will reaffirm to them that it was the Lord who had sent them into captivity, just as it was clearly the Lord who had brought them back (39:27-28; 36:23). Verse 29 indicates that this prophecy would be ultimately fulfilled by the spiritual ingathering of souls made possible by the atonement of the Lord Jesus Christ, after which came the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in fulfillment of prophecy (cf. Acts 2:16-17; Joel 2:28). With a repentant heart, a restored soul, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and with Jesus’ mediation and intercession for us, the Lord will no longer hide His face from us. Rather, we can boldly approach His throne of grace with confidence that He hears our prayers (cf. 14:3; 20:3; 36:37; Heb. 4:16).

Prayer

Father God, we pray for the Church and for ourselves, that we, as the body of Christ, cleansed with the washing of water by the Word, might be glorious, holy, and without blemish.