

Ezekiel's Hope

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A Commentary on Ezekiel 38–48

JACOB MILGROM *and* DANIEL I. BLOCK
IN CONVERSATION



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EZEKIEL'S HOPE

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For Moshe Greenberg

— *ʾari šebbaḥābûrâ (Sanhedrin 8b)*

A lion among his peers

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Abbreviations

AB	Anchor Bible
AfO	<i>Archiv für Orientforschung</i>
AHw	W. von Soden, <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> , 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1965–81
ANEP ²	<i>The Ancient Near East in Pictures</i> . 2nd ed. by J. B. Pritchard. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969
ANET	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Related to the Old Testament</i> . 3rd ed. by J. B. Pritchard. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969
ARAB	Daniel David Luckenbill, <i>Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia</i> . 2 vols. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926–1927.
ASTI	<i>Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute</i>
BASOR	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDB	F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. Briggs, <i>A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Oxford: Clarendon, 1907 (corrected impression, 1952)
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> . Edited by K. Elliger and W. Rudolph. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1977. See also MT.
BT	Babylonian Talmud
B-Y	E. Ben Yehuda, <i>A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew</i> , 17 vols. Jerusalem, 1910–59 [rpt. in 8 vols., New York: Yoseloff, 1960]
BZAW	Beihefte zur <i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary</i> . The Oriental Institute, the University of Chicago, 1956–
DJD	<i>Qumran Cave I, Discoveries in the Judaean Desert-I</i> Edited by D. Barthelemy et al. Oxford: Clarendon, 1955
EJ	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i> . Jerusalem: Keter, 1971
EM	<i>Encyclopedia miqrait</i> [Encyclopedia Biblica]. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1950–
GB	W. Gesenius, <i>Hebräisches und aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das alte Testament</i> . Edited by F. Buhl. 17th ed. Neudruck, Berlin: Springer, 1949
GKC	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i> , as edited and enlarged by the late E. Kautzsch, revised by A. E. Cowley. Oxford: Clarendon, 1910. Cited by section
GL	The Lucianic revision of the Greek text (fourth century C.E.), as presented in G (Ziegler's edition of the Septuagint)
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament

Abbreviations

IB	<i>The Interpreter's Bible</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . 4 vols. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962. Cited by entry (s.v.) and author
IDB Suppl.	<i>The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> . Supplementary Volume (1976)
K	<i>Kethib</i> , “[what is] written”; form of a word in MT (indicated by the consonants in the main text); contrast Q
KAI	<i>Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften</i> , von H. Donner und W. Röllig. 3 vols. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1964
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
K.T.U.	<i>Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit</i>
LXX	Greek (Septuagint), according to J. Ziegler, ed., <i>Ezechiel, Septuaginta . . . auctoritate Societatis Litterarum Gottingensis editum</i> , XVIII. Gottingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1952
NRSV	The New Revised Standard Version, 1989
MT	Masoretic Text, according to <i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> , [fasc.] 9, Liber Ezechiel. K. Elliger praep. Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1971
NAB	The New American Bible, New York: Kennedy, 1970
NEB	The New English Bible. Oxford and Cambridge, 1970
NJPS	The New Jewish Publication Society of America translations of the Holy Scriptures: <i>The Torah</i> . 2d ed. Philadelphia, 1967; <i>The Prophets: Nevi'im</i> . Philadelphia, 1978; <i>The Writings: Kethubim</i> . Philadelphia, 1982
OtSt	<i>Oudtestamentische Studiën</i>
PEQ	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
Q	<i>Qere</i> , “[what is] read”; form of a word in MT (indicated by the vowel signs and the consonants in the margin); contrast K
REB	Revised English Bible, 1989
RSV	The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version. New York: Nelson, 1952
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
VTSup	Supplements, <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
TDOT	G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, eds. <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>
Vulg	Vulgate, as in <i>Biblia sacra vulgatae editionis</i> . Monachorum Abbatiae Pontificiae Sancti Hieronymi in Urbe, Ordinis Sancti Benedicti. Roma: 1959
WCJS	World Congress of Jewish Studies

Preface and Acknowledgments by Jacob Milgrom

DURING ONE OF MY frequent visits with Moshe Greenberg, friend and colleague for over half a century, I talked about my readiness for a new project, now that my one volume *Leviticus* was done. Moshe suggested that I complete his *Ezekiel*. He had already published the Anchor Bible *Ezekiel* 1–20 (1987) and *Ezekiel* 21–37 (1997). But he felt that his health would not enable him to complete the final chapters. Since these chapters dealt with the structure and rules of Ezekiel’s visionary sanctuary, a topic whose antecedents were my expertise (*Leviticus* and *Numbers*), I was an ideal candidate to succeed him.

The offer was frighteningly irresistible. My interest in *Ezekiel* 38–48 had been piqued as early as 1970 (*Studies in Levitical Terminology*), and since then the plethora of its enigmas and contradictions had not been satisfactorily resolved. But the challenge was overwhelming. Greenberg’s two volumes were acknowledged classics. They were immediately translated into German, the European center of biblical scholarship. Could I measure up to the Greenberg standard?

Merely to scan my commentaries on *Numbers* (1990) and *Leviticus* (1991, 2000, 2001) is sufficient to indicate that, like Greenberg (1983, 11–27), I too have adopted a holistic exegetical approach. This holds even more so for *Ezekiel*, which I aver was written by him (and/or his tradents). Even where his theology totally shifts, such as the surprising absence of repentance in 38–48, the cause is not due to the insertion of a later redactor but to the circumstances that impel Ezekiel to change his mind.

The research on *Ezekiel* 38–48 is enormous and I acknowledge my indebtedness especially to Daniel I. Block, the *Ezekiel* scholar from whom I have learned the most. His comprehensive coverage of the versions has eased my path, as demonstrated in the textual notes below. Critical encounter with Block’s *Ezekiel* has quickened the writing of this book. Where my conversation partner and I disagree is indicated in the commentary and the notes.

A gift of magnitude has been the sustained presence of Joel Duman, my colleague, research assistant, and dedicated study partner who coaxed my no. 3 pencil micrography into electronic luster. Then there is Richard Tupper (“Tup”), careful reader of my writings who carries my offprints in his briefcase for distribution. Tova

Preface and Acknowledgments by Jacob Milgrom

Ganzel, co-researcher on the thought of Ezekiel, full time lecturer, and young mother of five, found time to read my manuscript and comment meaningfully. What would I have done without Batya Kaplan, chief librarian of Hebrew Union College, and her able and willing staff who helped me find what I needed and allowed me long-term lease on everything pertaining to my research?

I am humbly thankful to our Creator who provided me with a body strong enough to cope with incessant insults threatening completion of the work. Second only to the Creator is my life partner of sixty-two years, Jo, who propels me daily to my “holy of holies,” past all the domestic trivia. When she reads my work she rigorously questions my thinking, and brightens and lightens my language.

“As water mirrors one face to another face, so her heart speaks to mine”
(Proverbs 27:19).

Jacob Milgrom

Preface by Joel Duman

HAVING BECOME A FREQUENT visitor to the home and the study of Professor Jacob Milgrom, and through my ongoing work with his wife, Dr. Jo Milgrom, in 2004 I noticed that Professor Milgrom was collecting materials on the book of Ezekiel. Knowing of his long-term concentration on Leviticus and the Holiness Code, I asked him what brought him to Ezekiel and he told me of his plan to complete Professor Moshe Greenberg's commentary on Ezekiel. I volunteered to assist Professor Milgrom in his work; thus began my involvement in the present volume. Over the course of the following years, I served as Milgrom's study partner, reader, transcriber, typist, and research assistant, as he worked through Ezekiel 38–48, overcoming the challenges of this most perplexing text and his own declining health.

Jacob Milgrom brought to this monumental project his world-renowned erudition regarding the Priestly and Holiness Codes, as well as a number of studies he had already published on Ezekiel. As a long-time colleague and friend, he also brought Greenberg's approach and methodology, as well as the influences of Mary Douglas and other scholars. A particularly important contribution that Milgrom wanted to make regarding Ezekiel was to reference and build on medieval Jewish scholarship that is often neglected by critical scholars, especially the Aramaic Targums and the commentaries of R. Eliezer of Beaugency and R. Joseph Kara.

From the first day of my work with Professor Milgrom, I was introduced to Professor Daniel Block's commentary on Ezekiel. I quickly perceived that Milgrom considered Block's book to be the authoritative work currently available on the subject. I was frequently given the assignment of combing Block's commentary for references and additional insights, in preparation for Milgrom's own analysis. Eventually I realized that in essence a conversation was being created between these two scholars. While Milgrom sought out every piece of research on these final chapters of Ezekiel, Block's work was consistently Milgrom's point of departure. Our discussions of each section of Ezekiel would often center on Milgrom's judgments regarding Block's conclusions: frequently, Milgrom adopted Block's suggestions—regarding textual difficulties, Ezekielian concepts and English translations of Ezekiel's idiosyncratic Hebrew; at other times, Milgrom was delighted to do battle with Block, especially regarding Ezekiel's grounding in his Pentateuchal sources.

Preface by Joel Duman

It is, therefore, particularly fitting that this final form of Professor Milgrom's work has become a conversation between Milgrom and Block, echoing in a deep and moving sense the inter-personal and inter-generational conversations of much of traditional Jewish scholarship. The interfaith character of the dialogue between Milgrom and Block is a truly significant innovation to such collaborative scholarship.

Joel Duman
January 2012, Jerusalem

Preface and Acknowledgments by Daniel Block

EARLY IN 1983 I received a telephone call from R. K. Harrison, inviting me to write a commentary on Ezekiel for the New International Commentary on the Old Testament series. At the time I could not have known how critical that call would be for setting the course of my life as a teacher and scholar. Nor did I anticipate that this would be the beginning of a fifteen-year conversation with Ezekiel, by common consent the most enigmatic of the Hebrew prophets. In my work on this prophet I was deeply indebted to Moshe Greenberg, the foremost Jewish authority on the book, both for his holistic approach to biblical interpretation and for his understanding of particular texts. We were all saddened when we learned that Moshe would be unable to finish his commentary on Ezekiel. It is right that Professor Milgrom took it upon himself to complete the project by writing a commentary on Ezekiel 38–48. With his background in the study of the books of Leviticus and Numbers and his profound understanding of all things cultic in ancient Israel, this was a perfect assignment. Earlier, in my own work, the close links between Ezekiel and Leviticus inevitably drew me to the work of Jacob Milgrom, the fruits of which are represented in his magisterial three-volume commentary on Leviticus in the Anchor Bible Commentary series. Unfortunately Professor Milgrom's labors on Ezekiel would not appear in published form during his lifetime.

While I was on sabbatical leave in Cambridge in the winter of 2010, Jacob Milgrom called to inquire if I would consider working together with him in preparing his manuscript for publication. Sadly, his untimely death brought the conversation to a halt. This was a deep personal loss for his wife Jo and his family, but it was also a loss for the whole world of biblical scholarship, causing me to wonder if the world would ever gain access to his work on Ezekiel. In the fall of that year, at the annual convention of the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta, I was delighted to meet Dr. Jo Milgrom and their sons Jeremy and Etan. Jo and Jeremy had come from Israel, and Etan from California to explore whether or not we could find a way to publish Professor Milgrom's work. This volume represents the product of that conversation. When I first saw his manuscript I was both surprised and humbled that a scholar of his stature should have found my work helpful. At Professor Milgrom's request, his commentary on Ezekiel 38–48 is presented as a conversation between the two of us.

In preparing this document for publication our greatest challenge has been to polish the manuscript without losing Dr. Milgrom's voice in the process. We have generally left his discussion exactly as we found it. It has not been our role to check for accuracy every primary and secondary reference that the author cites. On the one hand this was precluded by the pressures of my life and my other projects. On the other hand, out of respect for Dr. Milgrom, it seemed imperative to make this work available as quickly as possible. We hope readers will be forgiving of the author and the editor when they encounter mistakes. The changes we have introduced involved primarily the following: (1) bringing the manuscript into conformity with Wipf & Stock's house style; (2) reformatting the translation and textual notes on each literary unit; (3) smoothing out readings where the composition was awkward or sentences were incomplete; (4) filling in lacunae, especially by identifying secondary sources to which Milgrom refers. Since we did not have access to Milgrom's originals, in some instances [especially figures and tables] the images are imperfect; some we have reproduced as we found them in his manuscript. Given his ubiquitous references to my commentary, we have generally signaled his use of or response to my earlier work by placing a number in square brackets at the end of a sentence or paragraph: e.g., [596]. Unless otherwise indicated, this means page 596 of the second volume of my NICOT commentary, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 25–48*.

I wish Jacob Milgrom's work on Ezekiel would have been available to me twenty years ago when I was wrestling with this prophetic book. Although we obviously do not agree on all matters, I gladly accept his correction in many instances, and have grown greatly from his contribution to the conversation, including his incorporation of insights from the long history of Jewish scholarship. I am encouraged by those moments when my approach to the text as a Christian interpreter have matched not only the impulse of this giant in modern biblical scholarship, but also the perspectives of R. Eliezer of Beaugency and R. Joseph Kara, to which I did not have access. It is a great honor to engage in this inter-faith conversation, and a privilege to have a small hand in making Jacob Milgrom's significant work on Ezekiel available to the broader community of biblical scholars.

The Milgrom family and I owe special thanks to Robin Parry and Christian Amondson at Wipf & Stock for their enthusiasm for this project and the efficiency with which they have handled all the business and editorial matters. From the first conversation after the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Atlanta, they have encouraged us and offered the help we needed to produce it to their specifications. I am also grateful to Alan Myers, editor of the NICOT series and Tom deVries at Eerdmans Publishing Company for granting permission freely to reproduce images that had been used in my own commentary. The original location of these and all other images used have been duly acknowledged. Closer to home, I am thankful to Bud and Betty Knoedler, who have given so generously to underwrite my professorial chair, which allows me time and resources to work on stimulating projects like this. My assistants, Jason Gile, Matt Newkirk, Austin Surls, and Carmen Imes, have provided excellent aid in proofreading and indexing this volume and in offering suggestions for

its improvement. I also eagerly acknowledge the support of Ellen, the delight of my life, who has spent many hours on the indexes to this volume. She has patiently stood by me as a gracious friend and counselor for more than four decades.

Most of all, I am humbled and grateful to the Milgrom family for their invitation to enter into a conversation that had engaged their family for the past eight or nine years. No one is more familiar with the conversation that was going on between her husband and me than Jo Milgrom, who has supported this project with enthusiasm and wise counsel all along the way. I must extend a particular word of thanks to Jeremy Milgrom, who worked through the manuscript scrupulously to ensure that all the links between his father's comments and my work were duly noted. I am also grateful for the assistance Dr. Joel Duman graciously provided in the end as we were trying to solve a series of issues involving credits, images, and bibliographic riddles in the footnotes. This has been a team effort, and I am privileged to have been a part of this team. Our common prayer is that through our scholarship and the tone of our conversation, readers of the book of Ezekiel will see the benefits that arise from conversations involving people from different faith commitments in wrestling with this enigmatic book, and that they will be enlightened and blessed by its message.

Daniel I. Block
Wheaton College, Illinois
July, 2012

Preface by Shira, Etan, Asher, and Jeremy Milgrom

*... Rather, his delight is in God's Torah,
in which he is steeped night and day
Like a tree planted on streams of water
bearing fruit regularly, his leaves not wilting
he succeeds in everything that he does.*
(Psalm 1:2-3)

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE, *Yaacov Avinu* = Jacob Milgrom demonstrated his devotion to Torah; living in his household provided an ongoing lesson in *talmud torah k'neged kulam*—the priority of learning Torah over all other commandments. Over a span of fifty years, from our early childhood to the birth of our grandchildren/grand nieces and nephews, we can vividly recall his constant retreat/pilgrimage/exile into his study in Richmond, Berkeley and Jerusalem where he engaged and created holiness. As we all know, from each of these oases of Torah emerged first articles, then monographs and finally commentaries that have enriched the world of biblical scholarship.

For his very last commentary he seamlessly wove two important conversations into his work. One included the ongoing conversation that he had through the conventional assistance that Joel Duman, his faithful study companion and scribe provided, for which we owe endless gratitude. The second embodied an ongoing conversation with Block's NICOT commentary on Ezekiel which bore an amazing resemblance to the one-sided conversations between earlier and later medieval scholars (think: Rashi and Ramban) in which one work is grafted onto the other. While distinct and innovative, they are actually inseparable from each other! Daniel Block recognized the value of this conversation, and with an open heart and generous spirit, joined in publishing the manuscript as the conversation the two of them could have shared, in the spirit of the following teaching:

אמר רב אחא בר אדא אמר רב
ואמרי לה אמר רב אחא בר אבא אמר רב המנונא אמר רב
שאפילו שיחת חולין של תלמידי חכמים צריכה תלמוד
שנאמר ועלהו לא יבול וכל אשר יעשה יצליח

Preface by Shira, Etan, Asher, and Jeremy Milgrom

R. Aha bar Ada quoted Rav (perhaps it was R. Aha bar Aba who quoted R. Hamnuna quoting Rav) who said that even informal conversations between scholars are worth studying, as it is written, “his leaves not wilting, he succeeds in everything he does.” (*Abodah Zara* 19b)

מה אהבתי תורתך כל היום היא שיחתי

ma ahavti toratecha, kol hayom hi siḥati

How I love your Torah, it is my conversation all day long (Ps 119:97)

In the end, it pretty much comes down to this: the conversations you have, the ones you should have, and the ones you wish you had . . .

Shira, Etan, Asher, and Jeremy Milgrom
White Plains, Los Angeles, Irvine and Re’ut
(half way between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem)

February, 2012

PART ONE

Ezekiel 38–39

The Gog Pericope

INTRODUCTION

Structure and Message

EZEKIEL 38–39 DEALS WITH the demolition of hostile peoples surrounding Israel who invade the land of Israel and are buried there. These chapters have been inserted between the miraculous return of exiled Israel to their homeland (36–37) and the description of Ezekiel’s visionary sanctuary (40–46). A chronological, if ahistorical, picture emerges: the resurrection, restoration, and resettlement of all twelve tribes of Israel (47–48).

In the Jewish tradition, these chapters provide the earliest treatment and sources upon which all subsequent projections are based. Magog is mentioned in Gen 10:2 as a descendant of Japheth, together with Meshech and Tubal who are mentioned in verse 3. The Targumic source (*Tg. Ps.-J*) on Exod 40:11 refers to the final struggle of Gog against Israel, and to the Messiah, son of Ephraim, who will vanquish him and his rabble.

Fg. Tg on Num 11:26 reads, “two men remained in the camp, the name of one Eldad and the name of the other Medad, and the Holy Spirit rested upon them . . . and the two of them prophesied together saying, ‘At the end, the very end of days, Gog and Magog and their armies shall go up against Jerusalem, but they shall fall by the hand of the King Messiah. For seven full years, the children of Israel shall use their weapons for kindling, without having to go in the forest to cut down trees.’” This prophecy is also referred to in *b. Sanh.* 17a and *Num. R.* 15:19.¹

Ezekiel 38–39 comprises a single extract, opening with a divine revelation (38:1) and closing with final recognition and signatory formulae,² henceforth naming and signing patterns, 39:28–29. The naming pattern appears seven times (38:16, 23; 39:6, 7, 22, 23, 28). The extract consists of two panels (A and B), each containing two units which address the prophet as *ben ʾādām*, “human”:

- | | |
|--------|--|
| Unit 1 | YHWH’s program for Gog’s attack against Israel in the future (38:2–13) |
| Unit 2 | YHWH’s anger in view of Gog’s advance against Israel (38:14–23) |
| Unit 3 | The annihilation of Gog’s army and its armaments (39:1–16) |
| Unit 4 | The corpses of Gog’s army devoured by birds and beasts (39:17–29) |

1. Details in Levey, *Targum of Ezekiel*, 105–7, n. 1.

2. On *neʿum ʾādōnāy YHWH*, as a signatory formula, see Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 33–34.

The first and third units are alike (38:2–3; 39:1–2). Certain words occur in all four units: *lābetaḥ*, *'im*, and the roots *'lh* and *bw'*. Others occur in three units: *yarkētē šāpôn*, *ʾāgāpîm*, *yāda' baggôyîm*, *qdš*. A number of idioms from other biblical passages have found their way into the Gog extract: e.g., *ḥereb'îš bē'āḥîw*, “self destruction,” (38:21) in Gideon’s war against Midian (Judg 7:22); *yôm ʾādōnāy YHWH*, “the day of Lord YHWH,” indicated by a collapsing (perimeter) wall at Jericho (38:18; Josh 6:20) and Aphek (1 Kgs 20:30); *haggôy miššāpôn*, “the foe from the north,” (38:9, 16; Jer 1–6; 10:22–25; 13:20–27; 25:46–51); Gog is destroyed on the mountains of Israel (39:4; Isa 14:25). The destruction of Gog and his allies takes place by realistic and mythical forces, e.g., fire, brimstone, and earthquake, due to the appearance of YHWH, and the feasting of birds and wild life on the unburied carcasses.³

As demonstrated by Moshe Greenberg,⁴ Ezekiel’s style is dominated by the literary device “halving,” according to which the first (usually longer) part expounds an oracular theme, and the second follows with another theme but ends with a coda that links elements from both parts. Symmetrical patterns are achieved occasionally by composing halves virtually identical in length. Thus, in the Gog oracle, panel A (38:2–23) consists of 365 words, and panel B (39:1–29), 359 words (below). Their parallel opening is represented diagrammatically as follows [adapted from Block, 424–25]:

“HALVING” in Ezekiel 38:1–4aα and 39:1–2aα

38:1–4aα

wayēhi dēbar YHWH ʾelay lēmōr

wēʾattā

ben ʾādām

šim pānēkā ʾel gōg ʾeres hammāgōg

nēšîʾ rōš mešek wētubāl

wēhinnābēʾ ʾālāyw wēʾāmartā

koh ʾamar ʾādōnāy YHWH

hinēni ʾelēkā gōg

nēšîʾ

rōš mešek ʾutubāl

wēšōbābtikā

39:1–2aα

ben ʾādām

hinnābēʾ al gōg wēʾāmartā

koh ʾamar ʾādōnāy YHWH

hinēni ʾelēkā gōg

nēšîʾ

rōš mešek ʾutubāl

wēšōbābtikā

3. Aharoni, *Structure of the Prophecy*, 52–53, would rather divide chapters 38–39 into the six portions beginning with *kōh ʾamar ʾādōnāy YHWH*, “Thus declared Lord YHWH” (38:3–9, 10–13, 14–16, 17–23; 39:1–16, 17–24).

4. Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20, 25–27, 137–38*.

38:1–4aa

The word of YHWH came to me saying,
 “As for you,
 “Human,
 set your face toward Gog,
 of the land of the Magog,
 the prince,
 chief of Meshech and Tubal.
 Prophecy against him and say:
 ‘Thus has the Lord YHWH declared:
 Lo, I am against you, O Gog,
 prince,
 chief of Meshech and Tubal,
 I will turn you around . . .’”

39:1–2aa

“Human,
 set your face toward Gog,
 of the land of the Magog,
 the prince,
 chief of Meshech and Tubal.
 Prophecy against Gog and say:
 ‘Thus has the Lord YHWH declared,
 Lo, I am against you, O Gog,
 prince,
 chief of Meshech and Tubal,
 I will turn you around . . .’”

As pointed out by Daniel Block, “The opening word-event formula (henceforth word-action pattern) serves as a general heading for both chapters, but the echo strategy thereafter suggests that chs. 38 and 39 function as a diptych, two leaves of a single document.”⁵ More precisely, 38:1–4 and 39:1–2 are “halving” equivalents.

The integral unity of Ezekiel 38–39 and its tie to chapters 40–45 are demonstrated by emphasis on the number seven, the integer of fullness and completion. For examples consider (1) the recorded dates: the seventh month (45:25), the seventh day (45:20), seven days (43:25, 26; 44:26; 45:23, 25), seven months (39:12, 14), seven years (39:25); (2) specified objects: seven kinds of weapons (39:9–10), seven steps (40:22, 26); seven bulls (45:23), seven rams (45:23); (3) seven references to knowing God (38:16, 23; 39:6, 7, 22, 23, 28); (4) measures: seven cubits (41:3). Especially significant is 45:23. Instead of the graded series of whole burnt sacrifices that mark P’s Tabernacle (*Sukkot*, Num 29:12–34), Ezekiel ordains that all prescribed burnt offerings are seven in number: seven bulls and seven rams on the seven days of the seventh month (beginning on the fifteenth day, 45:23). Finally, the seven attacking nations—again the number symbolizing totality and completion—form a merism: Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, and Beth-Togarmah, which represent the northern extreme of the world known to Israel; Persia, Cush, and Put, the southern (and eastern) extreme, suggesting that the *whole world* is involved in this invasion.

A major question remains concerning Ezekiel’s theology. As a priest he is the scion of the Holiness School, which projects the following blessing for Israel: “I will grant peace in the land, so that you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will eliminate vicious beasts from the land, and *no sword shall traverse your land*” (Lev 26:6).⁶ This means that the enemy will be stopped at the border; God will not

5. Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, 424–25.

6. See Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2295–99.

EZEKIEL'S HOPE

permit a hostile force to penetrate his land. Why then were Gog and his fully armed cohorts permitted to enter? The question is especially acute because subsequent to their annihilation on the mountains of Israel (38:8; 39:4) the Israelites would have to expend much energy and time (at least seven months, 39:12) burying the strewn enemy corpses and purifying the land (39:16). In keeping with Lev 26:6,⁷ why would the enemy not be held at bay at the land's borders? As soon as Israel is resettled (miraculously) in its land (chs. 36–37), it can engage in learning the architecture and laws of the visionary sanctuary that YHWH has revealed to Ezekiel (chs. 40–46). Thereafter it can fertilize the barren parts of the land and reallocate it equally among the twelve tribes (chs. 47–48). In other words, according to the view of the redactor(s) of Leviticus (H_R), the Gog chapters would be entirely superfluous!

The answer lies in the explicit objective of the divine intervention in 38–39. Not only does it propose to rescue Israel from its avowed enemies, but also to enlarge and sanctify the name of YHWH among the nations (38:23). These nations have witnessed YHWH inviting the Babylonians (or lacking the ability to prevent the Babylonians) to enter the land, raze its temple, and exile its inhabitants (chs. 1–11). Now YHWH will again enter the land and destroy the very nations that have entered the land to plunder it (38:12). The divine principle of “measure for measure” is in operation. The nation(s) that entered the land to devastate it will now be devastated on Israel's mountains. Indeed, Ezekiel 38–39 is a quintessential element in the structure and plot of the story.

Alternatively, as suggested by Kaufmann, the plot of the Gog pericope is based on the tradition of Israel's crossing of the Red Sea (Exod 14:2–4, 8, 17–18).⁸ Israel lies helpless on unprotected banks/country, but when Egypt/Gog enters the sea/land, God intervenes and the enemy is annihilated.

There is yet another message devolving from the placement of chapters 38–39. Ezekiel is telling his progeny that Israel's settlement on its land cannot be secure unless the inimical nations that surround it are neutralized or destroyed, a lesson that informs international history to this very day.

7. Ibid., 2295–96.

8. Kaufmann, *Religion of Israel*, 446.

YHWH's Program for Gog's Attack against Israel in the Distant Future (38:1–13)

Preface and Frame 1: YHWH's Conscription of Gog (38:1–9)

TRANSLATION

Preface (38:1–2b)

1 The word of YHWH came to me: 2 Human, set your face against Gog of the land of Magog,¹ prince, chief of Meshech and Tubal.²

FRAME 1: YHWH's Conscription of Gog (38:2c–9)

2c Prophecy against him, 3 saying: Thus the Lord YHWH has said: Look, I am coming at you, O Gog, prince, chief of Meshech and Tubal. 4 I will turn you around³ and put hooks into your jaws; I will bring you forth, you and all your army, horsemen and charioteers,⁴ all handsomely outfitted,⁵ a vast assembly,⁶ armed with bucklers and shields, all of them wielding swords.⁷ 5 Persia, Cush,

1. Tg. and Vulg. follow MT, but LXX and Pesh. add the copula (as above), suggesting that Magog was treated as the name of a people; cf. Rashi. Magog occurs with an article only here (cf. 39:6; Gen 10:2; 1 Chr 1:5); [432, n. 29]; cf. Radak.

2. The Versions are inconsistent in their renderings of *nāšī' rōš mešek wētubāl*. LXX ρως treats *rōš* as a proper name. Tg. apparently follows MT's pointing as an extended construct chain with two genitives. Pesh. understands the first two terms as a coordinate pair. Vulg. *principem capitis* sees in *rōš* an intensification of the title *nāšī'*. Many delete *nāšī'* as a secondary interpretation of *rōš*, though the present construction recurs in verse 3 and 39:2 [432, n. 28]. For further discussion see the COMMENT.

3. The Polel of *šūb* recurs in 39:2 and 29:27 [436, n. 50]; “induce” (magically) cf. Hos 8:6; Menahem ben Simeon; Eliezer of Beaugency.

4. On the word pair, *sūsīm* and *pārāšīm*, see above on 26:7. Cf. also 23:6, 12, where *pārāšīm* is followed by *rōkēbē sūsīm* “riders of horses” [437, n. 52].

5. LXX ενδεδυμενους θωρακακ παντας, “dressed in breastplates,” and Pesh. *zyn'*, “weapon,” for *miklōl* render the military imagery more explicit [437, n. 53].

6. Cf. *qāhāl gādōl wēhayil rāb* in verse 15. *qāhāl rāb* also occurs in 17:17; 26:7; 32:3, 38 [437, n. 54].

7. Without a connective particle, *šinnā ūmāgēn tōpēšē hārābōt kullām* is cryptic and intrusive. Pesh. smooths the text, reading *bnzk' wbskn*, “with lances and shields,” and linking the following *klhwn* (MT

and Put joining them, all armed with shields and helmets. 6 Gomer and all its hordes,⁸ Beth-Togarmah⁹ from the distant¹⁰ north, and all its cohorts—many peoples with you.

7 Get ready, prepare yourselves!¹¹—you and the whole mob that has crowded¹² about you. You will become their¹³ guard.¹⁴ 8 Much later you will be summoned;¹⁵ in the distant future¹⁶ you will invade a land that has survived¹⁷ the sword, and [whose population] has been assembled¹⁸ from many peoples on the mountains of Israel, which had long been devastated. Now they [its inhabitants] have been freed from the peoples;¹⁹ they are all living in safety. 9 You will rise up²⁰ like a tempest advancing like the storm cloud that blankets the land—you and all your troops, and many peoples with you.²¹

COMMENT

1–2. The word-action pattern is followed by the direct address to the prophet as *ben-ādām*, “Human,” and an order to the prophet to orient himself toward Gog. This is

kullām) to verse 5. Tg. clarifies by inserting the particle *dmzyynyn*, “who are armed,” to go with the added preposition *b*. LXX appears to read *māgēn wəqōbā*, “hand shield and helmet,” while dropping *tōpšē* [437, n. 56]. Following Tg., read *bšinnā*. Add *b* to *šinnā* by haplography. Most commentators delete the whole line as a gloss.

8. *aggāpīm* is a genuinely Ezekelian word, occurring outside this context (cf. vv. 9, 22; 39:4) only in 12:14 and 17:21 [437, n. 58].

9. Beth-Togarmah. A city-state in NE Anatolia, Akkadian *Til-Garimmu*.

10. *yarkētē šāpōn*, “distant north.” Read with LXX and Pesh. *miyyarkētē*.

11. Note the assonance of *hikkōn wēhākēn lēkā*, a combination of Niphal and Hiphil imperatives of the same root [437, n. 60]; see Rashi.

12. *hanniqhālīm*, defines the collective *qāhāl*. Cf. GKC §145c. Num 10:7 and 20:10 contain similar constructions. The coordination of nominal and verbal forms of *qāhāl* recurs in verse 13 [437, n. 61].

13. MT *lahem*, “for them,” (also Tg. and Pesh.) is difficult, but is preferable to “for me,” reflected in LXX (cf. REB), on the principle of *lectio difficilior* [437, n.62].

14. *mišmār*, “guard.” “You will guard them” (Rashi), though Radak renders “they will guard you,” i.e., they will guide you on the right path. LXX renders “agent” (*mēšārēt*) of YHWH.

15. In military contexts, *pāqad* means “to summon, muster”; see 23:22; Isa 10:28 [437, n. 63].

16. Yet, judging from 39:8, the comeuppance to Gog is about to occur.

17. *mēšūbebet*, “survived,” is a Polel fem. participle of *šūb*. Cf. Holladay, *The Root šūb*, 106–7 [438, n. 64]. Alternatively, “spared by the sword,” Menahem ben Simeon.

18. Following Pesh. and Vulg., which smooth out MT by adding the copula before *mēqubbeset* (see Menahem). Elsewhere in Ezekiel the verb *qibbēs*, “gather,” is associated only with living objects: the house of Israel, 22:19–20; the entire people of Israel or portions thereof, 11:17; 20:34, 41; 28:25; 34:13; 36:24; 37:21; 39:27; Jerusalem lovers, 16:37; Egyptians, 29:13; animals, 29:5; 39:17 [438, n. 65]. The reader might note in verse 8b the sequence of *segolim* creating the rhymed verse of a song.

19. The fem. form, *wēhī* . . . *hūšāā* assumes the land as the subject, but the following *kullām*, “all of them,” has the people in mind [438, n. 67].

20. Arise, *wēālītā*, lit., “go up”; so too in verses 11 and 16. The literal meaning “ascend, go up” may be the best, since Gog and his hordes are located in the lowlands, and they are headed for the mountains of Israel (v. 8).

21. On MT *ōtāk* as a stylistic variant of *’ittāk*, see Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 114, n. 7.

the last of the six occurrences of the (hostile) orientation formula (cf. 6:2; 13:17; 21:7; 25:2; 28:21) [432].

Gog. Gyges, king of Lydia, is probably the historical person linked to the name Gog. Ashurbanipal (668–631 BCE) authorized the inclusion of his name in six inscriptions. Gyges' name also appears in a sixth-century ashlar inscription discovered at Bin Tepe (Akkadian, *gugu*) thought to be located in the heart of Lydia. Sometime between 668–665, Gyges of Lydia sought Assyrian military support against Cimmerian pressure. Other Anatolian states, including Tabal, joined the Assyrian camp. Ashurbanipal signed a nonaggression pact with the Cimmerians and in ca. 650 Gyges met a violent death at the hands of the Cimmerians.²² In the time of Gyges' great-grandson, Alyattes, a contemporary of Ezekiel, Lydia once again became the dominant power in western Anatolia. As pointed out by Zimmerli,²³ “Gog is introduced not as a ruler of a great empire but as a leader of a number of national groups,” a political-historical situation corresponding to the relation of Alyattes/Gyges. Possibly Gyges/Gugu may actually have been the throne name of the dynasty; Ezekiel may have known it not only as the name of a legendary ruler but also as the name of a living rule—Alyattes/Gyges of his time. Hence, the latter is called *nāšī'*, “chief” (below).

of the land of Magog (*ereš hammāgōg*). This name, which recurs in 39:6, as the name of a people (Rashi), appears the Hebrew Bible only in Gen 10:2 and 1 Chr 1:5, where Magog is named as the second of Japeth's seven sons. Magog as a personal name in LXX anticipates later writings in which he and Gog, are caught up in the final “end of days” battle (Rev 20:8; *Sib. Or.* 3:319–20, 512).²⁴ Some see *māt gūgī* “land of Gog” shortened to Gog as associated with the land of Lydia in western Anatolia.²⁵

chief of Meshech and Tubal (*rōš mešek wētubāl*). MT *nēšī' rōš* (followed by LXX) reads as a broken construct, “prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal,” whereby *nēšī'* is vocalized as the construct of *nāšī'*, and is so translated.²⁶ Alternatively, the construct can be retained: Gog's title is *gōg nēšī' hārōš*, “Gog the chief prince,” modeled after *šērāyā kōhēn hārōš* (Jer 52:24). Once a second construct is added *harōš* becomes *rōš*. Odell relates the expression to *nōšē' 'et-rōš*, lit., “head-counter” (Num 1:2, 44; 4:34, 46).²⁷ Even if one would change the verb *nōšē'* into the noun *nāšī'*, it is unlikely that an of-

22. For details, see “Gyges and Ashurbanipal,” M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, 65–85, and Block, *Ezekiel* 25–48, 731, n. 32.

23. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 2, 305.

24. Cf. Block, *Ezekiel* 25–48, 434, n. 35.

25. Josephus (*Ant.* 1.6.1§123) identified Magog with the Scythians: “Magog founded the Magogians, thus named after him, but who by the Greeks are called Scythians.” The name has no geographic or ethnographic analogies in ancient Near Eastern literature, though Albright, “Contributions to Biblical Archaeology,” 383, proposed a blend with Manda, an abbreviation of Umman Manda, the common Mesopotamian designation for “barbarian.”

26. The attempt of politicians and religionists to equate *rōš* with Russia is briefly described and debunked by Block, *Ezekiel* 25–48, 434–35.

27. Odell, “Defeat of Gog,” 168.

ficial who on rare occasions merely conducts a census might be delegated to command an international military coalition. Although Gog is less than a king, at least he is not a census taker. Gog's title remains a puzzle. Was he not a king? *Rōš*, "chief," is best perceived as a lower case noun, defining the preceding *nāsi*, "prince." The names Meshech and Tubal have turned up earlier in the commercial inventory of Tyre (27:13) and among the casualties in Sheol (32:26). Neo-Assyrian sources mention both Meshech (Musku/Mušku) and Tubal (Tabal). Meshech (Muski) was subject to King Mitas (the legendary Midas) during the reign of Sargon II. Tubal/Tabal, bounded on the west by Meshech, had no access to the sea. Gog (Lydia), further west, headed an alliance with Meshech on her east, and Tubal still further east of Meshech. Block [436] conjectures that these distant nations were mentioned because the fame of Gyges and Midas had spread as far as Babylon and the report of its mysterious people spoke of its wildness and brutality. My conjecture, on the other hand, proposes that these far off nations in all directions—north, south, and east—create a literary merism, indicating that Israel was invaded by all its surrounding nations.

2C–3. In previous oracles, YHWH had challenged Judah/Israel (5:8; 21:8 [Eng 3]), the false prophets (13:8), Pharaoh (29:3; 30:22), and Edom (35:3); this time the duel will be between YHWH himself and Gog and his confederates. The initial phrase, a call to battle, orders Gog into the fray (vv. 4–6), and details his required military strategy [438].

3b–6. *So I am coming at you (hinēni ʾēlākā = ʾalākā; cf. 8:5)*. According to verse 4b Gog's forces are well-equipped, clothed and armed defensively (buckler and shield, either carried or worn on the arm) and offensively (swords), with cavalry and horse-driven chariots. Gog is not alone. The forces that join Meshech and Tubal include the African nations Cush (Ethiopia) and Put (Libya) and Paras (Persia) to the east. But it is unlikely that African nations would join an Anatolian coalition. Additionally, the mention of Persia—a people hardly known in Ezekiel's time—suggests deleting this trio in verse 5 as a late gloss²⁸ [439]. However, as suggested earlier, these nations form an imaginary merism, and Persia, though not yet a kingdom, was a well known conglomerate of tribes.²⁹ Also, these nations may comprise a mercenary force, cf. 27:10; Jer 46:9.

Other allies, *Gomer* and *Beth-Togarmah* are identified in verse 6. Gomer is a brother of Meshech, Tubal, and Magog and father of Togarmah (Gen 10:2–3). Gomer, rendered Gimmeraia in Akkadian and Cimmerian in Greek, is known as a savage tribe occupying foggy territory north of the Black Sea [440]. According to Strabo (*Geography*, 1.61), King Midas took his life in despair over the loss of the Phrygian capital Gordion to the Cimmerians. The latter were finally defeated by the Assyrians,

28. E.g., Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 2, 306.

29. See also the pointed arguments of Odell, "Are you of whom I spoke," 103–6, but her arguments for an unknown Paras are unacceptable.