## Part Five: The Darkness Deepens But Light Breaks, Year Twelve (33:21–39:29)

At the beginning of Part Four and the beginning of Jerusalem’s blockade, Yahweh had declared that the city would indeed fall, that Ezekiel was to be restrained in mourning his wife, but that he would be free to break his silence when the news came that Jerusalem had been taken (24:1–27). The date at the beginning of Part Five marks the arrival of the news, and on the eve of that event Yahweh commissions Ezekiel to break silence.

The implication is not that the time for proclaiming good news has come. Indeed, the darkness deepens (33:21–33)—the darkness of the people’s waywardness and the darkness of the prophet’s confrontation. But then light begins to dawn, in the six messages that follow (cf. Häner, 469–83). The beginning of each is marked by the declaration “Yahweh’s message came to me” (except 37:1–14, which opens with the alternative formulation “Yahweh’s hand came on me”).

34:1–31 The shepherding rebuked and reconstituted

35:1–36:15 The land repossessed and renewed

36:16–38 The sacredness of Yahweh honored

37:1–14 The nation brought back to life

37:15–28 The two households made one for all time

38:1–39:29 The ambitious coalition crushed

The six messages cover six aspects of “Jacob’s restoration,” to use the phrase that recurs in the very last paragraph (39:25). They are not characterized simply by light. As the darkness in Parts One to Four has occasionally been qualified by light, so the light here is occasionally qualified by the darkness of waywardness and suffering. But the general ambience is encouraging rather than confrontational—or it confronts despair with promise rather than confronting optimism with threat. The six messages take up different issues but parallel one another. Whereas Part Four was marked by a series of dates, Part Five has no dates after its opening in 33:21. The next date, which opens Part Six in 40:1, is thirteen years later. The implication is that readers are invited to understand all six messages in the context of the years from 587 to 573, though the chapters have been seen as actually issuing from a series of recensions during the Babylonian, Persian, early Hellenistic, and Maccabean periods.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Like the sequences of messages in the rest of the scroll so far, they do constitute a compilation of messages that were originally delivered on different occasions, like a collection of a pastor’s sermons or a collection of a theologian’s essays, rather than a book planned as an argument or as the exposition of a thesis. They may be assembled in chronological order, and 34:1–31 would make sense soon after the fall of Jerusalem, though 35:1–36:15 might reflect the passage of time as Edomites increased their occupation of Judahite land. And they could have been arranged in a different order without affecting the significance of the whole.

## Darkness Deepens (33:21–33)

Outline

Part Five begins with a new start in the form of both a “then” (וַיְהׅי; cf. 1:1) and a date, which introduce a brief two-part narrative in 33:21–22. This narrative first recounts the arrival of someone from Jerusalem, then goes back to the previous night when Yahweh had come to Ezekiel and released him from the silence that had been imposed on him. It thus picks up from the beginning of Part Four (24:25–27). MT treats 33:21–22 as a complete unit, with a petuhah\* on either side, but such a brief narrative would be unique in Ezekiel. Elsewhere, such an narrative is the introduction to a message (see 3:22; 8:1; 14:1; 20:1), and this one likewise leads into the two-part message in 33:23–33. But Ezekiel has put things in a murky order, as narrators sometimes do, by first relating the key event of the survivor’s arrival, then going back to the previous night. If it was on the previous night that Yahweh’s hand came on him, then, it was on the previous night that he was permitted to be no longer silent. This would in turn imply that he received the message that follows then, though it might have been next morning that he delivered it.

What follows is really two messages, but the second has no separate introduction. Ezekiel presents them as two parts of one message. The first part (33:23–29) relates to the future of the survivors in Jerusalem and the future of the land of Israel. It is a version of a classic confrontational message that divides into an accusation (33:23–26) and a threat (33:27–29). Such messages often incorporate a “therefore” in between the two parts, and this message has a “therefore,” but it appears in an anticipatory position, in 33:25, as Ezekiel’s “therefore” often does (e.g., 5:7, 11; 11:16; 13:8, 10). Once again Ezekiel’s message challenges the Jerusalemites about the expectations they had for the future that were based on the promises of prophets other than Jeremiah, confronts them about their lifestyle that ignores the Torah, and warns them that things are going to get worse before they get better (if they ever do). But maybe, maybe, the fall of Jerusalem might shake them to their senses.

The second part of the message (33:30–33) relates to the Kebarites’ attitude to Ezekiel. They have long been declining to take him seriously, and “so long as Jerusalem survived, Ezekiel’s status as Yahweh’s authentic prophet remained contestable; and his oracles about its demise could be ignored, refuted, or rationalized” (Darr, on 33:21–22). But tomorrow or today (according to when it was that Yahweh freed Ezekiel to utter this message) the Kebarites are going to hear that the catastrophe has happened. And “when it comes about (as there, it is coming about), they will acknowledge that a prophet, he has been among them” (33:33).

The nature of this message raises another chronological question and deepens the chronological murk in this passage a whole. In the message in 33:23–33, the fall of Jerusalem is still future. In the first part, the point is most clear in the declaration that “the pride of its strength will cease” (33:28), which repeats the threat from the beginning of the blockade (24:21). In the second part, it is indicated by the reference to “when it comes about—there, it is coming about” (33:33), which repeats the earlier threat that “a dire event, there, it is coming, an end is coming (7:5–6). These warnings in the message match their critiques (33:25–26, 30–32), which reformulate the critiques Ezekiel has been issuing for half a decade. In other words, there is nothing new in the two messages in 33:23–33, and nothing that suggests a context in the arrival of the terrible news from Jerusalem.

Now Parts One, Two, and Three of the scroll have given indications that they interweave chronological arrangement and dramatic arrangement, and Part Four has been more explicit about this. Part Five is beginning the same way. Ezekiel has set in the context of Parts One to Four some messages that belong chronologically after 587, and he here places immediately after the fall of the city two messages that chronologically belong earlier. As dramatically, rhetorically, and theologically, readers will benefit from taking post-587 messages into account when they are reading the pre-587 part of the scroll, they will benefit from one further reminder (or a double further reminder) of the gist of the pre-587 messages when they think about the fall of Jerusalem and about what is to happen now. To put it another way, Part Four of the scroll followed one dramatic order by announcing that the fall was imminent and then keeping readers in suspense, and now Part Five follows another dramatic order and keeps readers in another suspense.

In the drama, Yahweh’s hand coming on Ezekiel issues in the double message of which neither part addresses the Kebarites. The first part (33:23–29), about the Jerusalemites, is rhetorically designed for them to hear. The second part (33:30–33) is about the Kebarites but rhetorically addresses Ezekiel himself. In the drama, however, Ezekiel’s breaking his silence means he tells the Kebarites about both, because both are relevant to them. Both end with the aim that “they will acknowledge…,” though in each case it is a distinctive version of that aim. Otherwise, neither half says anything new. They do not imply that Yahweh has something different to say now that the fall of Jerusalem has happened. While the city’s fall is an event of great moment, it is not a moment when darkness gives way to light, as is evident from Jeremiah, from Lamentations, and from 2 Kings, and is evident here from Ezekiel. It does not mean that Ezekiel can now move from confrontational messages to encouraging ones. Both these messages are discouraging. As Part Five unfolds further, Yahweh will have new and promising things to say. But not yet. The fall of Jerusalem changes nothing, except that the Jerusalemites and Kebarites *might* now start taking some notice of what Yahweh and Ezekiel have been saying for half a decade.

Translation

21Now in the twelfth year, in the tenth [month], on the fifth [day] of the month of our exile, a survivor[[2]](#footnote-2) came to me from Jerusalem saying, “The city has been struck down.” 22Yahweh’s hand had come upon me the evening before the survivor came and he opened my mouth, before he came to me in the morning. So my mouth opened and I was no longer silent.

23Yahweh’s message came to me: 24My man, these people living in the ruins on Israel’s land are saying: “Abraham was one person and he entered into possession of the country. We being many, the country is given to us as a possession.”

25Therefore say to them, The Lord Yahweh has said this. When you eat over the blood, raise your eyes to your lumps, and pour out blood, you will enter into possession of the country! 26You have stood on your sword. You have committed outrage. You have individually defiled his neighbor’s wife. And you will enter into possession of the country!

27You will say this to them. The Lord Yahweh has said this. I am alive, if [this] isn’t the case:[[3]](#footnote-3) as people in the ruins will fall by the sword, and anyone on the face of the open country I am giving to the animals to eat, and people in the strongholds and in the caves will die by epidemic, 28I will make the country a desolation, something desolate. The pride of its strength will cease. Israel’s mountains will be desolate, without anyone passing through. 29And people will acknowledge that I am Yahweh, when I make the country a desolation, something desolate, because of all their outrages, which they have committed.

30And you, my man: the members of your people speak together about you by the walls and by the doorways of houses, and one speaks to another, an individual to his brother: “Come, will you, and listen to what is the message that issues from Yahweh,” 31and they come to you as a people comes, and sit in front of you as my people, and listen to your messages. But in that they don’t act on them, because they are acting on the desires in their mouth as their mind is going after their gain, 32there you are to them like a desirable song, nice of voice, doing well at playing. So they listen to your messages, but none of them are acting on them. 33But when it comes about (there, it is coming about), they will acknowledge that a prophet, he has been among them.

Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 33:22, 24, 26, 29, and 33.

**33:21** For “twelfth, LXXL has “eleventh,” corresponding to 2 Kgs 25:2.

**33:25–27** LXX lacks from “the Lord Yahweh has said” to “say this to them,” by homoioteleuton.\*

Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**33:21–22** The city fell in the twelfth year of the Kebarites’ exile, the eleventh full year of Zedekiah’s reign (see 2 Kgs 25:1–2), late 587. The catastrophe has been presupposed at various points in Part Four of the scroll, and six months have now passed since it happened, which is not much longer than one might expect under normal circumstances for a journey from Jerusalem to Babylon (Ezra 7:9). Here the focus lies not on the event itself but on the arrival of the news in Kebar and on the messages that link with the news. In the drama, Ezekiel received the messages on the eve before the news arrived and related them before its arrival, either that evening or next morning.

Ezekiel does not say that Yahweh had revealed to him what had happened, only that he had had another experience like the one related in 1:3; 3:22; and 8:1. The middle of those three occasions led into Yahweh’s requiring him to be silent (3:26), apparently as an act of judgment on his people. Yahweh did not wish to speak to them, because they did not wish to listen. Ezekiel does not indicate how long that dumbness lasted, but he gives the impression of having been speaking recurrently to deliver messages through the five years. Perhaps he just had to stay dumb for a while at the beginning, or perhaps he could speak only when Yahweh gave him something to say, or perhaps he could speak something that claimed to be Yahweh’s message only when Yahweh gave him something to say. When his wife died a couple of years previously, he was not to howl but only to “sigh, be quiet” (24:17), and then Yahweh told him that he would “not be silent anymore” when a survivor came with the news of the city’s fall (24:27).

Now that has happened. Presumably Babylonia would not be the destination of the average Jerusalemite fugitive of a Babylonian siege, but a lone fugitive might come to Kebar because his family were there, or this individual might be one of the people the Babylonians transported who found his way to Kebar. Actually, the city has not “fallen.” It has been “struck down.” That verb (נׇכָה hophal) usually applies to people, and then usually denotes that they are killed. The city has not even merely be “taken.” It has been devastated. But the reference to a “survivor” makes things less bleak (see, e.g., 6:8–9; 14:21–23). His arrival confirms both that the disaster has happened and that Yahweh has not eliminated the entire people.

**33:23–24** The first part of the message that Ezekiel reports relates to people in general who are “living in the ruins on Israel’s land,” its soil (אֲדָמָה). While the description could have denoted people in Jerusalem struggling for life after the city’s fall, it will eventually become more explicit that it refers to the general situation in Judah that has obtained for the past couple of years. Either way, these are people who know their story, trust in Yahweh’s promises, and believe that things will turn out okay as their prophets have been encouraging them to believe in light of what Yahweh has been to them in the past. Yahweh had enabled them to “possess” the land (יָרַשׁ), as Deuteronomy and Joshua emphasize. The land will surely be “given” to them again, by God’s grace. More literally it “is given.” The people can use an anticipatory or performative\* *qatal*,\* as Ezekiel can. Okay, some people were transported in 597, some people are dying in the siege, some people are fleeing, and more people are about to be transported, but “Abraham was [only] one person” and “we” are “many.” There is an ironic and dramatic contrast between the one survivor and the self-professed many and between the harsh reality of the situation now and the Illusionary self-reassurance (Sedlmeier, 151) that has been characterizing people.

**33:25–26** Yahweh’s response to that unrealistic hopefulness is the twofold one that he has been articulating for half a decade. It starts with a worrying “therefore.” First, here is a sample of some aspects of your lifestyle. Ezekiel names six actions that one could see in three pairs. You “eat over the blood,” which is not the same as eating the blood (eating meat without draining the blood) but denotes some divinatory practice, forbidden in Lev 19:26 (Qimhi, in MG). This practice forms a pair with the familiar charge that you “raise your eyes to your lumps.” The second pair comprises pouring out blood, that is, shedding blood, and standing on one’s sword, apparently a more forceful version of the same thing or a more forceful way of describing the same thing. People live by the sword. It is a hyperbolic\* version of the recurrent charge that the community bases itself on violence. The third pair comprises the further familiar generalization that people commit “outrages,” of which having an affair is one example because of its defiling implications (see 18:6, 11, 15; 22:11). Both in the middle and at the end of the six, Yahweh includes an incredulous exclamation relating to their expectation about entering into “possession” of Abraham’s country. Really?!

**33:27 - 29** Yahweh’s response recalls the form it took in 5:17: sword, animals, epidemic. It compares even more closely with 14:21, which also included famine. And it adds “a desolation and something desolate,” as in 6:14, where famine also featured, along with outrages, lumps, sword, and epidemic in the context (6:11–14). It includes a positive description of the temple, “the pride of [the country’s] strength,” an object of great pride to a country that knew it was a key to its strength (see 7:20, 24). But it will cease to be anything of the kind, as Yahweh threatened earlier (24:21). At the point when Yahweh originally gave this message the temple was evidently still standing in its majesty, but now it is not. Whereas the Jerusalemites could previously say they were numerous, Yahweh warned that the highland will be empty when Nebuchadrezzar has finished with them. Located here, Ezekiel’s critique and warning imply that the point at which Jerusalem falls is not one when people can start looking forward to restoration but one at which they need to think at last about heeding Yahweh’s critique and threats.

**33:30–33** The same considerations emerge from the message about the Kebarites, which likewise reprises descriptions of their behavior over five years. They have pretended to be open to what Yahweh might have to say to them and have long been inclined to come and ask Ezekiel questions, but with no real intention of listening to the answers (8:1; 14:1; 20:1). They have long been inclined to see Ezekiel as a more a joke than a mentor (20:49 [21:5]), or as a poet who sings enjoyable songs. God’s word is consumer item (Sedlmeier, 154). “Desire” (עֲגָבׅים) is almost exclusively an Ezekiel word (see 23:5), having the ambiguity of the more familiar אַהֲבׇה, “love,” which can suggest political or business commitments. And the Kebarites are less interested in spirituality or ethics than in “gain” (בֶּצַע; “dishonest gain” and “covetousness” are traditional translations). They want to do well politically and financially, as perhaps they once did in Jerusalem. In due course many Judahites in Babylonia were not enthusiastic about returning to Judah, and there may be a hint here of one thing that would lie behind this aversion. The Kebarites were not having a hard time in Babylonia. No doubt they care about Jerusalem and its future, and the news of Jerusalem’s fall is therefore going to be devastating. But it will also force them to take a different attitude to Yahweh and to Ezekiel. Yes, “a dire event, there, it is coming, an end is coming” (7:5–6), “and they will acknowledge that I am the Lord Yahweh” (24:24). No, there is no new promise here. Ezek 33 is “the last gasp of Ezekiel’s pre-fall theology” (Greenberg, 2:692).

Biblical Theology Comments

Abraham is a key figure in the Scriptures, dominating Genesis and beginning the New Testament story. For Jews or Gentiles, Abraham is our ancestor. And God is mindful of his covenant with Abraham (Lev 26:42). He promised to give the country of Canaan to him and his descendants. He promised that this commitment would remain more important than these descendants’ stubbornness. Some while after the fall of Jerusalem, he urged the Judahites to remember that they were the offspring of this friend of his (Isa 41:8), and that they could consider how he once summoned Abraham and Sarah on their own and made them a great people (Isa 51:2). He was a key figure for Judahites during the exile.[[4]](#footnote-4) And Jesus comes because God made a promise to Abraham (Luke 1:73). The significance of Abraham does not primarily lie in his being an example of faith. It lies in his being an embodiment of God’s grace. At least the Jerusalemites knew that.

Application and Devotional Implications

Abraham is also a key temptation in the Scriptures. For all his importance, his descendants cannot assume they are secure because of their relationship to him. It depends on how they look to God rather than to other resources or to views of God that they have devised, on how they resist violence, and on how they conduct themselves sexually. Ezekiel’s warning in 33:23–29 applies to all his descendants (Luke 3:8). Ezekiel’s community resemble people going to great services in big churches to listen to impressive choirs and hear sharp preachers and come home feeling edified, but continuing to put too much focus in their lives on doing well financially.

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## The Shepherding Rebuked and Reconstituted (34:1–31)

Outline

A survivor’s bringing the news from Jerusalem (33:21–22) mitigated the catastrophic nature of the news. But the message Ezekiel associated with the arrival of the news (33:23–33) did nothing to offer encouragement for the future. Only now does encouragement come, though it is still equivocal.

Ezekiel previously delivered a long parable\* or allegory\* about a girl (Ezek 16), another about two daughters (Ezek 23), a shorter one about lions (Ezek 19), and another about cooking, which Yahweh actually called a parable or allegory, a מׇשׇׁל (Ezek 24) Here is another allegory (Häner, 391), about shepherding. It compares with Ezek 16 and 23 in the involved way it works with its image. It takes it in a variety of different directions rather than aiming to formulate a single consistent allegorical picture. It aims rather to explore the allegorical potential of the image. Like some other allegories or parables, it moves in a laidback way between allegorical and literal, so that while working with the image of shepherd and flock it also speaks in terms of plunder, peoples, countries, land, and settlements, and moves grammatically between feminine gender for the flock and masculine for the people the sheep stand for. “The entire face of the country” (הׇאׇרֶץ) could make people think of “the entire face of the earth,” and “cloud and gloom” could suggest the accompaniments of Yahweh’s day. The allegorical is more prominent in the earlier part of the chapter, the literal more prominent in the last part. The allegory’s theme is the one explored more briefly and without promise in Ezek 19: the question of the human “princes” in Israel, of how they exercise their sovereignty and what Yahweh intends to do about their failures. It compares with the other long allegories in Ezek 16 and 23 in combining confrontation and promise, though its setting in the scroll and presumably in chronology means it puts more emphasis on promise than they do.

The chapter unfolds:

Introduction (34:1–2bα)

A critique to the shepherds (34:2bβ–6)

A threat to the shepherds: “therefore” (34:7–10)

(listen, 34:7; an affirmation, 34:8; listen, 34:9; Yahweh has said, 34:10)

A declaration of intent about the scattered flock (34:11–16)

(Yahweh has said, 34:11; an affirmation, 34:15)

A critique to the sheep (34:17–19)

 (Yahweh has said, 34:17)

A threat to the sheep: “therefore” (34:20–22)

 (Yahweh has said, 34:20)

A declaration of intent about a shepherd, David (34:23–24)

 (I Yahweh have spoken, 34:24)

A declaration of intent about a covenant of well-being (34:25–30)

(they will acknowledge, 34:27, 30; an affirmation, 34:30)

A summary reassurance and commitment (34:31)

(an affirmation, 34:31)

As with earlier allegories, the diversity in the spelling out of the allegory’s potential has stimulated suggestions about a redactional process lying behind the chapter as we have it. So the message critiquing the shepherds (34:1–10) might have issued in a later promise to rescue the sheep (34:11–16a), which might have led to the later message confronting the sheep (34:16b–22), which might have given rise to the promise about a returning David (34:23–24), which might have given way to the promise of a covenant bringing a renewal of nature (34:25–30), which might have suggested a reformulation of the covenant-style description of the relationship of Yahweh and Israel (34:31). Alternatively, one person might have explored the diverse potential of the allegory and taken it on different directions, and done so all in one go.

The earlier part of the chapter has detailed points of connection with Jer 23:1–8,[[5]](#footnote-5) and the later part with Lev 26, Ezekiel’s favorite chapter in the Torah.[[6]](#footnote-6) While Ezekiel could have been directly familiar with Jeremiah’s messages before 597, as he elsewhere shows acquaintance with Zephaniah, Jer 23:1–8 with its apparent snide reference to Zedekiah looks like material from after 597 that must have reached Kebar through oral reports or through Jeremiah’s sending written versions. It is also an open question whether Ezekiel would have had access to a written version of Leviticus.[[7]](#footnote-7) His overlaps with both Jeremiah and Leviticus do indicate that his messages reflect an internalized acquaintance with material that he has assimilated and is on that basis in a position to utilize.

I lay out here sequentially the material in Jer 23:1–8 that has parallels in Ezek 34, and the equivalent phrases in Ezek 34.

Jer 23:1–8 Ezek 34

1Oh, shepherds causing to disappear Oh, shepherds… disappearing

and scattering the flock of my shepherding scattered… the flock of my shepherding

(an affirmation of Yahweh)! An affirmation of the Lord Yahweh

2Therefore Yahweh, Israel’s God, has said this Therefore Yahweh … has said this

against the shepherds who shepherd my people: against the shepherds… my people

You are the ones who scattered my flock; scattered… my flock

you made them go astray.… going astray

3I myself will collect the remainder of my flock I myself… will collect

from all the countries where I made them go astray. from all the countries… go astray

I will bring them back to their grazing, brought back… grazing

and they will be fruitful and increase. give their fruit

4I will set up over them shepherds, I will set up over them one shepherd

and they will shepherd them… and he will shepherd them

5I will set up for David a faithful shoot.… my servant David

he will exercise faithful authority in the countryI will shepherd it with authority

6In his days Judah will find deliverance; I will deliver my flock

Israel–it will dwell in confidence.… they will live in confidence

8People will live on their soil. people will be on their soil in confidence

While stories in Jer 29 and 51 tell of occasions when Jeremiah communicated with Babylon, we do not know how extensive such communication would be and how familiar the Kebarites would be with messages that Jeremiah had been giving in Jerusalem since they left. The drift of Ezekiel’s message in this chapter is similar to that in Jer 23:1–8. He is declaring in Yahweh’s name that the Jeremiah message needs to have the attention of the Kebarites, though we also do not know whether they would have been aware that it had this background or what difference this would have made to their willingness to listen to it. The nearest there is to a difference from Jer 23:1–8 relates to David, and takes a paradoxical form. Ezekiel has less to say about David, but his declaration about David in 34:23–24 is remarkable and unique.

I also lay out here sequentially the material in Lev 26 with parallels in Ezek 34, and the equivalent phrases in Ezek 34.

Lev 26 Ezek 34

4I will give your rains in their season I will cause the rain to go down in its season

and the country will give its produce the country will give its produce

and the trees of the wild will give their fruit.… and the trees of the wild will give their fruit

5You will live in confidence. You will live in confidence

6I will give well-being in the country… I will solemnize a covenant of well-being for you

with no one troubling. with no one troubling

I will make dire animals cease from the country.… I will make dire animals cease from the country

9I will set up my covenant with you.… I will solemnize a covenant of well-being for you

12I will be God for you I am Yahweh their God…

and you will be a people for me. and they are a people for me

13I broke the bars of your yoke when I break the bars of their yoke

Ezekiel is declaring that Yahweh will fulfill his undertakings in the Torah, and whereas Leviticus begins with Yahweh’s expectations and comes later to the covenant, Ezekiel reverses this order. He of course expects a commitment to the Torah, but his starting point puts the emphasis on the generosity of Yahweh’s promises. Further, in Ezekiel Yahweh promises not a covenant *with* them but a covenant *for* them, and undertakes to “solemnize” (literally, “cut”) it, which more sharply suggests Yahweh’s making a commitment.

Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, prophesy against Israel’s shepherds. Prophesy and say to them,

To the shepherds. The Lord Yahweh has said this. Hey,[[8]](#footnote-8) shepherds of Israel, who have been shepherding themselves, when it’s the flock that the shepherds shepherd, isn’t it.

3Whereas you eat the fat

and put on the wool,

Whereas you sacrifice[[9]](#footnote-9) the fatling,

the flock you do not shepherd.

4The ones that become sick you have not made strong,

the one that is sick[[10]](#footnote-10) you have not healed.

The one that is injured you have not bound up,

and the one that goes astray you have not brought back.

The one that disappears you have not looked for,

but with strength you have controlled them, with harshness.

5They have scattered for lack of a shepherd,

and become food for every animal of the open country.

As they scattered, 6my flock would stray

through all the mountains and on every high hill.

On the entire face of the country

my flock were scattered.

There has been no one looking,

and no one searching.

7Therefore, shepherds, listen to Yahweh’s message. 8I am alive (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), if not:[[11]](#footnote-11) since my flock has become loot, and my flock has become food for every animal of the open country through the lack of a shepherd, and my shepherds haven’t looked for my flock, and the shepherds have shepherded themselves and my flock they have not shepherded… 9therefore, shepherds, listen to Yahweh’s message. 10The Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, regarding the shepherds. I will look for my flock from their hand and make them cease from shepherding a flock. The shepherds will no longer shepherd themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouth. They will not be food for them.

11Because the Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I myself. I will look for my flock and inquire into them.[[12]](#footnote-12) 12Like a shepherd’s inquiring into his herd on a day when he’s in the middle of his flock, [as] ones that have got separated,[[13]](#footnote-13) so I will inquire into my flock and rescue them from all the places where they were scattered, on a day of cloud and gloom.

13I will get them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries,

and enable them to come to their land.

I will shepherd them at the mountains of Israel,

in the ravines, and in all the settlements in the country.

14In good shepherding I will shepherd them,

and in the mountains of Israel’s highland their grazing will be.

There they will lie down in good grazing,

and on lush shepherding they will shepherd[[14]](#footnote-14)

at the mountains of Israel.

15I myself will shepherd my flock,

and I myself will lie them down (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

16The one that disappears I will look for,

and the one that goes astray I will bring back.

The one that is injured I will bind up,

and the one that is sick I will make strong.

But the lush one and the strong one I will wipe out—

I will shepherd it[[15]](#footnote-15) with authority.

17So you, my flock, the Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, exercising authority between animal and animal.[[16]](#footnote-16) To rams and to he-goats: 18is it too little for you [that] you shepherd on the good shepherding, so the remainder of your pasturage you trample with your feet, and [that] you drink the filtrate of water, so what remains you foul with your feet, 19and on the trampling of your feet my flock shepherds and the fouling of your feet it drnks?

20Therefore, the Lord Yahweh has said this to them. Here am I myself. I will exercise authority between fat animal and thin animal. 21Since with side and with shoulder you push and with your horns you butt all the ones who have become sick, until you have scattered them far and wide, 22I will deliver my flock and they will no longer become loot. I will exercise authority between animal and animal. 23I will set up over them one shepherd and he will shepherd them, my servant David. He is the one who will shepherd them. He will be a shepherd for them, 24and I, Yahweh, I will be God for them, with my servant David prince among them—I Yahweh have spoken.

25And I will solemnize for them a covenant of well-being, and make dire animals cease from the country. They will live in the wilderness in confidence and sleep in the woods. 26I will make them and the areas around my hill a blessing,[[17]](#footnote-17) and I will make the rain fall in its season. As there will be blessing rains, 27the trees of the open country will give their fruit. As the country will give its produce, people will be on their soil in confidence.[[18]](#footnote-18) And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh, when I break the bars of their yoke and rescue them from the hand of the people who make them serve them. 28They will no longer be loot for the nations. The animals of the country, they will not consume them. They will live in confidence with no one troubling. 29I will set up for them a planting with a name, they will no longer be being carried off[[19]](#footnote-19) by famine in the country, and they will no longer carry the nations’ shaming. 30And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh their God with them and they are my people, Israel’s household (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

31So you are my flock,

the flock of my shepherding.

You are human,

I am your God

(an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 34:8, 10, 19, and 31.

**34:3** For הַחֵלֶב, “the fat,” LXX, Vg. “the milk” imply הֶחׇלׇב.

**34:5** LXX, Vg. have an additional “my sheep” as the subject of the first verb.

LXX lacks the last verb.

**34:8** LXX differs in detail from MT.[[20]](#footnote-20)

**34:14** LXX lacks “in good shepherding.”

**34:15** After “lie them down,” LXX has “and they will know that I am the Lord.”

**34:16** LXX lacks “the lush one and.”

Then for אַשְׁמׅיד, “I will wipe out,” LXX, Vg. “I will watch” implies אֶשְׁמֹר.

As a whole 34:16b LXX and Vg. thus have a markedly different cast from MT.

**34:21** LXX translates the last part of the verse loosely.

**34:23** For אֶחׇד, “one,” LXX “another” implies אַחֵר.

LXX lacks “and he is the one who will shepherd them.”

**34:25** For וְכׇרַתּׅי לׇהֶם, “I will solemnize for them,” LXX has “I will make for David.”

LXX lacks “in confidence.”

**34:26** LXX has a shorter version of this verse, with less repetition.

**34:29** For לְשֵׁם, “with a name,” LXX “of peace” implies שׇׁלֹם, corresponding to 34:25 (*HUB*).

**34:30** LXX lacks “with them.”

**34:31** LXX lacks “human.”

Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**34:1 - 2a** The shepherding image recurs in the Prophets, especially in Jeremiah in passages such as 23:1–4. Only in this chapter and in 37:24 does Ezekiel use it. Shepherds controlled the life of their sheep and saw that they had the wherewithal for life, pasturage, water, and protection, while also being concerned about their economic interest in the flock.[[21]](#footnote-21) Outside of towns, farming and shepherding would be the two main occupations, and shepherding would be a useful metaphor for leadership because its object was animate beings rather than crops. As a metaphor, in the First Testament and elsewhere shepherds usually denotes kings. Though it might occasionally denote leaders more generally, it did not suggest “pastors.” Hammurabi speaks of himself:

Anum and Enlil named me

to promote the welfare of the people,

me, Hammurabi, the devout, god-fearing prince,

to cause justice to prevail in the land,

that the strong might not oppress the weak,

to rise like the sun over the black-headed (people),

and to light up the land.

Hammurabi, the shepherd, called by Enlil, am I;…

who made riches abound for Anum and Inanna;

the shelter of the land, who collected the scattered people of Isin.

(*ANET*, 164)[[22]](#footnote-22)

Like 33:23–33, the indictment in Ezek 34 addresses how things have been through Ezekiel’s lifetime, and could have had in mind all the “shepherds” since Josiah (Allen, 2:161), all of whom Ezekiel and most of his contemporaries would have known. But 34:1–31 pictures the Israelites as widely scattered and implies that the great calamity of 587 has happened. If Ezekiel has specific “shepherds” in mind, then, they are more likely the two deposed kings who both ended up in Babylonia, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah (Greenberg, 2:694). People might soon also think of Gedaliah (Sweeney, 172–73).

**34:2b–3** Wherein lies the shepherds self-shepherding? Jer 22:15–17 suggests more literally the two directions wherein lies their failure (Allen, 2:161). On one hand, they build themselves nice homes at the expense of ordinary people, in the sense that it involves using their unpaid conscript labor, and directly or indirectly financing this aspect of the kings’ fine lifestyle through the taxes required of their people. And on the other, they fail to fulfil the key obligation of an administration that was recognized (at least in theory) as much by a foreign king such as Hammurabi as by an Israelite king, the care and protection of the powerless and needy (see especially Psa 72).

One could hardly suggest that “shepherds” should not be feeding off the flock at all, and the stress here lies more on their failure than on their self-indulgence. But Ezekiel does start with their self-indulgence. They eat the fat (חֵלֶב), the most succulent part of the animal, which almost invariably denotes parts of the animal that were offered to Yahweh (e.g., 44:7, 15). They keep themselves warm with wool in the Jerusalem winter. And they enjoy excellent lamb barbecue: but Ezekiel uses the verb for sacrificing a sheep rather than the ordinary word for slaughtering it for a feast, which joins the other verbs in suggesting something that is at least self-indulgent and perhaps ungodly. So the way the shepherds eat off the sheep raises some questions. But Ezekiel’s emphasis lies on the last colon. They engage in self-shepherding, but not in flock-shepherding.

**34:4** Ezekiel spells out this failure. There are needs that apply to particular sheep: they get sick or hurt, or they stray. The shepherd’s job is to tend to such needs, and these shepherds have not done so. More generally, they have ill-treated the sheep, perhaps in driving them harshly to the shearers, or castrating them, or separating mothers and young. Interpreted, the allegory might denote failing to relieve the affliction that Psa 72 describes, and engaging in the kind of tough expectations that Rehoboam imposed on his people (1 Kgs 12). With terrible irony, “harshness” (פֶּרֶךְ) was the way the Egyptians treated the Israelites, from which Yahweh rescued them. It was thus no way an Israelite boss should treat fellow-Israelites (Exod 1:13–14; Lev 25:43, 46, 53—these are the only other occurrences of the word).

**34:5–6** Even more broadly, the entire flock might scatter because it had no shepherd. A shepherd would hardly want to lose his flock, so the literal may poke through the allegory here. The Israelite flock has been scattering for over a century, from Ephraim (which Ezekiel will later indicate that he cares about) and more recently from Judah, in 597 and now in 587. The implication of the critique is that the shepherds, the Ephraimite and Judahite kings, are responsible for the scattering of the flock in Assyria, Babylonia, and elsewhere. By the entirety of הׇאׇרֶץ, the allegory might have in mind “the country,” the mountains and hills of Israel, but the people’s literal experience would cover the entirety of הׇאׇרֶץ in the sense of “the world.” As sheep would be victims of the animals of the wild, the people have been plunder for the nations (34:7, 22, 28).

**7–10** There isn’t a literal equivalent to the shepherds searching for the flock, but the shepherds shepherding themselves, failing to shepherd the flock, and being responsible for the flock’s scattering, is enough to make Yahweh resolve to terminate their shepherding. The resolution overlaps with that implied by the requiem in Ezek 19, but it looks more final. Ezek 19 pretended to lament the sequence of kings comprising Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, but didn’t quite say that the dynasty was over. Here Yahweh more or less says that it is. Yahweh is going to take his flock from these shepherds’ hand. They will no longer be shepherding themselves or shepherding a flock. He did as he resolved. No one from this dynasty would ever again reign over Judah.

**34:11** Instead**,** Yahweh intends to take the shepherding into his own hands. He picks up the first verb used to describe the shepherds’ failure in 34:6, “look for” (דׇּרַשׁ), and almost picks up the second verb, “search for” (בׇּקַשׁ piel), but introduces some variation in using the similar verb “inquire after” (בׇּקַר piel). This rare verb suggests investigating the state of something with the implication that what you find may be objectionable or worrying (Lev 27:33 is a striking occurrence in this connection). In the present context, the worrying questions about the flock will be the matters the shepherds didn’t care about such as sickness or injury (34:4). Such an inquiry could lead to the conclusion that Yahweh wouldn’t find the sheep acceptable for sacrifice. That possibility could be in the back of a priest’s mind, though if there is a hint of it, Yahweh is not thinking in those terms. Nevertheless, critiques and warnings that will follow in 34:16–22 make it pointed that the picture of “a shepherd’s inquiring into his herd” (34:12) is a vital one in the New Year and Day of Atonement liturgies in the synagogue as an aspect of *Unetanneh* *toqep*, “Let us tell of the power” (Ganzel 2014, 1096).

**34:12** The other problem with the flock that the shepherds ignored was the sheep’s straying, disappearing, and scattering (34:4–6). Here Ezekiel again varies things, using an even rarer expression for scattering (פׇּרַשׁ niphal occurs only here) to describe the sheep as having become “separated.” His being “in the middle of his flock” means they can’t be too scattered for him, and also means he is again in a position to “inquire into” them and “rescue them” from anywhere you care to name. The odd reference to “a day” when he is in the middle of his flock gets explained as “a day of cloud and darkness,” which suggests Yahweh’s day (cf. 30:3; Joel 2:2; Zeph 1:15). The catastrophe and scattering of 587 was Yahweh’s day, but Yahweh’s day is not the end of Yahweh’s involvement with his people as their shepherd.

**34:13–16a** So the shepherd will collect the flock and take them back to their pasturage in its richness. Ezekiel goes to some length to describe how fantastic it will be: the goats on the mountains, the sheep and the ewes in the valleys, they will all have pasture by day and a place to lie down at night (Qimhi, in MG). In due course readers will discover what the allegory refers to (see 34:25–29). Already here, however, the sheep’s pasturing among all the “settlements” (מוֹשׇׁב) in the land also suggests the literal reality of the scattered people returning to their own villages. Yahweh picks up reference to the responsibilities the shepherds had neglected and promises explicitly that he will fulfill these responsibilities, detailing them in 34:16a in the reverse of the order in 34:4.

**34:16b** A shock follows. Whereas Ezekiel has so far made a distinction only between shepherds and flock and thus between kings and people, here he makes a distinction within the flock and thus among the people. “Lush” and “strong” suggest another formulation for a categorization Ezekiel has been working with. Within Judah, there are people who are “lush” (שׇׁמֵן) in the sense of rich like oil (שֶׁמֶן) and rich like the pasturage Yahweh promises (34:14). They will be financially rich, too. Kings are not the only ones who live plush lives off the back of ordinary people, as Isa 5:8–23 notes. Judah also includes powerless people who need to be strengthened, and the kings are also not the only people who can prove too strong for ordinary powerless and needy people (Psa 35:10). So there is more than one kind of sheep within the flock, and Yahweh also recognizes the need to take action about that. In 587 a lot of deserved wiping out (שׇׁמַד hiphil) has happened (Amos 9:8 uses the verb), but the sheep would be unwise to assume that no more will ever be needed. No, Yahweh will shepherd the flock with authority (מׅשְׁפׇּט), acting decisively on behalf of the needy sheep against the indulgent and tough sheep.

**34:17–19** Yahweh goes on to another picture of the exercise of authoritative judgment within the flock. The verb (שׇׁפַט) picks up from the noun (מׅשְׁפׇּט) in 34:16b. A flock can include both sheep and goats, so Yahweh speaks of exercising judgment among the mixed membership of the flock, but focuses on the male sheep and male goats. Both rams (אֵילׅים) and he-goats (עַתּוּדׅים) can be terms for leaders or chiefs (e.g., 17:13; Isa 14:9), so Yahweh can issue a parallel critique here to the one in 34:16. His point is again that these stronger examples of the species are spoiling things for the ordinary sheep and goats. Their monopolizing the pasturage one way or another, and spoiling it, again recalls the despoiling in Isa 5:8–23. Yahweh’s critique anticipates his later forbidding the leadership exploiting people by appropriating land and dispossessing them of their holdings (Ezek 45:8; 46:18).

**34:20–22** In a variant picture, fat animals and thin ones stand for strong animals and weak ones, and thus for powerful people and weak people. The fat ones can push the thin ones around, which Yahweh pictures as another factor in the ill-treatment and scattering of the people. Their troublers indeed include ordinary fellow-Israelites as well as kings. Again it means the people end up scattered, and the victims of the nations for whom they become plunder. Once more Yahweh declares the intention to take the required rescue action. For the first time Ezekiel uses the more theological verb “deliver” (יׇשַׁע hiphil), though it does not have distinctive connotations here (contrast 36:29; 37:23) and Ezekiel likely simply follows Jeremiah’s talk of “deliverance” (Jer 23:6).

**34:23–24** Once more Yahweh jumps in another direction. He has declared that the shepherds are finished (34:10) and that he himself will do the shepherding (34:11–16). Now he reworks those declarations. He will set up “one shepherd” who will do the job properly in the way the sequence of shepherds has not. This statement of intent compares with the one in Jer 30:9, where Yahweh declares that people “will serve Yahweh their God and David their king, whom I will set up for them” (cf. Hos 3:5), while it contrasts with the one in Jer 23:4, which implies a sequence of shepherds. Yahweh’s declaration implies that David will fulfill his commission as “my servant” in a way that they did not, and thus he will be Yahweh’s means of acting as shepherd. He will be a true “David,” who for all this faults did set about “implementing faithful rule (מׅשְׁפׇּט וּצְדׇקׇה) for all his people” (2 Sam 8:15). Yahweh speaks of him as “prince” (נׇשֹׅיא), the title Ezekiel usually prefers, rather than as king.

Is this David now to live forever? Does Yahweh have in mind bringing David back to life on earth, as happened with Samuel and Moses and Elijah (1 Sam 28; Mark 9)? Would Sheshbazzar the “prince” (Ezra 1:8) count as a fulfilment of Yahweh’s intent? Would a Davidic leader such as Zerubbabel, Yahweh’s servant (Hagg 2:23), count? Would a Hasmonean king count? Would Jesus count, as a Davidide and an embodiment of God?

**34:25–30** Instead of offering insight on such possibilities, Yahweh again jumps in another direction as he moves from restating promises made through Jeremiah to restating promises made in Lev 26.[[23]](#footnote-23) The themes of Ezek 34 don’t quite disappear. The allegory’s imagery and the practicalities of everyday life both continue to feature, though the balance between them changes. There will be no more dangerous animals threatening the flock. The sheep will be able to live in the wilderness pastureland without worrying about their security, and to sleep in the woods without the danger from the wild animals who are normally a threat there (e.g., Jer 5:6; 12:8).

For the most part, the message pictures more literal promises for the people, a fulfillment of covenantal blessings in wilderness and woods and around Jerusalem. In Lev 26:6, 9 Yahweh promises well-being (שׇׁלוֹם) and says “I will set up my covenant with you.” Here he says “I will solemnize a covenant for them” (see 17:13). A key expression of blessing will be rain “in its season,” in fall to soften the ground and make sowing possible, and in spring to bring fruit and crops to maturity. The people will no longer be under the servitude of overlords like the Babylonians. They will be renowned for the productivity of their land rather than shamed by famine overwhelming them. It is not a promise that finds fulfillment with the restoration of the community after 539 (Theodoret, 233–34). It is in a broad sense a messianic promise (Skinner, 304). Which perhaps helps with regard to those questions that might seem raised by the promise about David in 34:23–24.

**34:30–31** The promises’ fulfilment will be an expression of the relationship between Yahweh and his people. Yahweh closes with a final affirmation of the literal relationship phrase interwoven with the allegory of flock and shepherding and with a reference to human beings (אׇדׇם), an anticipation of 36:37–38 (Greenberg, 2:704).

Biblical Theology Comments

One reason why God was committed to sending a David to Israel was that his policy was to work though some human agent. As he didn’t have to get humanity to run creation for him but just chose to, so he didn’t need to work through Moses, Joshua, David, Ezra, or Paul, but just chose to. Another reason was that he had made a promise to David along those lines (2 Sam 7:11–16; 1 Chr 7:10–14). A third reason was that David sometimes symbolized what a king should be. He hardly did so better than Hezekiah, Josiah, Zerubbabel, or Ezra, and when we meet Uriah the Hittite in the new Jerusalem, it will be interesting to ask him what he thinks. But David did set about “implementing faithful rule (מׅשְׁפׇּט וּצְדׇקׇה) for all his people” (2 Sam 8:15) and there is hardly anything better that could be said about a leader.

The Davidic vocation is to embody what Yahweh is, to be the incarnation of Yahweh’s shepherding, to be the means of Yahweh’s own shepherding. Here is how Isaiah puts it:

 A child has been born to us,

a son has been given to us,

and government has come onto his shoulder.

 People have called him

“An-extraordinary-counselor-is-the-warrior-God,

the-everlasting-Father-is-an-official-for-well-being.”

Of the growing of government and of well-being

there will be no end, on David’s throne and on his reign,

 to establish it and support it,

with authority and faithfulness. (Isa 9:6–7 [5–6])

The idea isn’t that this king is himself the everlasting Father but that he can embody what the everlasting Father is. That is what David symbolizes. One can see how Jesus embodies the vocation of the Davidic shepherd (Luke 19:10; John 10).[[24]](#footnote-24)

Application and Devotional Implications

While shepherding in the First Testament is a metaphor for leadership in public life, the New Testament uses it as a metaphor for leadership in the church, and in that connection Ezekiel’s critique of the shepherds is also telling. In the first of his two sermons on Ezek 34 (which must have taken a couple of hours each to deliver), Augustine comments:

Because there are shepherds who are willing enough to hear themselves called shepherds and not at all willing to carry out the duties of shepherds, let us go over what is said to them through the prophet.… You, then, listen with care and attention, while we bishops should listen with fear and apprehension.… The sole reason people are put in charge is to consider the interests of those they are in charge of, and not at all to attend to their own advantage.[[25]](#footnote-25)

He goes on to draw attention to the two sides of Paul’s comments in 1 Cor 9 about whether shepherds are entitled to partake of the milk that comes from the flock: obviously they are, but it’s wise for metaphorical shepherds not to.[[26]](#footnote-26) In the second sermon he notes the worrying implications of Jesus’s story about sheep and goats in Matt 25:31–46, and eventually offers the reassurance:

Don't panic, sheep. The one who said, *He himself will feed them*, does not abandon you. God is feeding you, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, God himself is feeding you.[[27]](#footnote-27)

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## The Land Repossessed and Renewed (35:1–36:15)

Outline

Ezekiel’s introductory “Yahweh’s message came to me” (35:1) introduces a reaffirmation of Yahweh’s purpose in creation, his promise to Israel’s ancestors, the fairness of his treatment of nations, and his reassurance to a refugee people.

The reaffirmation comes in two juxtaposed messages in which Ezekiel is instructed to “prophesy” to Mount Seՙir (35:2) concerning Israel’s mountains (35:12), and to Israel’s mountains themselves and against Edom (36:1, 5). Each message has its own preamble, “My man… prophesy… and say,” which suggests they are separate messages that have been brought together and given the one introduction in 35:1. This double message follows naturally on 34:1–31 with its concern about the land and Israel’s mountains and its promise of fruitfulness (e.g., 34:13–14). It also leads naturally into 36:16–38, which also concerns the land and its fruitfulness. Given several pieces of theological and pastoral background, it makes broad sense that at this early point the developing exposition of Yahweh’s promises in Ezekiel focuses here.

An immediate existential question for Judahites is Judah’s having become to some extent a nation of refugees. The Kebarites were already that, but the period before and after 587 turned many other Judahites into refugees in Samaria, in countries such as Ammon, in Egypt, and across the Mediterranean, as well as in Babylonia. One should not picture the entire Judahite nation as taken into exile, but significant numbers either were transported or fled to the countries around. Then “we can imagine the rumours arriving among the fearful exiles in Babylon. The empty land was being overrun by even more ancient enemies than the Babylonians—the Edomites!… History was unwinding and the land was reverting to its past. As far as Israel was concerned, even the past was being wiped out, and now there could be no future either. Who or what was Israel without Yahweh’s land?” (Wright, 284).

In 36:1–15 Yahweh speaks of the Judahites as the victim of an “enemy” who is initially unnamed and of their land having become “a possession for the rest of the nations,” for the nations in general (36:2–3). It might then seem odd that Mount Seՙir and Edom specifically feature here, especially as they featured in 25:8–14. But as one of Judah’s neighbors, Edom was not only unfriendly, like Ammon, Moab, and Philistia. In the period leading up to the fall of Jerusalem it had not been confining itself to its homeland to the south and southeast of the Dead Sea but had moved into some Judahite land, perhaps because of being under pressure from tribes to its east and south, and in the aftermath of the city’s fall it had moved into more (see the verse-by-verse commentary on 25:12–14; Block, 2:319, notes the archaeological evidence). There is thus a necessary link between Israel regaining possession of the land and Edom losing possession of it, and thus between the messages that Ezekiel juxtaposes here. Some of the Kebarites might well have come from the south of Judah, and for them the existential question would include the destiny of their family’s land in the area into which Edomites had moved.

There is then a theological question raised by Yahweh’s having turned Judah into a desolation and let the Edomites take over much of Judah’s land. Does nothing happen to Edom? Is there no justice in the sense of similar treatment to one people and another? Yahweh’s message here not only develops the one in 25:12–14 but also takes up his message in 6:1–4 and declares that what has now happened to Judah will happen to Edom:

6:1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, 35:1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man,

set your face to Israel’s mountains set your face against Mount Seՙir

Prophesy to them 3and say: Prophesy against it 3and say to it,

Mountains of Israel, The Lord Yahweh has said this.

listen to the Lord Yahweh’s message. Here am I towards you, Mount Seՙir.…

The Lord Yahweh has said this

to the mountains and to the hills, 8I will fill its mountains with its slain as your hills

to the ravines and to the canyons: and your valleys and all your canyons,

Here am I … causing a sword to come …

I will cause your slain to fall … the people slain by the sword fall in them

4Your altars will become desolate… 9as I make you desolations for all time,

The towns, they will become waste… and your towns are not lived in.

And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

Zimmerli (2:240) speaks of “the mysteriously strange logic of God” in this unit:

Because, even when he has pronounced sentence of death, he does not abandon his work and will not allow his name, which he has entrusted to men, to be dishonored, he will for that reason have mercy on the condemned, allow the dead to flourish again, will rebuild what was destroyed, and will again bring back the displaced.

The devastation of Judah raises a broader question about Yahweh’s longtime purpose, with which these messages near the beginning of Yahweh’s promises also suggests a connection. Israel’s story started with Yahweh sending Abraham and Sarah to this land which he promised to give them (Gen 12:1–7), and they eventually came to “enter into possession” of it in fulfillment of that promise. The verb (יׇרַשׁ) and related nouns play a key role in Deuteronomy and Joshua, and now play a key role here (Ezek 35:10; 36:2, 3, 5, 12), mostly (with irony) with reference to the nations that had dispossessed the Israelites. That reversal will itself be reversed. Whereas desolation is the key word in 35:1–15, possession is the key word in 36:1–15 (Greenberg, 2:724).

Behind the commission, promise, and fulfillment for Israel’s ancestors, the entire scriptural story began with God creating the heavens and the אֶרֶץ, the land, a land that was formless and empty and needed shaping and filling (Gen 1:1–2). God went on to commission the first human beings to “be fruitful and abound” (Gen 1:28). Here he promises that people will “abound and be fruitful” on Israel’s mountains (Ezek 36:11). The reverse order of the verbs means they also correspond with the promise in Lev 26:9, in Ezekiel’s favorite chapter, which in effect renews Yahweh’s declaration concerning the creation purpose that had become undone. Ezekiel here reiterates it.

The messages are actually more than two, and Ezekiel might have combined messages within 35:1–15 and within 36:1–15 as well as then combining these two units, which unfold:

Introduction to the unit as a whole (35:1)

Preamble to the first set of messages, to Mount Seՙir (35:2–3aα)

Yahweh will desolate Mount Seՙir (35:3aβ–4)

Threat, no critique (here am I towards you)

 And you will acknowledge

In return for its pouring out blood, Yahweh will see that blood is poured out (35:6–9)

Critique and threat (on account of, therefore)

 I am alive

Yahweh’s affirmation

 And you will acknowledge

Yahweh will take action in light of its appropriating and taunting (35:10–13)

Critique and threat (on account of, therefore)

I am alive

 Yahweh’s affirmation

 I will get myself acknowledged

 And you will acknowledge

Yahweh will take action in light of its rejoicing (35:14–15)

Critique and threat (in accordance… so)

 The Lord Yahweh has said this

And they will acknowledge

Preamble to the second set of messages, to Israel’s mountains (36:1–2aα)

Yahweh will take action in light of the nations’ appropriating (36:2aβ–7)

On account of the appropriating and scorning, therefore (36:2aβ–3)

 Therefore, on account of the plundering and ridiculing (36:4)

 Therefore, on account of the dispossessing and ridiculing (36:5)

 Therefore, on account of the shaming (36:6)

 Therefore… (36:7)

Yahweh will restore the mountains for Israel (36:8–12)

 And you will acknowledge

Reformulated preamble (36:13aα)

Yahweh will undo the mountains’ danger and reproach (36:13aβ–15)

 Therefore

 Yahweh’s affirmation

 Yahweh’s affirmation

Ezekiel gives a single heading to 35:1–36:15 and then starts again in 36:16, so it is odd that the medieval chapter division makes Ezek 35 one chapter and Ezek 36 another. LXX treats 35:1–36:15 as one unit (Olley, 475). The medieval division does reflect the difference that 36:1–15 focuses less explicitly on Edom.[[28]](#footnote-28) But the associating of 35:1–15 and 36:1–15 reflects verbal links between them such as desolation, enmity and enemy, here am I towards you, prophesy, passion, rejoicing, hostility, cities not lived in, domain, and expressions that form pairs: Mount Seՙir and Israel’s mountains, “all Edom, all of it” and “Israel’s entire household, all of it,” and the quotations of the adversary in 35:10; 36:2 (Allen, 2:170–71).

Translation

1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, set your face against Mount Seՙir and prophesy against it. 3S ay to it, The Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I towards you, Mount Seՙir. I will stretch out my hand against you and make you a desolation, something desolate, 4as I make your towns into a ruin and you become a desolation. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

5On account of your having hostility from all time and your pouring the Israelites into the hands of the sword in the time of their calamity, in the time of final waywardness, 6therefore, I am alive (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), [I swear] that I will make you into blood, and blood will pursue you.[[29]](#footnote-29) Indeed, whereas you were hostile to blood,[[30]](#footnote-30) blood will pursue you. 7I will make Mount Seՙir a desolation, a desolation, and I will cut off from it anyone passing through or returning. 8I will fill its mountains with its slain, when [in] your hills and your valleys and all your canyons, the people slain by the sword will fall in them, 9as I make you desolations for all time, and your towns do not abide. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

10On account of your saying, “As for the two nations and the two countries, they will become mine, and we will take possession of it,” but Yahweh was there, 11therefore, I am alive (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), I will act[[31]](#footnote-31) in accordance with your anger and with your passion with which you acted, out of your hostility to them. I will get myself acknowledged through them as I exercise authority over you. 12And you will acknowledge that I Yahweh have listened to all the insults that you spoke over Israel’s mountains: “They are desolate, to us they have been given to consume.” 13You made big against me with your mouth and made your words against me abound, as I myself heard.

14The Lord Yahweh has said this. When the entire land[[32]](#footnote-32) rejoices, a desolation I will make for you. 15In accordance with your rejoicing towards the domain of Israel’s household, because it became desolate, so I will act towards you, as Mount Seՙir and all Edom, all of it, becomes a desolation. And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

36:1And you, my man, prophesy to Israel’s mountains and say, Israel’s mountains, listen to Yahweh’s message. 2The Lord Yahweh has said this. Since the enemy said over you, “Ah,” and “The heights from all time, it has become our possession,” 3therefore prophesy and say, The Lord Yahweh has said this. On account, yes, on account of the desolating and crushing[[33]](#footnote-33) of you all around, so that you became a possession for the rest of the nations and grew to be the talk[[34]](#footnote-34) of tongues and the vilification of peoples—4therefore, Israel’s mountains, listen to the message of the Lord Yahweh. The Lord Yahweh has said this to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the canyons, and to the desolate wastes and to the abandoned towns that have become loot and an object of ridicule to the rest of the nations, all around. 5Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. If I am not speaking in my passionate fire against the rest of the nations and against Edom, all of it, which made my country a possession for themselves, with whole-hearted rejoicing in contempt of spirit, for the sake of its common land as loot.…[[35]](#footnote-35) 6Therefore prophesy over the land of Israel and say to the mountains and to the hills, to the ravines and to the canyons, The Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, in my passion and in my wrath I am speaking, on account of their carrying the shaming of the nations. 7Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. I myself am lifting up my hand, if the nations that surround you, they do not carry their shaming.…

8And you, Israel’s mountains, your branches you will produce and your fruit you will carry for my people Israel, because they are near to coming. 9Because here am I towards you, and I will turn my face to you. You will be served and sown. 10I will make people abound on you, Israel’s entire household, all of it. The towns will be lived in and the ruins, they will be built up. 11I will make human beings and cattle abound on you. They will abound and fruit, and I will cause you to be lived on as in your former times, and make you better off than in your original times. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh. 12I will get people to walk on you, my people Israel. They will take possession of you, and you will be a domain for them, and you will not again bereave them anymore.

13The Lord Yahweh has said this. Since they are saying of you, “You[[36]](#footnote-36) consume people, and you have been one bereaving your nations,” 14therefore you will not consume people anymore, and not bereave your nation anymore (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh). 15I will not have the nations’ taunt heard towards you anymore, the peoples’ shaming you will not carry anymore, and you will not cause your nations to fall down anymore (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

Textual Notes

MT has a markers\* after 35:10, 13, 15; 36:4, 12, 15.

**35:5** LXX has a distinctive version of the middle of the verse, reflecting its puzzlement or misreading (Zimmerli, 2:224).

**35:6** LXX has a shorter text of the verse.

For שׇֹנֵאתׇ, “you were hostile [to blood],” LXX “you sinned [regarding blood] implies אׇשַׁמְתְּ, as in 22:4 (Cornill, 407).

**35:7** For עֹבֵד וׇשׇׁב, “anyone passing through or returning,” LXX “human beings and cattle” conforms to passages such as 14:17.

**35:8** LXX lacks “its mountains.”

**35:9** IfollowK תישבנה, implying תֵּישַׁבְנׇה, “abide” (see the translation footnote on 26:20); cf. LXX. Contrast Q תׇּשׁוֹבְנׇה from שׁוּב, “return.”

**35:10** For הׇיׇה, “was [there],” LXX has “is [there].”

**35:11** LXX has a shorter text of the verse.

**35:12** Q has שׇׁמֵמוּ, “they are desolate,” K שממה, “it is desolate.”

**35:15** LXX lacks 35:15a.[[37]](#footnote-37)

For כֻּלׇּהּ, “all of it,” LXX “will be consumed” implies כׇּלׇה (Cornill, 409).

**36:2** For בׇּמוֹת, “heights” (only here in Ezekiel in the geographical sense), LXX has “desolations,” implying שַׁמּוֹת (Cornill, 410).

**36:11** LXX lacks “they will abound and fruit.”

**36:12** For וְהוֹלַכְתּׅי, “I will get [people] to walk,” LXX “I will beget” implies וְהוֹלַדְתּׅי (Cornill, 412).

**36:13** K אתי is an archaic equivalent of אַתְּ, “you,” f.; cf. Q אׇתְּ in the pausal form.

Q גּוֹיַיׅךְ, “your nations,” corresponds to 35:10. K’s sg. גויך compares with Vg. The alternatives recur in 36:14.

**36:14** For Q תְּשַׁכְלׅי, “bereave,” K has תכשלי, “cause to fall down” (cf. 36:15).

**36:15** LXX lacks “and you will not cause your nations to fall down anymore.”

Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**35:1–4** Mount Seՙir (see 25:8) here denotes Edom as a mountainous country. It parallels expressions such as “Mount Israel” (Josh 11:16) and “Israel’s high mountain” (e.g., Ezek 17:23). In the First Testament, all can be geographical terms for their peoples’ respective mountainous homelands. None is exactly the name of the country, though “the lands of Seՙir” and “Munt Seՙir” are known as the name of a country, for instance in one of the Amarna Letters from before Moses’s time (*ANET*, 488). We do not know precisely what geographical area it denoted, but in effect it refers to Edom and indicates Yahweh’s threat not merely to push the Edomites back from Judah but to advance into Edom itself and cause devastation there.

**35:5** Such action will be in keeping with the threats in Ezek 25 and with rationales articulated there in terms of proper redress, both in light of the recurrent conflict between Edom and Israel and in terms of Edom’s apparent recent collaboration with the Babylonians in their action against Judah. The narrative in 2 Kings does not speak of Edomite involvement along with Aram, Moab, and Ammon in the events that came to a climax in the fall of Jerusalem, but prophets such as Ezekiel and Obadiah assume it. Nor does Genesis speak of hostility between the two nations’ ancestors, Jacob and Esau, only of Esau’s understandable grudge over Jacob’s swindling him out of the blessing (Gen 27:41). The more apposite point to identify as the beginning of a hostility “from all time” between Israel and Edom would be Num 20:14–21.

Ezekiel here recognizes the complexity of Yahweh’s logic in his action against Edom, even while not here incorporating “redress” as an aspect of it. For Judah, what happened in 587 was “their calamity” (אֵידׇם), a rare expression that occurs only here in Ezekiel but sounds tellingly similar to Edom (אֱדוֹם). Such a “calamity” can be a disaster that simply happens and has no rationale (e.g., Job 30:12), but 587 was not that kind of calamity. In the terms of a standard Hebrew metonymy\* that links an action and its results, 587 was “the time of final waywardness.” What happened was the appropriate consequence of Judah’s waywardness. It was when Judah’s waywardness reached the point at which Yahweh said “enough, so far and no further” (see 21:25 [30]). “Their measure was full” (Rashi, in MG): it’s not the language of Gen 15:16, but the thought is similar. Literally, it was the “the time of the waywardness of the end,” so that “what is evoked here is sheer eschatological termination” (Jenson, 272). Yahweh had said that the end was coming (7:7:2, 3, 6), that the time was coming (7:7, 12), and in 587 it arrived. Yet paradoxically and mercifully, the end was not the end.

**35:6–9** But further, the Edomites turned the calamity and the result of waywardness into a war crime on their part, by “pouring the Israelites into the hands of the sword,” metonymy or catachresis\* or zeugma\* for giving multitudes of Israelites over to sword bearers and thus pouring out their blood. In return, Yahweh says, in the terms of a further catachresis, “I will make you into blood.” Ezekiel also thus works with another paronomasia:\* he will turn Edom (אֵידׇם) into blood (דׇּם). That is how much Edomite blood he will spill. In terms of another metonymy, “blood will pursue you.” People bearing swords will pursue the Edomites and pour out their blood. The second of these two chilling “death threats” might alternatively make the readers think of the “blood restorer” (Deut 19:6) pursuing Edom (Greenberg, 2:713). It will happen even though (in another tricky elliptical phrase) “you were hostile to blood.” You were naturally hostile to having your blood shed and you thought you could avoid it (Fairbairn, 382). Fortunately, “desolations for all time” involves a hyperbole,\* like “hostility from all time” in 35:5 (עוֹלׇם in both expressions). Aqaba (in an area that would have counted as Edom) has nice hotels nowadays. All the threats in 35:6–9 portray things darker than anything Yahweh will do, as is the case with his threats to Judah.

**35:10–11** The point about dispossession become explicit. The expression “two nations” otherwise comes only twice in the First Testament. It refers to Jacob/Israel and Esau/Edom in Rachel’s womb (Gen 25:23). It would be a odd to describe Edom as aiming to take possession of these two, since it is one of them. But later in Ezekiel “two nations” refers to Judah and Ephraim (37:22), which might more likely be the reference. Again, then, Ezekiel speaks hyperbolically in articulating Edom’s aims, as if it had ambitions on Ephraim as well as on Judah. Perhaps the Israelites were genuinely fearful about losing their entire original homeland. They can then be assured that any takeover by Edom or anyone else would never be permanent because “Yahweh was there.” That both increases the scandal of the Edomites’ aspiration and offers reassurance to the fearful Israelites. Ezekiel uses “the foreign oracle form as a means of ministering to Israel” (Allen, 2:172). Israel was Yahweh’s territory whether or not the Israelites were there, and just because the Israelites have gone, it doesn’t mean Yahweh has gone.

Indeed, Yahweh says he will take up the matter of the Edomites’ anger and passion. Apparently he alone is entitled to anger and passion, or at least his having a distinctive capacity to express such instincts means that people take a risk in expressing them themselves. This links with the declaration that he will get himself acknowledged through taking action on the Israelites’ behalf, as he acts in authority over Edom in restoring the Israelites.

**35:12–13** He has another motivation for so acting. The only earlier reference to an “insult” (נֶאׇצׇה) relates to a “day of insult” when the Assyrians scorned Yahweh’s capacity to protect Jerusalem (Isa 37:3; the word occurs later in Neh 9:18, 26). Here, Yahweh goes on to berate the way Edom “made big against me with your mouth and made your words against me abound.” Israel’s mountains are the location where Edom utters its insults, but Yahweh is one way or another their object. “Yahweh was there” (35:10). And, he says, “I myself heard.”

**35:14–15** In this last mini-message to Edom, Ezekiel refers for a ninth time to Edom’s desolation, which will be a reversing of Israel’s. He has an equivalent point to make about rejoicing. The Edomites had been rejoicing over the domain (נַחֲלׇה) belonging to Israel’s household. Any Israelite household or family has a domain, a stretch of land that belongs to it irreversibly and that no one can take away (in theory: again, see Isa 5:8). On a larger scale, Israel’s household as a whole has such a domain. But Edom has been gradually appropriating strips of it, as unprincipled Israelites might do if they moved a boundary stone and thus falsified the boundary between one family’s land and another family’s (e.g., Prov 23:8–9). Recently, Edom’s excuse has become that the Israelites have become an absentee household, and it has been understandably but reprehensibly rejoicing over the enlarging of its domain (cf. 36:5; also 25:6). Yahweh’s promise to the Israelites is that they are coming back to their domain. Ezekiel thus expresses the “theological intention” that was previously unexpressed (Zimmerli, 2:236). That will be “when the entire land rejoices,” as will be spelled out in 36:8–12.

**36:1–2** The bidding to prophesy to the mountains that opens the second complex of messages parallels the one that opened the first. Paradoxically, the messages are addressed to some mountains that are desolate, but it is a bidding to “prophesy to” them rather than “prophesy against” them. It is also the same bidding as the one way back near the beginning of the scroll in 6:1–6,[[38]](#footnote-38) but again its implications are blessedly different. As the recurrent expression in Ezek 35 was desolate/desolation, now the recurring word is “possession,” again with negative implications (36:2, 3, 5) until once in terms of a reversal (36:12). “The enemy” has taken over the “heights” that the Israelites had possessed “from all time,” which parallels the time frame of Edom’s hostility (35:5), though here the enemy is unnamed. We could assume it is Edom, but Ezekiel will shortly also refer to “the rest of the nations.” There is some irony in the link between the reference to these “heights” (בׇּמוֹת) and the reference in 6:1–6, another aspect of the reworking of that message. But there, it referred to the elevated shrines, traditionally “high places.” Here it has its more geophysical meaning. The Edomites are rejoicing over the heights (which it would have been okay for the Judahites to rejoice over), not over the shrines (which it would have been less objectionable for the nations to rejoice over).

**36:3–7** As well as incorporating expressions that feature in 35:1–15 but using them to make a reverse point, Ezekiel adds new expressions that also contribute to a reversing. Judah had been the victim of crushing, the talk of tongues, vilification, ridicule, and contempt. And the message owns the grimness of the land’s total wasting and abandonment—mountains, hills, ravines, canyons, towns, plundering. Therefore the anger and passion that Edom expressed (35:11) will give way to its being on the receiving end of passion and wrath (36:6) and of “my passionate fire” (36:5). This unusual expression (אֵשׁ קׅנְאׇתׅי) is another link with Zephaniah (see 1:18; 3:8), Ezekiel’s favorite prophet alongside Jeremiah. In Zephaniah the passionate fire pours out on Israel, and one could hardly blame people for asking how long it will do so and thinking it is time for it to divert to Israel’s people (Psa 79:5–6; cf. Block, 2:330–31).

Here Yahweh responds (cf. Ezek 38:19). The nations thought they could appropriate this land, make it “a possession for themselves.” But it is “my country,” even if the Israelites had all left it. It is still “the household of my dwelling” (שְׁכׅינׇה; Tg.). The nations have thus “violated” it (Jenson, 270). And as the fire and wrath will be on the other foot, so will the shame be (36:6–7). The combination of declarations about violation and shame points to the dual significance of God’s passionate fire. In acting against the nations, Yahweh acts both for Israel’s sake and for his own, the two concerns being intrinsically related (Jenson, 274). It is a piece of good news for God’s household that God’s acting for his own sake can combine with his acting for his household’s sake. It is the other side of the coin of his household being first in line when he acts punitively (1 Pet 4:17).

**36:8** One could see the promises in 36:1–7 as merely ground-clearing. Okay, Edom and other nations are going to be put in their place and expelled, but the country remains desolate. Something positive also needs to be done. In a way, then, 36:1–7 has constituted another great raising of suspense. Now Yahweh speaks of blessing he will give. Given that he is addressing the mountains, he naturally begins with branches for the trees growing there and the fruit they produce. It fits that in 34:27 he has already taken up the promise in Lev 26:4 that “the trees of the wild will give their fruit.” One of the three occurrences of the word for “branches” (עׇנׇף) outside Ezekiel is Lev 23:40 in the instructions for Sukkot, so Ezekiel’s readers could be reminded of the renewed celebration of Israel’s festivals that would be an aspect of the restoration of land and nation. But the trees’ flourishing relates explicitly to “my people Israel” being “near to coming.” Ezekiel gives no hint of what Israel’s being “near” means. His words parallel Isa 56:1 or Jer 48:16 rather than the specifics of Isa 45–46 where talk of nearness links with a concrete reference to Cyrus (45:1; 46:13). And *b. Sanh.* 98a speaks of such flourishing as a sign of the end, while Tg. adds that “the day of my rescue or deliverance (פּוּרְקׇן) is about to come.” But “near” does rule out some distant eschaton. The good news for the mountains is that their desolation is destined to end in the foreseeable future, so that it is worth their while to encourage their fruit trees to grow. And this good news for the mountains is good news for people such as the Kebarites if they wish to go home. The trees carrying fruit will succeed the land and the people carrying shame (36:6).

**36:9–10** Thus “here am I towards you” has different implications when now addressed to Israel’s mountains from the implications that held for Mount Seՙir in 35:3, or for Israel elsewhere (e.g., 21:8; 34:10). Indeed, only here does the expression have positive implications (Zimmerli, 1:175). Something similar applies to Yahweh’s turning his face. I will turn my face to you, he had promised in Lev 26:9. The king’s looking your way can be bad news, and so was Yahweh’s setting his face towards Jerusalem (21:2 [7]). But his looking your way can be good news, and his hiding his face be bad news (39:23, 24, 29). Such hiding of the face will now be reversed for the mountains. And they will have humanity’s attention and tending, in keeping with Yahweh’s original intention that humanity should serve the ground (Gen 2:5, 15). Beyond the sphere of trees, and where the cultivation of crops is possible, the ground will be sown. Towns being lived in and wastes being built up again reverses threats in earlier messages (e.g., 5:14; 6:6; 12:20).

**36:11–12a** Yahweh extends his affirmations that the mountains will abound with people, which is more of what is obviously good news for the people themselves who actually hear this message from Ezekiel. The abounding will embrace “Israel’s entire household, all of it,” the “two nations” to whom 35:10 may refer, about which the Kebarites might have more mixed feelings. Following up “abound” with “fruit” further reaffirms the promise in Lev 26:9, and via that promise makes a link with Gen 1:22, 28 to accompany the link with Gen 2:5, 15. The verbs come in the reverse order to Gen 1:22, 28, so perhaps the parallel is a coincidence. But these links support the suggestion that Ezekiel’s affirmations about creation push modern readers towards a more responsible attitude to the created world,[[39]](#footnote-39) even though the passage remains God-centered or human-centered rather than earth-centered.[[40]](#footnote-40) Further, whereas Lev 26:9–13 makes a link with the exodus, Ezekiel uses the imagery of a second entering into “possession” of a “domain” (see 35:14–15) on the part of “my people Israel.” Yahweh intends to “get people to walk on” the land (הׇלַךְ עַל hiphil) as he did at the beginning (cf. Gen 13:17; Greenberg, 2:721)—he will not merely “lead people onto you” (Vg.). And as a new exodus might exceed the splendor of the first exodus, Israel’s new entering into the land will exceed the splendor of the first entering. The mountains will not only be lived on as in former times but will be better off than they were in their original times (רׅאשֹׁתֵיכֶם).

**36:12b–15** While 36:12b belongs syntactically with 36:11–12a, it takes up a different theme that the succeeding verses develop. The word for “bereave” (שׇׁכַל piel) is more specific than that English word. It refers more concretely to the loss of children, and that connotation may carry here. For most societies, having children and nurturing them to adulthood has been a preoccupation for safeguarding the life and the future of family and community, but many men and women couldn’t have children and most babies didn’t live to adulthood. One could then blame the land as a key contributory factor behind the more dominant two of Ezekiel’s unholy trinity of sword, famine and epidemic. Yahweh’s implicit promise, then, is that the flourishing of the mountains and of the produce of the land more generally will mean that the land no longer bereaves Israel.

While the unnamed accusers saying that Israel’s mountains “consume” people might be Israelites themselves, 36:15 suggests other nations are issuing this taunt or reproach, or “vilification” (דּׅבׇּה; 36:3). That last word occurs only nine times, three in connection with the report of the reconnoiter party in Num 13–14. (Num 13:32; 14:36, 37) who asserted that the promised land “consumes” people (אׇכַל), as here in 36:13, 14. To put it more prosaically, the nations say that the Israelite highland causes its nations to fall down, collapse, crumple (כׇּשַׁל hiphil). Maybe “what is significant is not that the land has ‘devoured’, but that this is what ‘They said to you’. It is a matter of honour in the eyes of others” (Olley, 481). But also in Lev 26, Yahweh had threatened to let wild animals bereave the Israelites and let their enemies consume them (Lev 26:22, 38). If it’s ever been true, he now says, it will be true no longer.

Biblical Theology Comments

Edom is an archetypal enemy of Israel, and one could therefore see it as an archetypal enemy of the vastly expanded version of Israel that comprises the church. But by New Testament times, Edom came to stand for Rome as the oppressor of the Jewish people, and subsequently the church took over that position. So the church has to see itself as on both sides of the equation in 35:1–36:15. In light of the Holocaust, over recent decades some Christian circles have repudiated “supersessionism,” the view that God has cast off the Jewish people and that the church has replaced it in God’s economy, but Christian indignation at the state of Israel’s attitude to the position of Palestinians can now look like a new version of antisemitism, a new willingness to be Edom. The church is thus wise to see itself and its destiny in Edom.

Application and Devotional Implications

Trauma has been a focus of concern in the twenty-first century, as a complex of responses to experiences such as rape, assault, or sudden bereavement, and to shared experiences such as war, earthquake, and tornado. Its being a focus of concern has led to its becoming a focus in biblical interpretation, as the Scriptures report and relate to traumatic experiences. The Kebarites had gone through a traumatic experience in being transported to Babylonia in 597, and many more Judahites have now gone through a traumatic experience in the fall of Jerusalem in 587. Against this background, Ezek 36 opens a window on “Ezekiel’s pastoral rhetoric of reassurance.”[[41]](#footnote-41) Wright (283) imagines:

They had walked to the far corners of the earth (as it must have seemed to them), to the pagan, enemy land of Babylon. Their last mental image of the land they had left behind would have been of the systematic destruction being wreaked upon it by Babylonian armies, and the smoke still rising from the fires of Jerusalem. Some of them would have stumbled in captivity past the smoking remains of their own farms and houses. So they arrived in Babylon with a sense of total loss—loss of land and property, but also loss of dignity and identity. All their pride and joy in themselves, their land, their city, their temple, their king, their God, had gone.… The work of Ezekiel as pastor after the fall of Jerusalem and the arrival of the last batch of exiles had to include the restoration of this people morally and psychologically, as well as spiritually. The process would take a generation.

A generation, at least. But for now, having already addressed their status as a people and their need of faithful leadership, Ezekiel speaks here to their need of land, sustenance, honor, task, expectation, home, promise, dreams, safety, and rebuilding of spirit. It is something of what could be involved in ministering to trauma.

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## The Sacredness of Yahweh Honored (36:16–38)

Outline

“Gathering from the nations, returning to the land, cleansing from defilement, gifting of a new heart and a new spirit, fecundity of the trees and fields. In Ezek 36.16–38, the reader of the book of Ezekiel encounters an unprecedented accumulation of salvation promises to the ‘House of Israel.’”[[42]](#footnote-42) The passage manifests a structure that Ezekiel often follows. After an introduction (36:16), it describes the background that provides rationale for what Yahweh intends to do (36:17–21), and then articulates that intention (36:22–38), with the two parts linked by a “therefore.” But Ezekiel turns upside down the usual significance of this form of message, in that the background lies not primarily in Israel’s having been engaged in wrongdoing (though the verses refer to that) but in Yahweh’s having brought calamity on Israel. Consequently, the “therefore” leads not into a threat of calamity but into a declaration about reversing that calamity. Its working in this way has been anticipated in 11:16–21, which also anticipated the content (scatter, collect, outrages, new spirit, rock mind, flesh mind, laws, rulings). Like the immediately preceding messages, 36:16–38 presupposes the 587 calamity and presupposes a context sometime after 587—not immediately after the city’s fall, but one where enough time has passed for considerable dispersal of forced migrants from Judah. But we cannot tell how long after the calamity.

As there is overlap in the messages in Parts One through Four of the scroll that articulate Yahweh’s indictments and threats towards Israel and towards other peoples, so there is overlap in the messages that articulate Yahweh’s promises in Part Five. The scroll’s compiling did not mean turning overlapping messages into one coherent systematic presentation, but stringing and combining messages or elements from messages. Thus 36:16–38 repeats promises from 35:1–36:15 and adds others, which themselves reformulate promises from earlier in the scroll. Indeed, one might see 36:16–38 as both drawing together the key themes of Ezek 1–36 and also anticipating those of Ezek 37–48.[[43]](#footnote-43) Yahweh’s promises are way longer than the rationale for them, as was the case in some of the earlier negative messages that followed the sequence of rationale, then “therefore,” then declaration of intent (e.g., 5:5–17; 26:1–21). Perhaps Ezekiel has combined several messages: 36:23 might have been an ending, so might 36:28b, while 36:33 is overtly a new beginning, as is 36:37. In content, however, there is overlap between these units. The message in its compiled form unfolds:

Introduction (36:16)

Yahweh’s review of the past (36:17–21)

 Focus on defilement, scattering, and treating as ordinary

Yahweh’s intention (36:22–23)

 “Therefore”

 Focus on treating as ordinary

 “And the nations will acknowledge”

Yahweh’s intention (36:24–28)

 Focus on gathering, defilement, and transformation

“And you will be my people and I will be your God”

Yahweh’s intention (36:29–32)

 Focus on defilement and provision in nature

Yahweh’s intention (36:33–36)

 New introduction

Focus on cleansing and rebuilding

Yahweh’s intention (36:37–38)

 New introduction

 Focus on multiplying the people

 “And they will acknowledge”

That outline indicates how Yahweh’s purification of the nation is such a prominent theme. The section has been called “the climax of Israel’s restoration process” and in light of the vision of the new temple that will follow, a key significance of this section and the restoration process is “to prepare the nation to protect the future Temple” (Ganzel 2020, 231, 232).

Translation

16Yahweh’s message came to me: 17My man, Israel’s household, living on their land, defiled[[44]](#footnote-44) it with their path and with their deeds, their path being like the defilement associated with menstrual taboo before me. 18So I poured out my wrath over them over the blood that they poured out over the country. And with their lumps they defiled it. 19So I scattered them among the nations and they dispersed among the countries, as I exercised authority over them in accordance with their path and with their deeds. 20And they came to the nations where they came, and caused my sacred name to be treated as ordinary through people saying about them, “These are Yahweh’s people, but they have gone out of his country.” 21So I have been concerned over my sacred name that Israel’s household have made ordinary among the nations where they came.

22Therefore say to Israel’s household, The Lord Yahweh has said this. Not for your sake am I acting, Israel’s household, but rather for my sacred name, which you have caused to be treated as ordinary among the nations where you came. 23But I will make my great name sacred that has been treated as ordinary among the nations, which you have caused to be treated as ordinary in the midst of them. And the nations will acknowledge that I am Yahweh (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh) when I show myself sacred through you before their eyes.

24I will get you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and have you come back to your land. 25I will sprinkle clean water on you, you will be clean from all your defilements, and from all your lumps I will cleanse you. 26I will give you a new mind, and put a new spirit within you. I will remove the rock mind from your flesh, and give you a flesh mind. 27My spirit I will put within you. I will make it that you will walk by my laws, and my rulings you will keep, and act on them. 28You will live in the country that I gave to your ancestors, and be a people for me, and I myself[[45]](#footnote-45) will be God for you.

29So I will deliver you from all your defilements, and summon the grain, make it abundant, and not permit famine on you.30I will make the fruit on trees and the produce of the open country abundant, in order that you will not anymore get a reproach for famine among the nations. 31You will be mindful of your dire paths and your deeds that were not good, and you will feel a loathing at yourselves over your wayward acts and over your outrages. 32Given that I am not acting for your sake (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), be it known to you, be disgraced and shamed because of your paths, Israel’s household.

33The Lord Yahweh has said this. On the day when I cleanse you from all your wayward acts, I will make your towns lived in, and your wastes will be built up. 34The country that is desolate, it will be served, instead of it having been a desolation in the eyes of everyone passing through. 35People will say, “This country that was desolate­—it’s become like Eden Garden. The towns that were wasted, desolated, ravaged, they abide[[46]](#footnote-46) fortified.” 36So the nations that remain, around you, will acknowledge that I Yahweh have built up the wastes—I have planted the desolate—I Yahweh am speaking and I am acting.

37The Lord Yahweh has said this. Once more letting myself be inquired of for this by Israel’s household, to act for them, I will make them abundant like a human flock. 38Like a flock of sacred ones, like a flock in Jerusalem at its set occasions, so the wasted towns will be, filled with a human flock. And they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 36:21, 32, 36, and 38.

**36:17–18** LXX has a longer version of 36:17b and a shorter version of 36:18.

**36:20** On וַיׇּבוֹא, see the textual note on 20:38.

**36:23** LXX lacks “(an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).”

The oldest manuscript of LXX Ezekiel, Papyrus 967, lacks 36:23bβ–38, which may be an accidental loss or may indicate that its text goes back to a Hebrew version lacking these verses, which might or might not then be an older version of the Hebrew text of Ezekiel.[[47]](#footnote-47) Having reviewed the debate on this question, Patmore concludes:

The data… make the *Urtext* [original text] of Ezekiel a will-o'-the-wisp. Behind the texts of Papyrus 967 and the MT lie two distinct *Vorlagen* [templates], and unless new materials come to light, there is no credible way of establishing the historical precedence or originality of either. But… if authority is to be found in the “most original” form of the text, what ought one do when two versions of a text exist, neither of which provide clear access to the Urtext? If “originality” cannot be used as the yardstick of authority, on what other foundation might authority be built?[[48]](#footnote-48)

Those questions stimulate a number of reflections. Why should one assume that authority lies in the “most original” form of the text? Amusingly, critical and fundamentalist scholarship agree on the assumption, but one might query it as an aspect of modern thinking. And why is “authority” the category introduced into to the discussion about the oldest form of the text? Suppose that the Papyrus 967 text is the oldest: would we really then want to conclude that the magnificent message in 36:23–38 therefore lacks “authority”? That conclusion in itself would suggest there is something wrong with our categories, or a need to think of authority in a different way. Even if 36:23–38 was not part of the original Ezekiel, its nature indicates that it issued from an involvement of the spirit of God (it is a nice coincidence that it mentions that spirit), or from what Jer 23:18 calls someone being admitted to Yahweh’s council, or from what 2 Tim 3:16 calls being God-breathed, or from what Heb 1:1 calls God speaking to our ancestors. It has authority. At some point an influential Jewish community recognized that fact, which is how it came to be in MT.

Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**36:16–18** Like 33:23–33, but unusually, at first Yahweh simply addresses Ezekiel and gives him no instruction about delivering this message to anyone. Thus, when he does articulate it to the Kebarites or when other people read it, at first they are in effect overhearing it or reading it over his shoulder. It is not a message addressed to them but one that concerns people “living on their land,” the people back home or another generation. If they were lulled into a false sense of security, the eventual “therefore” in 36:22 with its instruction to address Israel’s household may disabuse them. The Kebarites are members of “Israel’s household” who were formerly “living on their land.”

These opening verses “are as succinct a summary of Ezekiel's preaching so far as one could imagine” (Wright, 288; Häner, 407–20, considers specific connections with 5:5–17; 11:14–21; 16; 20; and 24:13–14). Yet typically, Ezekiel’s summary and reiteration is not simply repetition.

He starts with “defilement,” making the regular assumption in Leviticus that similar concerns hold together ethical wrongdoing (pouring out blood), religious wrongdoing (serving idols), and bodily wrongdoing (ignoring the rules about matters such as menstruation). All are equally wrong and equally defiling. They stain people, make them taboo, and make it impossible for them to relate to God. Ezekiel’s extra note is that they defile Yahweh’s land as well as defiling his people. Only rarely does the First Testament speak of the land as defiled or of defiling the land (see Lev 18:24–28; Num 35:33–34; Deut 21:23 Jer 2:7; 3:2, 9; 16:18), and only here does Ezekiel speak in these terms, though he does refer elsewhere to cleansing the land (22:24; 39:12–16). As a contagion comes on other people or on clothing from the taboo attaching to a man who has had an emission of semen or a women who is menstruating, so a contagion comes on the land from people who ignore the rules about taboo. It makes the land throw them out, or throw them up as Lev 18:24–28 vividly puts it. Here, Ezekiel rather speaks of Yahweh’s fury at the defiling of his land, which is why he himself threw them off it.

Ezekiel’s further extra note is expressed in the double antanaclasis\* that suggests links between wrongdoing and its consequences. He twice uses the verb “pour out” (שׇׁפַךְ) and three times uses the preposition “over” (עַל): he *poured out* wrath *over* them, *over* the blood that they *poured out over* the country (Fishbane, 250). Menstruation might provide a simile for defiling the land because it involves blood and thus parallels the bloodshed that defiled the land (Bowen, 222). It is important that it is a symbol. Words such as defilement and uncleanness can seem linked to sin, but a link comes about only when people ignore the taboo associated with them. A funny but unfortunate typo in a commentary on Ezek 16, picking up the phrase “a menstruous woman,” refers to “a monstruous woman,” but the First Testament associates no revulsion with matters such as emission of semen or menstruation in themselves. KJV thus usually translates the term for “menstrual taboo” (נׅדׇּה) simply as “separation”—see the verse-by-verse commentary on 7:19–20 and 18:6 (here KJV has “a removed woman”). “It is time to eradicate the belief that a woman’s menstrual cycle is “unclean,” and therefore an appropriate simile for pollution” (Bowen, 226).

**36:19** Yahweh’s wrath finds expression in throwing them off their “land,” as he first calls it (אֲדׇמׇה, their land in its earthiness; 36:16), out of the “country” (אֶרֶץ, their country set over other countries; 36:18). He does not call it “my land” or “my country” (cf. 36:5), but “their land,” which it remains (36:24), the country that he gave their ancestors (37:25). They defiled their own land, their own country! What was wrong with these people? Ezekiel also does not actually say that Yahweh threw them out but that he “scattered” them (פּוּץ hiphil) with the result that they “dispersed” (זׇרׇה niphal) far and wide. These two verbs are synonyms but the doubling makes it possible to refer one to Yahweh’s action and one to their action, and to reflect both the migration that Yahweh imposed on Nebuchadrezzar’s victims and the flight that some people chose as refugees. Saying that Yahweh scattered rather than threw out, and referring to their dispersing, also prepares the way for the affirmation about his getting them and collecting them (36:24). In addition, accompanying the reference to pouring out wrath is the declaration about having “exercised authority” or implemented a ruling (שׇׁפַט, traditionally “judged”). There is both strength of feeling and propriety in Yahweh’s action.

**36:20–21** An unfortunate consequence, also amusing if it were not so serious, follows from Yahweh’s action. It adds profanation to defilement. Whereas defilement turns something clean into something taboo, profanation turns something sacred into something ordinary. The Israelites’ leaving their homeland gives the impression that their God couldn’t enable them to stay there. Thus Yahweh is “concerned” about his sacred name. More often than not, that verb (חׇמַל) appears in the negative. In Ezekiel, more often than not it relates to Yahweh’s not being concerned over Israel’s fate. He is not willing to take pity on Israel and spare it from his wrath, not least in connection with action that entails defilement (e.g., 5:11). Subtly or dryly or wryly, then, Ezekiel has Yahweh concerned about Israel’s fate because he is concerned about his own reputation. Any decent prophet surely should be so concerned. And given that Yahweh is not some ordinary deity, it would surely be inappropriate for him to leave the world with the impression that he was just some ordinary deity.

**36:22–23** As usual, Yahweh’s “therefore” introduces a resolve issuing from the preceding review. It is good news, unlike other such resolves. But in keeping with the nature oif the preceding review, it is not unalloyed inspiration. It continues to put the people in their place. Yahweh’s restorative action will indeed be based on the necessity to do something about the discredit that Israel has brought on him. It will not imply that they deserve it. Nor will it be consequent or dependent on their becoming ashamed of themselves, though that will be appropriate response to his declaration (cf. 36:32). Nor will his action be an expression of grace or love towards them. Ezekiel’s logic complements the logic that will be expressed in Isa 40–55. There is nothing “soft-hearted” about Ezekiel’s declaration (Zimmerli, 2:247). The sacredness of Yahweh’s name was the reason the exile had to happen and it is also the reason why Yahweh has to take some opposite action (Clements, 161). But if you are Israel, you will not mind what is the basis for his concern, if it is going to issue in you going home.

**36:24–25** So Yahweh will bring the Israelites back from the foreign countries to “your land” and sprinkle them to cleanse them from their defilement. Yahweh thus reverts to the earlier matters in his review, before he came to the question of profanation. Cleansing from material stains can require the application of some purgative substance, or it can be effected by water, or the stain may fade with time. Likewise, cleansing from some forms of defilement involves blood, and cleansing from other forms simply requires time to pass, while cleansing from yet other forms is effected by water (see, e.g., Lev 15). The only other passage that speaks of sprinkling (זׇרַק) with water is Num 19:13, 20, and the haftarah\* for Num 19 thus comes from Ezek 36; Tg. also makes the link. Yahweh takes the practice of cleansing through water as a symbol for the cleansing that Israel needs. Metaphorically, Yahweh will sprinkle Israel with “clean water,” a unique phrase implying “cleansing water” (cf. Greenberg, 730) or “expiation water” (Rashi, in MG) or, appropriately, the water for a woman’s immersion at the end of her period (Qimhi, in MG). *M. Yoma* 8:9 quotes Rabbi Aqiba (cf. Blenkinsopp, 167):

Your good fortune, Israel! Before whom are you made clean, and who makes you clean? Your Father in heaven, as it is said (Ezek 36), “I will sprinkle clean water on you and you will be clean.” And it says (Jer 17), “The Lord is Israel’s hope” [מׅקְוֵה]. As a purification bath [מׅקְוֶה] cleanses the defiled, also the Holy One (blessed be he) cleanses Israel.

(There are two homonymous\* nouns מׅקְוֶה, one meaning hope, one denoting a water reservoir, and in PBH specifically a purification bath.)

Ezekiel extends the link by incorporating the reference to plural “defilements” (טֻמְאוֹת), which otherwise occurs in the plural only in Lev 16:16 and 19 (Greenberg, 730). Such physical cleansing rites will be further developed at Qumran and through John the baptizer, and they will speak to Christians about baptism (e.g., Oecolampadius 215; cf. Beckwith, 177), while the symbolic language of 36:25–26 appears in Heb 10:22.[[49]](#footnote-49)

**36:26** One could say that Yahweh’sreview established three issues that needed to be faced, in connection with sacredness, cleansing, and renewal: the correcting of profaneness, defilement, and defiance (Fishbane, 251). The action in 36:24–25 related to sacredness and with cleansing. The action in 3:26–28 relates to the third need. In the absence of action here, the defilement (and presumably the expulsion and profanation) will simply recur.[[50]](#footnote-50) In substance 3:26–28 thus relates to the opening of the review, though the language is different and these verses might derive from another message. They form a pair with 11:19–20:

19I will give them one mind, 26I will give you a new mind,

and a new spirit I will put within you. and a new spirit I will put within you.

I will remove the rock mind from within them, I will remove the rock mind from your flesh,

and give them a flesh mind, and give you a flesh mind,

 27and my spirit I will put inside you.

20In order that by my laws they will walk, I will make it that you will walk by my laws,

and my rulings they will keep, and act on them. and my rulings will keep, and act on them

 28You will live in the country that I gave to your ancestors.

And they will be a people for me, And you will be a people for me,

and I will be God for them. and I myself will God for you.

Both divine undertakings compare and contrast with 18:30–31:

Turn, turn yourselves from all your acts of rebellion, and waywardness will not be your downfall. Throw away from attachment to you all your acts of rebellion with which you acted, and produce yourselves a fresh mind and a fresh spirit.

It is up to Yahweh. It is also up to them. Neither will work separate from the other.

“Mind” is anatomically “heart” (לֵב), which stands for the entire inner person as it thinks about things, reacts emotionally to things, forms views, formulates attitudes, and makes decisions—with different emphases in different contexts (see 6:9). When Ezekiel adds “a new spirit” to “a new heart,” it separates off or makes explicit an aspect of the meaning of the first expression. Spirit in particular suggests energy, and thus mind and spirit suggest the forming of understanding and the making of decisions, on one hand, and the action that flows from that activity of the mind, on the other.[[51]](#footnote-51) The understanding of Yahweh’s spirit as at work to turn Israelites into people who are faithful to Yahweh is important to the significance of the Yahweh’s spirit in Ezekiel.[[52]](#footnote-52)

**36:27–28** Yahweh’s move to speaking of “my spirit” instead of “a new spirit” nuances his point in 36:26, leads into what follows, and confirms that a “new spirit” implies the drive to live by what one knows. When God gives people a new mind, he will be giving them his mind, of which the New Testament equivalent is “Christ’s mind” (1 Cor 2:16). He will be enabling them to look at things the way he looks at things. And when he gives them a new spirit, he will be giving them his kind of energy, “his own impulsion to goodness and righteousness” (Greenberg, 2:730). God teaches people to do his will, and his good spirit leads them on level ground (Psa 143:10). This giving will mean that people “will walk by my laws, and my ruling will keep.” It is what people had not been doing that thereby issued in the land’s defilement (36:17), though Ezekiel’s actual wording here follows more closely Lev 18:4–5:

My rulings you will act on, and my laws you will keep, walking by them. I am Yahweh your God. You will keep my laws and my rulings that a person acts on and lives by. I am Yahweh.

They will therefore be able to live in the country Yahweh gave to their ancestors (again, see Ezek 36:17). Whereas “live” in 36:28 (יׇשַׁב) is a different word from “live” in Lev 18:5 (חׇיׇה), people’s living back in Canaan will issue from the action that Yahweh takes and the action the people take. It will put into effect the mutual commitment of “you will be a people for me, and I myself will be God for you.” The logic of the relationship between God’s acts and his people’s acts is thus the one Paul will assume. While repentance is not a condition of God restoring his people, commitment to him in one’s moral, religious, and personal life is an indispensable consequence of that restoration. People will no longer surrender their bodies to sin as instruments of wickedness but present themselves to God as people who have been brought from death to life (Rom 6:13).

**36:29a** The summary promise in 36:28 looked like an ending, and what now follows might be in origin a new and separate message. In this context, it further nuances Yahweh’s promises in 36:16–28, but first it summarizes them by means of Ezekiel’s second use of the verb “deliver” (יׇשַׁע hiphil). The third occurrence will come in 37:23.[[53]](#footnote-53) This is “the commonest soteriological term in religious contexts, but the rarest in everyday language,” and its subject “is almost without exception Yahweh or his appointed representative.”[[54]](#footnote-54) Whereas in 34:22 its broad-ranging and theological significance did not come out, here it does, especially as the promise follows on 36:24–28. “So I will deliver you from all your defilements,” a unique expression (*HUB*), constitutes a neat summary of the gathering, cleansing, and transforming that Yahweh has been promising.

**36:29b–30** It leads into what constitutes in this context a spelling out of what it will mean to live in the country again, in terms of grain, fruit, and produce, a neat summary of the necessities of life for people living on the stretch of land that they farm. Hos 2:21–22 [23–24] in a similar connection has grain, wine, and oil, while Haggai later makes a link between the same necessities and commitment to Yahweh in association with avoiding defilement (Zimmerli, 2:249–50). Theodoret (243–44) comments: “I am aware that each of these references [in 36:28–30] can also be taken spiritually; but I consider the prophetic word is promising material goods here-and-now to the Jews; since great devastation gripped the land at the time, he promises them an abundance of fruits of all kinds, and forecasts [in 36:31] as well the benefit that would ensue from it.” The particular promise that there will be no more famine and no more of the shame attached to famine recalls one of Ezekiel’s three standard threats of famine, epidemic, and sword and recalls (for instance) the story of Elimelek and Naomi’s family being obliged shamefacedly to leave Judah for Moab because Judah was not producing for them, whereas Moab could (Ruth 1:1). Once Yahweh summoned a famine (2 Kgs 8:1); now he summons a harvest.

**36:31–32** Ezekiel again makes the counter-intuitive point (how counter-intuitive Ezekiel is!) that spiritual restoration will include not forgetting the terrible things that you did, but remembering them (see 20:43). Memories of sin can be negative but they can be good (Clements, 164). There is bad self-blame and good self-blame (Bowen, 224–25). Thinking about the dire things you did can be one key to changing your pattern of life, an aspect of receiving a new mind. In case they miss the nature of the litotes\* in his reference to “not good things” following up his reference to “dire paths” (Ezekiel is also not inclined to understatement rather than hyperbole),\* he makes explicit that he is talking about “wayward acts” and “outrages” that properly make people “feel a loathing at yourselves” (literally, “at your faces”) and feel shame and disgrace. “Not for your sake am I acting,” Ezekiel further reiterates from 36:22 (repeating the overstatement that is indeed more characteristic of him). It is indeed a key motif in this passage. Israel’s restoration happens for God’s sake, to reverse the turning of his name into something ordinary.

**36:33–36** The new introduction suggests that Ezekiel is appending another message that was once separate but now further hones Yahweh’s promise. “Architecture” as well as “husbandry” is the work of the Lord” (Greenhill, 736). Yahweh not only overthrows but also builds and plants (Jer 1:10; 18:9; 24:6; Allen, 2:179). He is not only God of the land where things grow, but God of the town where many farmers actually live and where potters, jewelers, scribes, metalworkers, and administrators live and work. Once again he promises that the land will be served (that is worked) instead of ignored, and thus will be fruitful rather than desolate. And once again Ezekiel goes beyond what he said earlier in this message as a whole. People will not only refrain from reproaching its people. They will compare it to the Eden where Yahweh commissioned the first human being to “serve it” (Gen 2:15). Ezekiel thus adds to the links with Gen 1–2 in 36:11–12 and to the hints that in restoring Israel Yahweh is pursuing his creation purpose.

That the towns will now be occupied as “fortified” might be a surprise. Yahweh will later picture Gog of Magog invading the restored land as a country of open communities, towns without fortifications (38:11). Zech 2:8 will have the same vision for Jerusalem, though that will not stop Nehemiah from rebuilding Jerusalem’s walls in light of the presence of “the nations that remain” around the restored community whom Nehemiah saw reason to be concerned about. Ezekiel is engaged in an internal conversation that corresponds to a conversation between Zechariah and Nehemiah. There is a positive aspect to the fortifying of a town: it earns the admiration of the people around, it testifies to Yahweh’s grace and capacity to act, it offers protection. But there is a negative aspect: it suggests you may not trust in Yahweh and may set limits on how far you think Yahweh can enable you to grow. There is positive aspect to letting your town be an open community: it suggests a confidence in your future, an openness to outsiders, and a trust in Yahweh. But there is a negative aspect: it may tempt Gog of Magog to attempt action they would be wiser to resist.

**36:37–38** Yet again Ezekiel provides a new introduction to what may be an originally separate message that once more nuances the promises we have read so far. Most instances of the verb translated “letting myself be inquired of” (דׇּרַשׁ niphal) are in Ezekiel (see 14:3; 20:3, 31), but all the others involve Yahweh questioning or denying the possibility. Here Yahweh adds another reversal of the chastisement entailed by the people’s defiling behavior. It has been impossible to pray. Now it will be possible again. This affirmation is a subordinate clause leading into the main clause with the promise “I will make them abundant.”[[55]](#footnote-55) Yahweh is not making a general point (though the general point could be made) but issuing an invitation relating to a topic that would be a natural subject for prayer. The community cut down by events of recent decades needs and wants to grow. And Yahweh has promised that it will (36:10–11). It is now told that it can pray for that blessing, perhaps that it needs to: “God expects that his people should seek to him for performance of those promises he graciously makes them” (Greenhill, 737). They are a flock, but a flock of human beings, yet no ordinary flock, and not merely in size. They will be like a flock of sheep present in Jerusalem for sacrifice at a festival such as Passover or Sukkot. Such a flock is sacred and clean. The simile once again issues the promise, but also the challenge, that the restoration and flourishing of the flock in the towns Yahweh has rebuilt includes its not falling back into defilement.

Biblical Theology Comments

Ezekiel here expounds a form of theodicy (Allen, 2:180), though in a typically jolting Ezekiel form. It is necessary that Yahweh restores his people. But the necessity does not come from his indebtedness to them, or an obligation deriving from having treated them in a tough way. Nor does it entail his forgiving them (Ezekiel never refers to forgiveness). Nor is it a response to their repentance (they have not shown any). In restoring Israel, God is concerned for himself. God will likewise send Jesus “to demonstrate his righteousness” (Rom 3:25) and he will forgive sins “for his name’s sake” (1 John 2:12) (Greenwood, 713). Jesus will pray for the Father to glorify himself, and his Father will affirm that he will (John 12:28; Henry, 1375). So God will take action on behalf of scattered Israel “for my sacred name,” which they have caused to be treated as ordinary. His action will restore the distinctive sacredness of his name before the nations by showing what he can do “through you before their eyes.” When he says it is “not for your sake” that “I am acting,” he is probably stating the point more sharply than he means it, as when he says he wants commitment not sacrifice (Hos 6:6; Wright, 291). He means he is acting less for this reason than for that reason or not just for that reason but for this reason. But the sharpness with which he makes the point drives it home. “Not compassion for Israel but divine self-pity has coerced Yhwh to take action.”[[56]](#footnote-56) The appropriate response would then be, “May your name be treated as sacred” (Matt 6:9), along with “may your reign come about” and “may your will be done” (Olley, 484).

Application and Devotional Implications

Israel needs to think in a new way and to have the energy and dynamism to take action in ways that it knows are right. Yahweh undertakes to deal with both needs by giving it a new mind and a new spirit. Ideally, at least, the more clearly we see things, the more likely we are to act on the basis of what we see. But this is more theory than practice. Yahweh has made clear what he expects of Israel, but Israel has not acted on it. Israel needs some undergirding of its understanding of who Yahweh is as the person who stands behind his expectations, which might issue in the energy to do what he says. It is the process that Jer 31:31–34 calls writing Yahweh’s teaching on people’s minds and Deut 30:1–10 calls circumcising their minds. The Deuteronomy image is closer to Ezekiel’s image of a rock mind, an inflexible mind. The problem with God’s people is that our thinking can be inflexible as rock. Yahweh wants it to have the pliability of flesh. He has always wanted people to think in new and flexible ways—that is, to think in accordance with the Torah. But natural thinking follows our instincts or our culture rather than the Torah. Yahweh is also engaged in encouraging flexible thinking by means of the messages in Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah 40–55.

It is a process in which Israel itself has to be engaged. Ezekiel is not talking about a metaphorical heart transplant operation that he undertakes as a metaphorical, metaphysical surgeon. In isolation, one might infer that talking in terms of “give” or “put” (both times נׇתַן) or “remove” (סוּר hiphil) implied a unilateral action that could then determine what people do, but this does not make sense in light of the way Ezekiel involves the people. It is contradicted by the explicit exhortation in 18:30–31. His messages “do not see the *promise* of inner renewal contradicting the *encouragement* to inner renewal.”[[57]](#footnote-57) And it does not make sense, given that actually we do not behave as if we have had a moral or religious heart or spirit transplant. We still have a rock heart or uncircumcised heart, in that our thinking is shaped by our culture rather than by what God has said through the Torah, the Prophets, and Jesus. God is here referring to giving his people a bigger knowledge of himself, of his actions on their behalf, and of his expectations of them, and looking for them to accept these and live by them. This process is an ongoing one, though it is also one characterized by some markers at the exodus and at Sinai, in the exile, and in Jesus. The church joins with Israel in praying:

Create for me a clean mind, God;

renew a firm spirit within me.

Don’t throw me out of your presence;

and don’t take your holy spirit away from me. (Psa 51:10–11 [12–13])

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## The Nation Brought Back to Life (37:1–14)

Outline

Ezekiel relates a visionary experience in which Yahweh commissioned him to undertake a sign act within the vision. In the sign act, he calls on a collection of bones to come back to life, and they do. Yahweh then explains the sign act’s meaning. Its background is the community’s sense that its life is over. It is dead. It has no future. In and by the sign act Yahweh brings it back to life and settles it again on its land in Canaan. “Anyone reading this unit who has not read Ezek 4–24 needs to stop immediately and read them. It is impossible to appreciate the hope of this unit without having experienced the previous despair” (Bowen, 227).

Like the preceding messages, this vision presupposes the fall of Jerusalem and presupposes a context sometime after 587. The stress on the dryness of the bones again implies not the situation immediately after the city’s fall but one where enough time has passed for morale to have sunk to low depths. We cannot tell how long after the calamity. All we can say is that it belongs sometime between 33:21 and 40:1, between 587 and 573. If we think in terms of half way, we won’t be far wrong.

The passage unfolds:

Yahweh takes hold of Ezekiel and interrogates him (37:1–3)

Yahweh commissions Ezekiel and undertakes action related to the commission (37:4–6)

Ezekiel fulfills his commission and Yahweh half-fulfills his undertaking (37:7–8)

Yahweh extends the commission (37:9)

Ezekiel fulfills the commission and results come (37:10)

 The closing “very, very” pairs with the “very, very” in 37:2

Yahweh interprets the background to the vision (37:11)

Yahweh gives Ezekiel a further commission with a promise related to the vision’s content (37:12–14)

Yahweh’s “my spirit” and “I will set you down” pairs with “Yahweh’s spirit” “set me down” in 37:1 (רוַּח and נוַּח; Häner, 427).

The passage has no introductory “Yahweh’s message came to me,” and its content with its references to Yahweh’s spirit/breath, to Yahweh putting spirit/breath into the people, and to their return to the land of Israel gives it a close link with 36:16–38. “Great ideas and themes carry the greatest weight and endure the longest when they are given a visionary form.… The envisioned picture says nothing that Ezekiel has not already said” in Ezek 36, but the image in this vision gives the message new and lasting power (Clements, 165). It fits that MTL has only a setumah\* after 36:38. In other words, it treats 36:1–37:14 as one “chapter.” On the other hand, 37:14 makes for a plausible end to a message, and MT has a petuhah there, while 37:15 then does have an introductory “Yahweh’s message came to me” that clearly marks a new beginning. It is odd that the medieval chapter division makes 37:1–14 and 37:15–28 one chapter.

“The vision of Israel as dry bones and the promise of the bones’ resurrection are from a certain Christian point of view the effective culmination of Ezekiel’s prophecy and book, and indeed of the Old Testament” (Jenson, 281). But they are not that within 33:21–39:29 or within the Ezekiel scroll or within the First Testament itself.

Translation

1Yahweh’s hand came on me, got me to go out by Yahweh’s spirit, and set me down in the middle of the plain. It was full of bones. 2He got me to pass through it[[58]](#footnote-58) over them[[59]](#footnote-59) all around, and there, very many over the surface of the plain, and there, very dry. 3He said to me, “My man, will these bones live?” I said, “Lord Yahweh, you are the one who knows.” 4He said to me, “Prophesy over these bones and say to them, Dry bones, listen to Yahweh’s message. 5The Lord Yahweh has said this[[60]](#footnote-60) to these bones. There, I am causing breath to come in you, and you will live. 6I will put sinews over you, cause flesh to go up over you, spread skin over you, and put breath in you, and you will live. And you will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.”

7I prophesied as I was commanded, and there was a sound as I prophesied. There, a shaking, and bones joined together,[[61]](#footnote-61) bone to its bone. 8I looked, and there, sinews and flesh went up over them, and skin spread over them, on top, but there was no breath in them. 9He said to me, “Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, my man, and say to the breath, The Lord Yahweh has said this. From the four winds come, breath, and blow into these slaughtered people, so that they live.” 10So I acted as a prophet[[62]](#footnote-62) as he commanded me, the breath came into them, they came alive, and they stood on their feet, a very, very big force.

11He said to me, My man, these bones: they are Israel’s entire household. There, people are saying, “Our bones are dry and our hope has disappeared—we have been cut off, we people.”[[63]](#footnote-63) 12Therefore prophesy and say to them, The Lord Yahweh has said this. There, I am opening your graves and I will get you up out of your graves, my people, and I will get you to come to the land of Israel. 13You will acknowledge that I am Yahweh through my opening your graves and getting you up out of your graves, my people. 14I will put my breath in you, you will live, and I will set you down[[64]](#footnote-64) on your land. And you will acknowledge that I Yahweh have spoken and acted (an affirmation of Yahweh).

Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 37:10, 12, and 14.[[65]](#footnote-65)

**37:1** In the expression בְּרוַּח יְהוׇה, “by Yahweh’s spirit,” LXX “the Lord [led me out] by a spirit” takesיְהוׇה as the subject of the verb rather than as absolute following רוַּח, which it takes as construct. This fits with Yahweh being the subject of “set me down.”

Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**37:1a** Ezekiel’s account of Yahweh’s hand coming on him and of the activity of a spirit or of Yahweh’s spirit parallels the more complex accounts in 1:1–3:27; 8:1–11:25; 40:1–48:35. It denotes a strong reality of Yahweh’s forceful presence, felt in his body. Ezekiel is here less explicit about the nature of what he experienced, and he does not refer to seeing a vision. He speaks of Yahweh’s spirit, as in 11:5, which both links back with Yahweh’s reference to “my spirit” in 36:27 and links forward to the reference in 37:14 (Block, 2:373). In 1:1–3:27, a spirit physically moves him around, and at first sight 37:1–14 suggests the spirit similarly transporting him physically into the plain. Yahweh might then have enabled him to see in his mind the events in the main part of the passage. But it never reports him coming back from the plain, and more likely the whole passage parallels 8:1–11:25 and relates something that happened in his mind, in a vision. It was in his imagination, then, that Yahweh took him out into the “plain,” the wide flat Mesopotamian area around Kebar (cf. 3:22–23; 8:4).

**37:1b–2** What he sees there is the remains of a people. While it might be the remains of an army, Ezekiel does not specifically indicate that. His emphasis is on the quantity of the remains and their total deadness. They are just bones, very many of them, and “very dry.” “The exiled Israel is not just metaphorically dead.… Nor is Israel in some shadowy existence in Sheol.… The prophet learns in his journey through the Valley of Bones that Israel is really dead.”[[66]](#footnote-66) The picture recalls one of the curses in a treaty between the Assyrian king Esarhaddon and one of his Median underlings: “May Ninurta, leader of the gods, fell you with his fierce arrow, and fill the plain with your corpses, give your flesh to eagles and vultures to feed upon” (*ANET*, 538).[[67]](#footnote-67) The state of the bones in the vision reflects such a process. “The bones would not even attract a dog sniffing them.”[[68]](#footnote-68) Neither Ezekiel nor Yahweh speaks of the possibility that in the scene Yahweh’s own covenant curses have been implemented (Deut 28:25–26; cf. Jer 34:17–20). The focus is on the scene’s “surreal” nature: Ezekiel is “the Hieronymus Bosch of the Old Testament.”[[69]](#footnote-69) It is a solemn and scary tableau, indeed a “terrifying” one (Zimmerli, 2:259), though we learn of no reaction on Ezekiel’s part. “The repetitions and detail of the narrative make it impressively solemn; the audience has time to take in the amazing panorama” (Greenberg, 2:748). It has no option. The repeated “there” (הׅנֵּה, traditionally “lo,” seven more times in the passage) keeps drawing attention to the real and visible nature of the scene. Ezekiel is not allowed to escape, and neither is his audience. Part of the narrative’s power comes from the repetitions: there, spirit/wind/breath, bones, prophesy, live.

**37:3** Yahweh’s question is different from the one in Jer 1:11, 13, but slightly more like ones in Amos 7:8; 8:1 and Zech 4:2, 5. It is both curious and ridiculous (Block, 2:374). All these interrogations have something in common. Although Yahweh does not tell Ezekiel to relate his experience to his people, it seems likely that he would do so, even before putting it into writing and incorporating it in a scroll that people might read. The question-and-answer exchange (along with the entire vision) is significant for Ezekiel’s listeners or readers rather than for Ezekiel himself. The question formally addressed to Ezekiel is a question addressed to them. Ezekiel’s reply is the best reply they might possibly give, and better than any reply they might actually give. It is perhaps surprising that Ezekiel does not ask about the defilement that Yahweh is bringing upon him through his contact with these human remains (contrast 4:9–15), as he does not raise the question about covenant curses.

**37:4–6** He knows that there was no way Israel could bring itself back to life.[[70]](#footnote-70) Hiebel comments:

From Ezek 8–11, the vision of the defiled temple, it becomes evident that the relationship between YHWH and Israel is in a crisis beyond repair; death and destruction are the consequences. The reality of death is the starting point of 37:1-14. The vision demonstrates YHWH’s ability and willingness to restore life even to the dry, scattered bones and, thus, also to Israel as the people of YHWH. For the author(s) of these texts, the initiative for destruction lies on the human side first; the initiative for restoration lies with God alone.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Yet “from the very first,” since they were in Egypt, “life from the dead has been the sign under which the history of Israel has stood.”[[72]](#footnote-72) Indeed, it is not just the sign under which Israel has stood, if Ezek 37 is “the most powerful commentary on Gen 27.”[[73]](#footnote-73)

Ezekiel and his audience might have no great difficulty with the idea that Yahweh could bring people back from the dead, or with the idea that a prophet such as Elijah could be Yahweh’s agent in doing so. Elijah and Elisha, after all, had done it (1 Kgs 17:17–24; 2 Kgs 4:18–37). The idea of resurrection to an afterlife is a different question, but that is not the topic in this passage. Admittedly, prophesying to thousands of bones is a typically extreme Ezekiel version of the kind of possibility that the First Testament elsewhere envisages, and Yahweh’s proposal would warrant the incredulous response that it does not get (Jerome, 418–19). Even apart from general questions of feasibility, the idea that one could cause bones to become living people by talking to them would surely seem far-fetched. But Yahweh intends to speak to the bones, in a performative\* act that makes things happen as it did at creation. Later, Jesus will speak to the dead and stinky Lazarus in a similarly implausible way (John 11:43). Ezekiel is being summoned to be the voice of such speech that is a performative act, and such acts require courage.[[74]](#footnote-74)

**37:7–8** “Ezekiel, being an obedient prophet, prophesies” (Bowen, 228). When he does, “first sound, then sight; Ezekiel’s senses are bombarded” (Allen, 2:185). But again, the passage is designed to impact Ezekiel’s audience. Ezekiel uses both visual and auditory language throughout, with a view to getting his audience or readers to see, hear, and experience the event and thus be drawn into its reality with its implications for them.[[75]](#footnote-75) When Yahweh gave his instructions to Ezekiel, he had not divided the resuscitation process into two stages, but there turn out to be two stages to the bringing back to life, which adds further to the drama of the event, as the audience pictures it. It also corresponds to the process of the creation of the first human being (Gen 2:7). And it corresponds in reverse to human experience of life and death. A human person is a physical thing, a body, with breath mysteriously breathed into it. When people die, the breath goes, but for a while the body carries on existing just as it was. There is body, and there is breath. So it naturally was at creation, so it is in reverse in human experience, and the process here cohere with both.

**37:9** Nor had Yahweh initially bidden Ezekiel to speak to the breath, but now he does so. He thus clarifies the process of coming to life a little, though he also makes it a little more mysterious. “Breath” (37:5, 6, 8) is now “the breath,” which may suggest that there is a kind of repository of the breath of life somewhere that Ezekiel is to call on. When Jesus dies, he commits his breath to God in words from Psa 31:5 [6] that use the word רוַּח, and then he “breathed out” (ἐξέπνευσεν; Luke 23:46). Yahweh himself is not going to breathe into these bodies as he did in Gen 2:7. He directs Ezekiel to this mysterious source, whose location is clarified in a way that preserves its mystery by identifying it as the place where the four breaths/winds are. This is not so surprising. The winds/breaths in their dynamic energy are an embodiment of the dynamic energy of Yahweh’s breath/spirit. In breathtaking fashion, then, Yahweh will breathe into these bodies, but he will make Ezekiel his agent in this process. Ezekiel will tell the breath that Yahweh is bidding it come to these bodies.

He describes them, however, not as bodies but as corpses. This is not a repeat of the original creation process or even a reversal of the natural process whereby people die a natural death, but a reversal of the unnatural process whereby people are killed before their time. They are “slaughtered people” (הֲרוּגׅים). Ezekiel’s usual word for people killed in battle is חֲלׇלׅים, “slain people” (e.g., 35:8). One of the few occasions when he speaks of “slaughter” in connection with the Judahites is in Yahweh’s bidding to the executioners in 9:6. These people are the victims of Yahweh’s act of judgment in Jerusalem. They will be not only people “slain by the sword,” which is not mentioned (Qimhi, in MG), but also people who died by the scourges of famine and epidemic, which were also Yahweh’s agents.

**37:10** Ezekiel is again the obedient prophet, the breath is the obedient breath, the process works, and the dead become undead, like zombies.[[76]](#footnote-76) But coming to life is not the end (Greenberg, 2:748): “Yahweh’s own desire was to put the people back on their feet” (Allen, 2:187). This follows. They are ready for action, like Ezekiel himself in 2:1–2; 3:24 (Zimmerli, 2:262), or at least ready for something else to happen (see 37:14). Now there is a positive “very, very” (compare and contrast the “very… very in 37:2). They are a very, very big “force” (חַיׅל), which sounds like a fighting force, though Ezekiel otherwise uses the term only of foreign armies (e.g., 29:18–19; 38:4).

**37:11** In itself a sign act or a parable\* could stop with 37:10, though it then would cry out for interpretation. The interpretation first points in the opposite direction from the word “force.” The bones represent the entire family, not just the men of fighting age. Further, the expression “entire household” suggests both Judahites in Babylonia and other foreign countries and also people who never left Jerusalem and Judah. It could suggest Ephraim as well as Judah, as 37:15–28 will make explicit. The interpretation goes on with a quotation expressing the death lament that people were praying. Fragments of ostensible quotation and conversation play a prominent role in Ezekiel, and this one is a highpoint.[[77]](#footnote-77) If it is not their actual words, it could have been. It neatly follows the form appropriate to a protest psalm and comprises three two-word statements such as are typical in expressions of grief. The first of the statements could have triggered the vision.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Our-bones are-dry.

Our-hope has-disappeared.

We-have-been-cut-off, we-people.

“Our” (ֵינוּ ) and “our” (ֵנוּ ) and the final “we” (ׇנוּ ) rhyme plaintively at the end of each line.

Bones stands for the person (e.g., Pss 31:10 [11]; 35:10; Prov 3:8; 15:30; Isa 66:14). Hope (תּׅקְוׇה) disappearing or perishing (אׇבַד) picks up the description of mother Judah or mother Jerusalem or mother Israel in 19:5—here, mother Israel would be appropriate. These are Ezekiel’s sole references to hope. The image of being cut off recurs in Lam 3:54 (where the suppliant had been convinced he was cut off but now knows he was wrong), Isa 53:8 (where Yahweh’s servant is cut off from the country of the living), and Psa 88:5 [6], that darkest psalm that compares the suppliant with people who are dead and thus cut off from Yahweh’s hand,[[79]](#footnote-79) from any place where Yahweh takes action on people’s behalf.

**37:12–13** Once again Ezekiel is bidden to prophesy, but these words will be delivered outside the vision. Yet he will still be addressing dead people. his words will be just as fantastical as the ones delivered in the vision, because “the hardest part of Ezekiel's task” is based on an implausible yearning: “If only the exiles could be brought to believe that Israel had a future” (Skinner, 343). Yahweh moves from the image of bones scattered over a plain to the more literal image of a graveyard. The idea of opening graves and getting the remains out to take them home recalls several incidents in the First Testament: see Gen 49:29–32; 50:12–14, 25–26; Exod 13:19; Josh 24:32; 2 Sam 21:12–14.[[80]](#footnote-80)

**32:14** The good news going beyond the parallel with those incidents is that the people who have died will go home alive. In this passage, only here does Yahweh speak in terms of “my breath,” making a verbal link with 36:27–28—though there Yahweh was interested in the dynamic moral effect of giving people his breath/spirit, whereas here he is interesting in the life-giving effect of that action. Qimhi, in MG, speaks of a spirit of insight, and this piece of interpretation would fit with another consideration. Much of what Babylonian prophets had to say might have seemed similar to Ezekiel. They served gods who claimed to offer insight and life. Yahweh’s regular closing statement of his aim in speaking through Ezekiel might be especially significant against that background, that “you will acknowledge that I Yahweh have spoken and acted (an affirmation of Yahweh).” It would be important for Judahites to see the difference between Ezekiel and those prophets and on that basis to acknowledge Yahweh.[[81]](#footnote-81)

Biblical Theology Comments

The English word *spirit* has a wide range of meanings, illustrated by different expressions within which it can appear: I am with you in spirit, someone has a spirit of generosity, the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, human beings comprise body and spirit, a demonic spirit assailed someone, I was low in spirit, you kept the letter of the law but not the spirit, she was a leading spirit in the group, they sell wines and spirits. While one can see links between some of these meanings of *spirit*, and they are related etymologically, in usage they more or less become homonyms,\* and it would be inappropriate to seek to like all the meanings of the word.

Something similar is true of רוַּח, whose range of meanings overlaps with that of *spirit* though it is not identical. Ezekiel almost begins with a meaning that might not seem to overlap: רוַּח can signify wind(1:4). It then refers to the spirit of the living creatures, their inner thinking and aims. Ezekiel refers to his own spirit with a similar significance (3:15). When a רוַּח comes into Ezekiel and enables him to stand, the expression hints at supernatural breath entering him. In 37:9–10 רוַּח means ordinary breath (cf. Job 19:17). For practical purposes, then, רוַּח meaning wind, breath, and spirit can be homonyms. Elsewhere, a רוַּח can be an invisible semi-personal supernatural entity that influences a human being with or without the person’s cooperation or awareness or God’s involvement, though presumably at least with God’s acquiescence. Examples are the (bad) רוַּח that affected Saul (1 Sam 16), the (deceptive) רוַּח that could affect prophets (1 Kgs 22), and the unclean spirits in the Gospels. It’s hard to find certain references of this kind to “good” spirits in the Scriptures. The activity of a spirit on a person could explain what otherwise seems action uncharacteristic of this human person, as when one may sometimes say that “an idea came to me” or “I don’t know what possessed me to do it.”

Ezek 37 works spectacularly with the homonymy of רוַּח, though in doing so, it points towards some links of substance: the wind is Yahweh’s breath, someone’s breath and physical nature are two aspects of their life as a person. Ezekiel also works consciously or unconsciously with this homonymy in 2:2; 3:12–15; 8:3; 11:1, 24, where it can be difficult to know whether he is talking about the wind or about a separate individual רוַּח in Yahweh’s service. Ezekiel leaves open the nature of the link between wind, breath, and spirit.[[82]](#footnote-82) Given the combination of Ezekiel’s account of the involvement of רוַּח in his commissioning as a prophet and his talk of רוַּח in Ezek 36–37, one might see Ezekiel as a catalyst for subsequent First Testament thinking about Yahweh’s spirit.[[83]](#footnote-83)

Application and Devotional Implications

*B. Sanh.* 92b discusses in what sense Ezek 37 was “truth” (אֶמֶת), something that was actually going to happen, and in what sense it was a “parable” (מׇשׇׁל). One can imagine that Ezekiel, like Rabbi Judah in that passage, might have wanted to affirm that it was both truth and parable, and subsequently it has been treated as both. It has been called a true metaphor, and in effect it has functioned thus.[[84]](#footnote-84) It has had powerful practical implications for people in different contexts in a way that reflected an interaction between its inherent meaning in the sense of the meaning it would have had for Ezekiel’s hearers, and the significance it had for readers when they read it in light of their context, convictions, and needs, or their “ideology”—not in the sense of their biased economic or political prejudices but in the sense of their convictions, of what they knew.[[85]](#footnote-85) To put it another way, because this story about God’s breath is God-breathed (θεόπνευστος), it has been profitable for teaching (2 Tim 3:16) in various contexts in which it could enable people to see things that were beyond its own horizon. Thus:

* The surviving fragment of a Qumran prayer (4QPseudo-Ezekiel, 4Q386) begins, “[Yhwh, I have seen many in Israel who lo]ve your name and walk on the paths of justice [צדק]. When will these things happen?” To which Yahweh’s response is to issue a bidding to “[proph]esy over the bones” (*DSS* 2:774–75). The vision becomes a promise to the faithful.[[86]](#footnote-86)
* Ezek 37 is not quoted in the New Testament, though (for instance) the “shaking” perhaps influenced the enigmatic Matt 27:52–53 (Olley, 491).[[87]](#footnote-87) Exegetically it does not refer to resurrection but at most to resuscitation (cf. Jerome, 420), but subsequently Christians took it to signify resurrection, as Jews did. Syr. prefaces its translation with the phrase, “Concerning the Resurrection of the Dead.” Oecolampadius (216; cf. Beckwith, 180) calls the vision “a type of the future resurrection.” This appropriation of the passage usefully reminds readers who might think that the important thing was the soul that the body is integral to the reality of resurrection.
* A frieze in the synagogue in Dura-Europos, between Aleppo and Baghdad, portrays the scene in Ezek 37:1–14 with its hope for the future of the Jewish people as a whole.[[88]](#footnote-88)
* In the AD 800s a monk called Rabanus Maurus wrote a song called “Come, Holy Spirit,” and this prayer became a feature of church worship. It found new significance in the context of the charismatic movement in the United States and elsewhere in the twentieth century and suggested that Ezekiel’s vision might encourage prayer for the renewal of the church, especially where it is dead or dying in Europe and the United States.
* For the Jewish people, in the context of the Holocaust, the vision’s lack of a date encourages the hope that its promise is not linked to space or time. “That vision, that consolation, is offered to every generation, for every generation needs it—and ours more than any before us.[[89]](#footnote-89)
* For some African Americans, the song “Dem bones, dem bones, dem dry bones,” of which one version of the chorus says, “Dem bones gonna walk around,” expresses a hope for their renewal as a people. For African nations that see their situation in the world as hopeless, it encourages hope for renewal.[[90]](#footnote-90) One might entertain the same hope for Indigenous Americans.[[91]](#footnote-91) One might entertain it for Palestinians.[[92]](#footnote-92)

One cannot prove exegetically that such applications of the Scriptures are “correct,” as *B. Sanh.* 92b implies. Ezek 37:1–14 is not evidence for believing in resurrection or renewal. But if on another basis one knows that resurrection or renewal is to be expected, then the vision can help put flesh on the bones of that knowledge and encourage that hope.

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## The Two Households Made One for All Time (37:15–28)

Outline

Whereas a number of themes (e.g., defilement and cleansing, rebellion and obedience, leaving and returning to the land) have recurred so far in the scroll, the subject of the promise in 37:15–22 is novel and surprising. Yahweh now speaks of bringing together the Judahite and Ephraimite clans into one nation. The last sign act in the scroll is to embody and implement the uniting, the first and only positive sign act (omitting the one within a vision in 37:1–14). It will be an aspect of gathering Israelites from all the nations where they have scattered and bringing them back to Canaan, to be ruled by one king. The sign act does not reflect the gloom lying behind 37:1–14, which might or might not mean it comes from a little later in the period between 587 and 573. As in 37:1–14, however, Ezekiel “speaks of Israel’s future in terms that must have struck his audience as absurd” (Darr, on 37:15–28). Perhaps they could just about imagine themselves returning to their homeland, but who are these northerners who are to become one with Judah again, and how could one imagine the long-divided peoples becoming one again? Yet if death can be reversed, so can division (Wright, 312).

In 37:23–28 the message transitions into a focus on the ongoing life that will follow the initial revolution. While 37:22 incorporated a repeated “not again … not ever again,” that becomes a dominant note in 37:23–28, which five times uses the expression “for all time” (עַד־עוֹלׇם or לְעוֹלׇם or simple עוֹלׇם), in connection with life in the land, Davidic leadership, a well-being covenant, and the gift of Yahweh’s sanctuary. And the people will have Yahweh’s own presence over them. The passage summarizes much of the encouragement expressed in Ezekiel’s various promises. Like 37:1–14 (but for different reasons) it might have seemed an appropriate end to Part Five or to the Ezekiel scroll as a whole, though Ezek 38–39 will raise another issue before Part Five or the scroll comes to an end, and Ezek 40–48 forms a vast expansion of the promise in 37:26bβ–28.[[93]](#footnote-93)

There is no formal transition from 37:15–22 to 37:23–28 by means of a phrase such as “the Lord Yahweh has said this” in 37:23, whereas there is such a resumptive phrase in 37:21. Conversely, the “not again … not ever again” in 37:22 and the “single shepherd” in 37:24 make for overlap between 37:15–22 and 37:23–28. But the broadening of focus might suggest that the second part is an originally separate message.[[94]](#footnote-94) The expressions “for all time” and “a covenant for all time” previously occurred only in 16:60 in a passage that looked like a development of the original form of Ezek 16.

In the synagogue lectionary, 37:15–28 is the haftarah\* linking with Gen 44:18–34 as the beginning of the Torah reading from Gen 44:18–47:27. “What the Torah portrays as a family event, the prophet Ezekiel projects as a national hope: the reconciliation and reunification of all the children of Israel.” A family achievement becomes a divine promise (Fishbane, 53, 54).

The passage as a whole unfolds:

Introduction (37:15)

Yahweh’s Instruction regarding two sticks and a single stick (37:16–18)

Yahweh’s reply for when people inquire about the sticks: they stand for the uniting of Judah and Israel, a single stick (37:19–20)

Resumptive introduction (37:21aα)

Yahweh’s intentions regarding Israel as whole: to bring them all back to Canaan to live as a single nation with a single king (37:21aβ–22)

Not again … not ever again (עוֹד … עוֹד)

Their longer-term destiny: to live undefiled under David, by Yahweh’s rules, in Canaan (37:23–25)

 They will be a people for me and I will be God for them

For all time … for all time

Yahweh’s longer term intention: to make a covenant and be with them (37:26–28)

 For all time … for all time … for all time

I will be God for them and they will be a people for me

The nations will acknowledge that I am Yahweh

Translation

15Yahweh’s message came to me: 16And you, my man, get yourself a single stick and write on it, “For Judah and for the Israelites associated with it,” and get[[95]](#footnote-95) a single stick and write on it, “For Joseph (Ephraim’s stick) and Israel’s entire household associated with it.” 17Join them together, a single one to a single one as a single stick for yourself. They will become a single one together[[96]](#footnote-96) in your hand. 18And when the members of your people[[97]](#footnote-97) say to you: “Will you not tell us what these things mean to you?” 19speak to them, The Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, getting Joseph’s stick, in Ephraim’s hand, and Israel’s clans associated with it, and putting them with it, Judah’s stick, and making them into a single stick. They will become a single one in my hand. 20The sticks that you have written on will be in your hand in front of their eyes.21Speak to them, The Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I, getting the Israelites from among the nations where they have gone, gathering them from all around, getting them to come to their country, 22and making them into a single nation in the country, on Israel’s mountains, with there being a single king for all of them. They will not again become two nations. They will not divide into two kingdoms ever again.

23They will not defile themselves again with their lumps and with their detestable objects and with any of their rebellions. I will deliver them from all their settlements in which they committed offenses, and I will cleanse them. They will be a people for me and I will be God for them. 24With my servant David king over them and being a single shepherd for all of them, and them walking by my rulings and keeping my laws and acting on them, 25they will live in the country that I gave my servant Jacob in which your ancestors lived. They and their children and their grandchildren will live in it for all time, with David my servant as prince for them for all time. 26I will solemnize a well-being covenant for them, it being a covenant for all time with them. I will make them,[[98]](#footnote-98) and cause them to abound. I will put my sanctuary among them for all time 27and my dwelling will be over them. I will be God for them and they will be a people for me. 28And the nations will acknowledge that I am Yahweh making Israel sacred, when my sanctuary is among them for all time.

Textual Notes

**37:16 For** MT’s second אֶחׇד, “a single,” LXX “another” implies אַחֵר.

**37:19** While the meaning here is clear, the wording seems confusing. Omitting אֹתׇם, “them,” simplifies things, though LXX, Syr., Sym., and Vg. all have “them.”

**37:22** Q has pl. יׅהְיוּ, “they will become,” K sg. יהוה, “it will become.”

**37:23** For מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיהֶם, “their settlements,” LXX “their lawlessness acts” and more explicitly Sym. “their turnings” imply מְשׁוּבֹתֵיהֶם.

**37:26** LXX has a shorter version of the text, accompanying a number of slight differences spread through the unit.

**37:28** MT has a marker\* after 37:28.

Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**37:15–17** “And you,” says Yahweh (וְאַתׇּה), suggesting a continuation from the dry bones vision (cf. the “and you/so you” in 7:2; 22:2; 27:2). Ezekiel is to undertake another sign act, which 37:18 implies will be performed in front of his community. “The Israelites associated with” Judah might be people from the north who moved south in the context of the decline and fall of the northern state, and people from the Simeon and Benjamin clans that were linked with Judah. But Ezekiel goes on to a startling, emphatic, visionary promise of the reconstitution of the entire nation of Israel, north and south. Ephraim was one of the customary names of the northern state, to which 37:19 will refer by the name of Ephraim’s father Joseph (cf. Psa 78:67; Am 5:6; 6:6; Zech 10:6). It is not surprising that the Ephraimite Hosea speaks of the future of Ephraim, though that was before Ephraim fell and scattered, or that the Benjaminite Jeremiah does so, though that was sometimes a way of trying to lean on Judah. But Ezekiel’s promises stand out. Perhaps news of the scandalous troubles reported in Jer 40–41 involving people from the south and people from the north had reached Kebar. Or perhaps Ezekiel just knew about Yahweh’s commitment to the twelve clans.In 37:11 “Israel’s entire household” would suggest Judah, especially the Judahites in Babylonia. Here Ezekiel makes a point by associating the same expression with the old northern state, the other “Israel.”

To “join” the sticks together (קׇרַב) makes another link with the preceding vision, where the bones “joined together” (cf. 37:7). “Stick” is the ordinary word for a tree (עֵץ), which could thus make readers think of a tree standing for the nation (e.g., 15:2). In LXX, ῾ράβδος could suggest a king’s staff,[[99]](#footnote-99) but the image of two staffs becoming one doesn’t work well. And while the promise eventually refers to the people having one king (37:22b), it focuses on the people. Tg. takes the word to denote a writing tablet (cf. Block, 399–401), which fits the reference to writing, but the image of joining writing tablets also doesn’t work well. With this understanding, Mormons take the two writing blocks to refer to the Book of Mormon and the Bible.[[100]](#footnote-100)

**37:18–22** Yahweh makes more explicit the extraordinary nature of what he proposes. He is not merely thinking of Judahites living in Babylonia, Ammon, Moab, or Egypt, or scattered Ephraimites living in those countries or having somehow regained a foothold in Samaria. His description of where he will get them from implies including the Mesopotamia to which the Assyrians transported people from the north over a century previously. He is intent on reconstituting an entity with ethnic, territorial, political, and spiritual integrity (Block, 2:410–15). While Ezekiel speaks of foreign rulers as “kings,” he does not normally use the word of Israelite rulers. Here, Israel’s having a king suggests restoration to full nationhood (Block, 2:414), and “one king" further symbolizes the nation's renewed unity. In responding to the foolishness of Rehoboam ben Solomon, Jeroboam ben Nebat had made Ephraim politically independent of the Jerusalem monarchy. “Never again,” says Yahweh.

Blenkinsopp comments (175–76):

Yahweh proposes to reunite the twelve tribes now dispersed in foreign countries, bring them back to their own land, and constitute them as a purified people under a single ruler. How, given the fate of the northern tribes, this was thought to be possible, we do not know. Perhaps Ezekiel had in mind the survivors of the mixed population to the north of whom we hear from time to time (e.g., Jer. 41:48). Sometime after the return from captivity some of these, who profess to worship Yahweh, will make an unsuccessful bid to share in the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple (Ezra 4:12). To judge by the names of their deities (e.g., Anath-Bethel), the somewhat less "orthodox" Jewish settlers at Elephantine in Upper Egypt during the early Persian period also hailed from the former kingdom of Samaria. But it seems likely that Ezekiel is acting out and proclaiming an eschatological goal the fulfillment of which, in ways not then imaginable, would be brought about by God. Ezekiel's public is therefore being asked to accept on prophetic warranty that this is an essential aspect of God's plan for the future of his people.

**37:23–25** With the transition to speaking of the new nation’s life and in formulating “a distinctive model of political community” (Blenkinsopp, 177), references to a single stick, nation, and king (there were eleven) almost disappear (but see 37:24) in favor of references to how things will be “for all time,” of which there are now five (Block, 2:394). In expounding his broader theme Ezekiel takes up and reaffirms promises from earlier in Part Five of the scroll. The terms defile, lumps, deliver, settlements, cleanse, people for me and God for them, servant David, shepherd, prince, rulings and laws, live in the country that I gave your ancestors, recur from 34:13, 22–24; 36:17–18, 25–28.[[101]](#footnote-101) Ezekiel also reuses other broadly familiar expressions of his own (detestable objects, rebellions, offenses), and takes up his earlier allusion to Yahweh’s having given the land to “my servant Jacob” (28:25)—though there the אֲדׇמׇה, here the אֶרֶץ).

**37:26–26bα** Yahweh’s further undertaking continues to take up earlier promises, but now puts the emphasis on solemnizing a well-being covenant, on making [a blessing],[[102]](#footnote-102) and on causing the people to abound (cf. 34:25–26; 36:10–11). Behind the covenant promise, and behind the picture in general, there once again stands Lev 26 (Häner, 452–58), though the passage makes no new allusions to that chapter. The one fresh link is within Ezekiel, in that Yahweh had promised “a covenant for all time” back in 16:60. Alongside the allusion to 28:25, this link means that these verses recapitulate promise that have appeared through the scroll.

**36:bβ–28** For his last lines, Yahweh makes another transition and initiates a move to the theme that in due course becomes the great focus of Ezek 40–48, though Ezekiel does not make this link explicit. The connection is clearer in LXX Papyrus 967 (see the textual notes on 36:16–38), where Ezek 38–39 precedes Ezek 37 and thus has these verses leading into Ezek 40–48 (Joyce, 212).[[103]](#footnote-103) Ephraim’s turning away from its relationship with Judah had meant turning away from Jerusalem and from the temple as well as from David. The reunion of Ephraim with Judah will mean the new nation again has one sanctuary as well as one monarchy. Ezekiel might regard that as more important (Allen, 2:195). In not making that point, however, Ezekiel may by default draw as much attention to the grievous connotations of references to the sanctuary earlier in the scroll. The sanctuary has been subject to defilement (5:11). Yahweh has profaned it, let it become something that was not sacred to him, let it be trampled by people such as the Babylonians (24:21). People such as the Ammonites have then expressed amused satisfaction (25:3). Subsequently, Yahweh has been with his people in Kebar, and presumably elsewhere, as if they were a little sanctuary (11:16). But now, he says, “I will put my sanctuary among them for all time.” One result will be the nations’ recognition of him, as he makes Israel sacred in this way. It will reverse the nations’ profaning the sanctuary in 587. In between these two statements about the sanctuary is the innovative promise that “my dwelling will be over them.” Dwelling (מׅשְׁכׇן) is the term in the Torah for the wilderness dwelling. Elsewhere it can imply reference to the temple. Here it is hardly a synonym for sanctuary (מִקְדָּשׁ). The sanctuary is “among” them, but this dwelling will abide “over” them. It sounds more like Yahweh’s presence in the cloud over the camp and thus over the sanctuary in the wilderness (e.g., Num 9:15–23). Isa 4:5 promises something similar hanging over Mount Zion. Ezekiel implies a similar promise (Greenberg, 2:757–58).

Biblical Theology Comments

It’s been said that “the predictions regarding a restored northern kingdom, whether it was conceived as an independent entity or as part of a reunited Davidic kingdom of all the Hebrews, collectively constitute perhaps the most conspicuous example in the Tanak of patently false prophecy.”[[104]](#footnote-104) If one accepts the judgment of the Jewish community and the church that they are true prophecy, how does one handle the disparity between what God says he is going to do and what didn’t happen? Such questions about the future compare with some questions regarding the Scriptures’ narratives about the past. These include some that correspond quite well to events (e.g., 2 Kgs 25), some that bear little relation to actual events (e.g., Gen 1), and some that sit somewhere between the two (e.g., Exod 14). All are good narratives that illumine what God has actually done and who God is. The same applies to statements about the future. The fact that God has not implemented his statements about the future in Ezekiel and other prophets doesn’t mean that these statements have no truth to offer.

Greenhill (746, 753) comments:

God hath a care of his people, be they in never so poor, broken, scattered, or despicable a condition. The house of Judah had been now in Babylon upon seventy years, the house of Israel two hundred and four years, if not more; they were despised of men, and seemed forgotten of God: but the Lord had them in remembrance, and bids the prophet write upon one stick, For Judah and his companions; and on another stick, For Joseph, Ephraim, or the house of Israel, and his companions; not one of them were out of God's thoughts. Their forefathers had been four hundred years in Egypt, were tyrannized over by cruel task-masters, looked upon as contemptible; but the Lord had an eye to them, cared and wrought for them. They have now lain sixteen hundred years in darkness, in a desolate and despised condition; yet doubtless they are not forgotten, God's thoughts are upon them to do them good again.

From these two verses [37:26- 27] I shall only give you this observation that there are great and precious promises that concern the Jews, yet unperformed. The everlasting covenant of peace, Christ being their king and temple, with many others, the Jews expect the fulfilling of. And so may we, for God is faithful and will make good his word.

Application and Devotional Implications

Blenkinsopp (174, 175) comments:

The prospect of an eventual union between the northern tribes and Judah must have seemed as unrealistic in Ezekiel's day as the unification of the churches will appear to most contemporary Christians.… The ecumenical movement … has its biblical basis in the unity of Israel acted out and proclaimed by Ezekiel after the fall of Jerusalem.… The attainment of a lost unity may be an eschatological goal but one that no Christian body professing allegiance to the biblical tradition can afford to neglect.[[105]](#footnote-105)

One aspect of the justification for this position is that the argument of a prophet such as Ezekiel provided Paul with some of his basis and language for his convictions about the church expressed in a chapter such as Eph 2.[[106]](#footnote-106) Thus Jenson (288) observes:

Unity thus belongs to the very being of the Lord’s people; and this conviction was carried from Israel directly into the theology of the church, and there maintained with respect both to canonical Israel and to herself. To celebrate canonical Israel’s special presence in the kingdom, the Revelation both evokes a single Jewish multitude and pedantically lists all twelve tribes, with strict equality of representation (Rev. 7:5–8). And of herself the church first of all confesses that she is “one,” even before confessing that she is “holy, catholic, and apostolic.” As with Israel, a divided church could not in strict logic be church at all; we may be glad that the Lord’s history with us does not always follow strict logic.

We may therefore comfort ourselves with this comfort against schisms (Oecolampadius, 222; cf. Trapp, 492).

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## The Ambitious Coalition Crushed (38:1–39:29)

Outline

The message for Gog of Magog carries on from 37:15–28 as 37:15–28 carried on from 37:1–14. “Yahweh’s message came” to Ezekiel declaring that he would bring his people back to life in their country (37:1–14), that he would make the people one in this country (37:15–28), and now that he will devastate Gog of Magog when he attacks the people in this country. There is no indication that a considerable amount of time has passed between the messages, though there is an indication that a considerable amount of time will pass before Yahweh does what he announces in this one (38:8). One gets the impression of continuing to read a series of messages from a time not so long after 587, though the time when this one becomes reality will arrive only after the fulfillment of the promises in 34:1–37:28.

In one sense, then, the promises follow one another in a linked way. But in substance this message defies expectations. The consolidated promises in 37:23–28 seemed to bring the Ezekiel scroll to something like closure. The Gog messages about invasion are a surprise. They follow on the promise of a well-being covenant (37:25), and while the *shalom* in a *shalom* covenant covers more than peace, it must surely include peace. Yet Yahweh now issues copious warnings of troubles that look not very different from the ones that led up to 587, threatening a large-scale attack by a mysterious northern power and by other powers it brings with it. The warnings differ in not basing the inevitability of invasion on Israel’s wrongdoing. Yahweh intends to bring about the invasion purely in order to impose a huge defeat on Gog and his allies. Initially, then, the message would surely be terrifying for Judahites, but it eventually makes clear that Gog and his forces are not a threat at all.

The two chapters actually comprise a series of messages to or about Gog, with overlapping content. They thus parallel other sequences of chapters in the scroll where themes recur. They also parallel individual chapters where separate messages have been brought together to form a looser or tighter sequence. Scholarly opinion differs over how far the messages in Ezek 38–39 come from Ezekiel or from later prophets, and over their date,[[107]](#footnote-107) and “a glance at the commentaries will convince the reader of the difficulty of distinguishing between what is ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’” (Blenkinsopp, 181). A common scholarly view is that the “apocalyptic” nature of the messages and/or their dependence on a range of earlier Scriptures indicates that they derive from the Persian or Hellenistic period, though the chapters make no references that enable us to date them. The question of dating does not affect their own meaning, though it will make a difference to the message they bring home in different contexts Reading them against the context of the Persian, Hellenistic, or Roman period enables one to imagine the history of their impact even if it does not reveal the history of their composition.

Working with the notions of apocalyptic or of reworking earlier Scriptures raises further complications. While Ezek 38–39 has overlaps with “apocalyptic,” that term can have a variety of meanings. It commonly suggests reference to the end of all things and to final judgment and salvation, presupposes dualisms such as good and evil and the action of God and of human powers, relates dreams and visions given through angels and concerning heavenly realities, and uses exotic imagery. None of these features appears in Ezek 38–39. A recurrent feature of apocalyptic that Ezek 38–39 shares is the absence of reference to identifiable historical events such as previous chapters in Ezekiel include. Ezekiel does not express its vision in the terms of “plain history, real politics, and human instrumentality” as prophets commonly do.[[108]](#footnote-108) Its starting point lies in an identified time when Israel has been restored from war and gathered together in its land, and is living in peace and security (38:8–12). This is the background to Gog’s invasion. Neither that situation nor the invasion itself ever happened. In this respect Ezek 38–39 again follows well on 37:15–28, which described a coming reunion of Ephraim and Judah, a resettlement of this reunited people in the land, and a reign of a new David, which never happened. In effect, these chapters build on that description as if those events had happened. Jenson (290–91) comments:

With Ezek. 38–39, Ezekiel takes almost complete leave of what is conceivable within history as it now runs. Until this point in his book, Ezekiel’s evocations of coming doom or blessing have usually had a simultaneous double reference: to events conceivable in this age and events conceivable only as or indeed after “the end” as it is depicted in →7:1– 9. With Ezek. 38, the this-worldly reference almost entirely disappears. Indeed, the departure from what modernity calls history is explicit: the final restoration of Israel in her own land, variously promised from Ezek. 34 on, figures here as indeed the end of God’s historical ways with Israel (38:8, 11– 12), to be followed by the Lord’s summons to Gog.… The language of nations and battles does remain; this language tenuously maintains the tie to history.… But as the names of nations now appear, their reference to known entities is opaque or disturbed. And in the great battle, human combatants on the Lord’s side have vanished altogether: he tells of no instrument like Nebuchadnezzar, and the people of Israel appear only after the victory, to dispose of the enemy dead.… Gog and his horde are “from the remotest parts of the north” (38:6, 15). Figures from “the north” seem to have been [seen] as a semimythic permanent threat in certain prophetic traditions (Zimmerli 1983: 299–300). Gog emerges from this threat’s remotest lair.[[109]](#footnote-109)

While the form of Ezek 38–39 does not describe Yahweh acting on the historical plane, however, this in itself does not indicate that the prophet has given up the idea of Yahweh acting on the historical plane. In the context of the Ezekiel scroll, it complements the reality of Yahweh acting on the historical plane, even though this message does not describe him doing so. Indeed, an aspect of the way Ezekiel has not abandoned thinking in terms of Yahweh’s activity within history is that, even though he is talking about Yahweh’s final victory over the nations, the conflict the chapters describe is not one in which Yahweh fights and defeats all the nations, like the one in Joel 3 [4], nor is it an eschatological conflict like the one in which Gog takes part in Rev 20:7–10.

Another key significance of apocalyptic is that it is a way of doing theology, of expounding the nature of God and of God’s relationship with the world, by painting an imaginative and imaginary portrait of the future. Yahweh invites the Judahites to picture him commissioning and defeating Gog and to reflect on the theological implications of the picture, of this piece of fantasy literature. More generally, the way prophets speak about the future and the theological implications of their picturing parallels the way narrators speak about the past (see the Biblical Theology comments on 37:15–28). Prophets no more provide an advance video of coming events than narrators provide a retrospective video of past events. Like movies about the future or about the past, the stories told by scriptural narratives and prophecies are portrayals from which we can learn in a way that is not dependent on their factuality.

In their working with earlier Scriptures, these chapters may be called a pastiche, a composition that bringing together excerpts from a variety of existent works that thus turns them into a new whole.[[110]](#footnote-110) And one can see multiple points at which Ezekiel is taking up earlier Scriptures.[[111]](#footnote-111) Noteworthy examples are the three curious paragraphs about a seven-year bonfire, a seven-month corpse collection, and a sacrificial feast for birds and animals (39:9–20). Yet by no means do these paragraphs simply bring together their underlying Scriptures. These Scriptures are jumping-off points for something exotic and bizarre. And they put us on the track of a key aspect of the nature of the Gog material as a whole. Its starting point lies in the Scriptures, but it is a midrash built on them, and a midrash that has the nature of a parody.[[112]](#footnote-112) Gog himself “is more caricature than character” (Darr, in her reflections on 38:1–39:29). Ezek 38–39 is another parody in the sequence of midrashic parodies in Ezekiel, of which the outstanding examples are Ezek 16; 20; and 23. Where it differs from them is that they made their point clear from the beginning, indicating that they were portraying Jerusalem’s outrages, Israel’s history, and the whoring of the northern and southern states. Ezek 38–39 gives no initial clue to what it is about.

This feature makes for a comparison with other chapters in Ezekiel where the prophet proceeds by relating a parable\* or allegory without initially telling people what it means. He thereby intrigues his audience and makes them wonder about the point he is making. In Ezek 38–39 he tells an intricate and fantastical story concerning an entity that no one knows about engaging in a shameful and implausible project and coming to a horrifying and implausible end, with the three outrageous quasi-scriptural aspects in 39:9–20. As is also his wont, then, Ezekiel paints a picture that recalls motifs from predecessor prophets and other Scriptures, but exalts them to preposterous heights. Then, when his parable could get no more bizarre, in 39:21–29 he makes a sudden transition to his cool theological mode of speech to interpret his parable. In this respect the chapters as a whole work in a way that parallels other parable chapters, with the parable first and the explanation following.

It turns out that a clue to the parable lies, unsurprisingly, in the closing line of the preceding message, in 37:28 with its reference to the nations acknowledging Yahweh as the one who makes Israel sacred. Perhaps we should have recognized that before the Ezekiel scroll could reach an end there was more that needed to be said about Yahweh and the nations than 37:15–28 said. Ezek 38–39 is about an aspect of how the nations will come to acknowledge Yahweh: see 38:16, 23; 39:6, 7, 22, 23, 28 (Block, 2:430–31). The final verses in Ezek 39 thus pick up from where 37:28 left us and answer the question we may not have noticed, in light of the parable/parody that Ezekiel has presented in between. “The overriding objective that determines the whole prophecy is the hallowing of the name of Yahweh before the nations, which is emphasized again and again as a result of the divine judgment now to be executed” (Eichrodt, 519).

Perhaps the parodic form of the message encouraged the jerky sequence in the chapters, of which the most notable example is the feast on the victims of the massacre that follows their burial. But the overlap between some sections parallel that in previous units in the scroll where overlapping messages with a common theme appear one after each other. An implication would then be that Yahweh saw the message’s theme as important for the Judahites and inspired messages of this kind for them on a number of occasions.

Opinions differ over the chapters’ development and over their structure. One way of seeing their unfolding is:

Introduction (38:1–3aα)

Yahweh’s message to Gog, about his intention that Gog should invade Israel (38:3aβ–9)

Introduction (38:10a)

Yahweh’s message to Gog about the plan he will make (38:10b–13)

Introduction (38:14aα)

Yahweh’s message to Gog about his intention to invade Israel (38:14aβ–16)

Introduction (38:17aα)

Yahweh’s reflection on Gog’s role and on his own intention (38:17aβ–23).

 An affirmation of the Lord Yahweh

 An affirmation of the Lord Yahweh

 They will acknowledge that I am Yahweh

Introduction (39:1a)

Yahweh’s message to Gog about the fate he will meet through his invasion (39:1b–6)

 An affirmation of the Lord Yahweh

 They will acknowledge that I am Yahweh

Yahweh’s declaration about his name being honored (39:7–8)

 The nations will acknowledge that I am Yahweh

 An affirmation of the Lord Yahweh

A declaration about Israelites burning their weaponry (39:9–10)

 An affirmation of the Lord Yahweh

Yahweh’s declaration about burial for Gog to cleanse the country (9:11–16)

 An affirmation of the Lord Yahweh

Introduction (39:17aα)

A message to birds and animals about a festive meal (39:17aβ–20)

 An affirmation about the Lord Yahweh

Yahweh’s declaration about his recognition by the nations and by Israel (39:21–24)

 Israel’s household will acknowledge that I am Yahweh

The nations will acknowledge that it was because of waywardness that Israel’s household went into exile

Introduction (39:25aα)

Yahweh’s declaration of intent about restoring Israel (39:25aβ–29)

 They will acknowledge that I am Yahweh their God

 An affirmation of the Lord Yahweh

The text provides no formal basis for dividing the message into two chapters. The resumptive introduction in 39:1aα is not like the introduction to a separate message such as appeared in 38:1. Yet the medieval chapter division does correspond to a transition half way through 38:1–39:29, and broadly speaking, parable is more prominent in Ezek 38 and parody in Ezek 39:

38:1–7 more parody: Gog and the hooks in his jaws

38:7–23 more parable: a picture of battle that leads to recognition of Yahweh

39:1–20 more parody: bonfire, corpse collection, sacrificial feast

39:21–29 more parable: circling back to 37:15–28

Translation

38:1Yahweh’s message came to me: 2My man, set your face towards Gog, of the country of Magog, head-prince[[113]](#footnote-113) of Meshek and Tubal, and prophesy against him. 3Say, The Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I towards you, Gog, head-prince of Meshek and Tubal. 4I will turn you around and put hooks in your jaws and get you to go out, you and your entire force, horses and cavalry, clothed in excellence all of them, a vast assembly, [with] body shield and hand shield, wielding swords, all of them. 5Persia, Kush, Put with them, all of them [with] hand shield and helmet, 6Gomer and all its divisions, Bet Togarmah, the remote parts of the north, and all its divisions, many peoples with you. 7Be ready, get yourself ready,[[114]](#footnote-114) you and all your assembly, the people assembled with you, and be on the watch in relation to them.

8After many days you will take up your position,[[115]](#footnote-115)

at the conclusion of years you will come,

To a country restored from the sword,

 gathered from many peoples,

Against Israel’s mountains

 that had been a desolation continually,

But it[[116]](#footnote-116) having been got out from the peoples,

 and dwelling in security, all of them.

9You will go up like a storm when you come,

 being like a cloud to cover the earth,

You and all your divisions,

 and many peoples with you.

10The Lord Yahweh has said this. Then, on that day, things will go up into your mind, and you will formulate a dire intention. 11You will say,

I will go up to a land of settlements,

 I will come to the quiet people,

Dwelling in security, all of them,

 living without a wall,

And bar and gates

 they don’t have:

12To take plunder,

 to seize loot,

To turn your hand against wastes [now] lived in,

 to a people gathered from the nations,

Acquiring livestock and possessions,

 living at the center[[117]](#footnote-117) of the earth.

13Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish and all its villages,[[118]](#footnote-118) they will say to you,

Is it to seize loot that you have come,

 is it to take plunder that you have gathered your assembly,

To carry silver and gold,

 to get livestock and possessions,

to seize much loot?

14Therefore prophesy, my man, and say to Gog, The Lord Yahweh has said this. On that day, when my people Israel are living in security, you will get to know, won’t you, 15and you will come from your place, from the remotest parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, riding on horses all of them, a big assembly, a vast force. 16You will go up against my people Israel like a cloud to cover the earth, when it happens at the conclusion of the days and I get you to come against my country, in order that the nations may acknowledge me when I show my sacredness through you before their eyes, Gog.

17The Lord Yahweh has said this. Yes, you are one that I spoke of in earlier days by the hand of my servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days (years) that I would get you to come against them. 18Then, on that day, on the day of Gog’s coming on the land of Israel (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), my fury will go up in my anger. 19In my passion and in my furious fire I am speaking: if on that day a great quaking doesn’t happen on the land of Israel, 20and in front of me the fish in the sea, the birds in the heavens, the animals in the open country, every reptile that moves on the ground, and every human being that is on the surface of the ground quakes, and the mountains are thrown down, the embankments[[119]](#footnote-119) fall, and every wall falls to the earth.… 21I will call against him to all my mountains [for] a sword (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh) so that each individual’s sword will be against his brother. 22I will engage in ruling with him, by epidemic and by blood. Rain streaming, fiery hailstones, and sulfur I will cause to pour on him, on his divisions, and on many peoples, with him. 23I will show my greatness and my sacredness and cause myself to be acknowledged before the eyes of many nations, and they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

39:1So you, my man, prophesy against Gog and say, The Lord Yahweh has said this. Here am I towards you, Gog, prince-head of Meshek and Tubal. 2I will turn you around and drive you on[[120]](#footnote-120) and have you go up from the remote parts of the north and have you come to Israel’s mountains. 3But I will strike down your bow from your left hand, and your arrows from your right hand I will cause to fall. 4On Israel’s mountains you will fall, you and all your divisions and peoples, with you. To bird of prey, bird of every kind,[[121]](#footnote-121) and animal of the open country I am giving you as food. 5On the surface of the open country you will fall, because I myself am speaking (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh). 6And I will send off fire against Magog and against the people who are living on foreign shores in security, and they will acknowledge that I am Yahweh.

7My sacred name I will have acknowledged among my people Israel. I will not have my sacred name treated as ordinary anymore. And the nations will acknowledge that I am Yahweh, the sacred one in Israel. 8There, it is coming and happening (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).[[122]](#footnote-122) That is the day that I have spoken of.[[123]](#footnote-123)

9The people living in Israel’s towns will go out and light fires and make them burn with equipment, hand shield and body shield, with bow and with arrows, with a hand staff and with a spear. They will light fires with them for seven years. 10They will not carry wood from the open country and they will not cut [it] from the forests, because they will light fires with the equipment. And they will plunder their plunderers and loot their looters (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

11Then, on that day, I will give Gog a place there for burial in Israel, The Ravine of People Passing On, east of the sea (with it then stopping people passing through). They will bury Gog there and all his horde, and call it Gog’s Horde Ravine. 12Israel’s household will bury them, in order to cleanse the country, for seven months. 13The entire citizenry[[124]](#footnote-124) will bury them, and they will have a name, on the day of my getting myself honor (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh), 14as they select people permanently passing through the country, burying the people who had passed on, the people remaining on the surface of the earth, to cleanse it, searching for a period of seven months. 15The people passing through the country will pass through, one will see a human bone, and will construct a sign near it until the buriers have buried it in Gog’s Horde Ravine 16(the city’s name will also be Horde). So they will cleanse the country.

17And you, my man, the Lord Yahweh has said this. Say to bird of every kind and to every animal in the open country, Collect together, come, gather from all around for my sacrifice that I’m offering for you, a big sacrifice, on Israel’s mountains. Eat flesh and drink blood, 18eating the flesh of strong men and drinking the blood of earth’s princes, rams, lambs, and goats, bulls, fatlings of Bashan, all of them. 19Eat fat until you are full and drink blood until you are drunk, from my sacrifice that I’m making for you. 20Get full at my table [from] horses, chariots,[[125]](#footnote-125) strong men, and all the men of battle (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

21So I will put my honor among the nations, all the nations will see the ruling that I have acted on and my hand that I have set against them, 22and Israel’s household will acknowledge that I am Yahweh their God, from that day and onward. 23And the nations will acknowledge that it was because of their waywardness that Israel’s household went into exile, because of the fact that they trespassed against me, and I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they fell by the sword, all of them, 24as I dealt with them in accordance with their defilement and with their rebellions and hid my face from them.

25Therefore the Lord Yahweh has said this. Now I will bring about Jacob’s restoration[[126]](#footnote-126) and have compassion on Israel’s entire household, and be passionate for my sacred name. 26They will carry their shame and all their trespass that they committed against me, when they are living[[127]](#footnote-127) on their land in security and there is no one troubling, 27when I have returned them from the peoples and gathered them from the countries of their enemies and shown myself sacred through them in the eyes of many nations. 28They will acknowledge that I am Yahweh their God when I have exiled them to the nations but gathered them onto their land and not left any of them there anymore. 29And I will not hide my face anymore from them when I have poured my spirit on Israel’s household (an affirmation of the Lord Yahweh).

Textual Notes

MT has markers\* after 38:9, 13, 16, 17, 23; 39:10, 16, 24, and all have a petuhah after 39:29.

**38:2–3** LXX, Sym., and Theod. take רֹאשׁ, “head,” as the name of the first place of which Gog is ruler, Rosh; so also in 39:1.

**38:4** LXX lacks “and put hooks in your jaws and get you to go out,” and the second “all of them.”

**38:5** LXX lacks “with them.”

**38:14** For תֵּדׇע, “you will get to know,” LXX “you will be aroused” implies תֵּעֹר.

**38:16** LXX reads “Gog” as the beginning of 38:17.

**38:21** For הׇרַי חֶרֶב, “my mountains [for] for a sword,” LXX has simply “[for] fear,” perhaps implying a reading such as חֲרׇדוֹת (26:16) or חֲרׇדׇה (see Cornill, 426).

**38:23** After “sacredness,” LXX also has “be glorified.”

**39:11** For Q הֲמוׄנוׄ and K המונה, see the textual note on 31:18.

**39:21** For בַּגּוֹיׅם, “among the nations,” LXX “among you” implies בׇּכֶם.

**39:26** For וְנׇשֹוּ, “they will carry,” NIV “they will forget” implies וְנׇשׁוּ.

**39:28** LXX takes בְּהַגְּלוּתׅי, “when I have exiled,” to mean “when I have revealed myself” (see BDB), and then lacks “but gathered them … anymore.”

**39:29** LXX understands רוּחׅי, “my spirit,” to denote “my wrath.”[[128]](#footnote-128)

Verse-by-Verse Commentary

**38:1–3** The transition with its suddenness parallels the one in 25:1–3, whose wording it repeats: “Yahweh’s message came to me: My man, set your face towards… Prophesy against… and say.…” “Set your face towards” in Ezekiel means bad news (e.g., 6:2; 29:2; 35:2), as does “here I am towards” (e.g., 34:10; 35:3, though 36:9 is an exception).

While we have heard nothing of Gog or Magog before, Meshek and Tubal were among Tyre’s trading partners in 27:13 and among Pharaoh’s companions in Sheol in 32:26. The former locates them in Turkey and the latter anticipates their fate in Ezek 38–39. Gog is being portrayed as similar to Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and other one-time allies of Israel, which Israel ought therefore to keep clear of.[[129]](#footnote-129) While Gog became a significant figure in later writings, there are no independent references to him from First Testament times.[[130]](#footnote-130) Nor do we know anything about such a person as a historical figure, and it might be surprising if such a person had left no trace in the many records we have from the region north of Israel.

Behind the name may be that of a seventh-century king in the region, Gugu. Thus “a great figure of the past is evidently used to define a future threat, as we might speak fearfully of a new Hitler” (Allen, 2:204–5). In Ezekiel, it constitutes a negative equivalent to the idea of a new embodiment of David (34:23–24; 37:24–25). In role, Gog parallels Nebuchadrezzar as the leader of an empire to the north of Israel. Indeed, Gog might be code for Babylon.[[131]](#footnote-131) But the description of him as “head-prince” (נׇשֹׅיא רֹאשׁ) may suggest that he was head among equals in his world, like Jabin king of Hazor in his world in Josh 11, and unlike a “proper” king of kings like Nebuchadrezzar. There are many princes in his world, then, but Gog is the biggest. This could then indicate that Ezekiel knows something about political and constitutional questions in the swath of territory from Turkey eastward and northward—which would make it more plausible to infer that Ezekiel is talking about a Gog who is an actual person. As an actual or imaginary figure, Gog symbolizes potentially threatening, aggressive, expansionist, and ambitious alien power at the edge of the world, in a region stretching east and north of the Assyrian and Babylonians empires that actually dominated Judah. He is then at least in part the product of poetic artistry.[[132]](#footnote-132) Yahweh gives no reason why Ezekiel should prophesy “against” Gog (contrast 25:1–3), but perhaps the logic in this chapter follows that in Yahweh’s dealings with Assyria and Babylon, whom he uses as his agents but then punishes for their actions.

Magog is a person in Gen 10:2, though the lists in Genesis conflate people and places in portraying people as the founders of places or the ancestors of communities. The context in which Magog appears there again suggests the area north of Israel. The name may link with that of māt Gūgi in Turkey, who is thus from Gog’s region (Block, 2:434).[[133]](#footnote-133)

**38:4** In English, “Gog and Magog” can have humorous connotations, partly because of the alliteration\* in the pair of names. Names in Daniel such as Abednego illustrate the First Testament working this way. Perhaps it is no coincidence that the stories in Daniel and these chapters in Ezekiel are set in the same decades and social context of exile in Babylonia. The fact that Gog and Magog are the hardest names in Ezek 38–39 to link with people or places that are otherwise known encourages the idea that they are made-up names that provide the first clue suggesting that Ezek 38–39 is a parody. A further indication of this possibility is Yahweh’s statement of intent here. He will “turn Gog around,” an unusual form of the verb (שׁוּב polel—it recurs in 39:2) that elsewhere means “lead astray” (*DCH*) or “lead away (enticingly)” (BDB). But it can also denote urging on an animal (*DCH*), which “put hooks in your jaws” would then follow neatly. This phrase repeats Yahweh’s statement of intent regarding Pharaoh, pictured as a crocodile about to be hauled out of the Nile with fish stuck to its scales (29:4). Hooks also figured in the description of the “lion” dragged off to Egypt in 19:4. The description of Gog’s military corresponds to that of the Assyrian army in 23:12, 24.

**38:5–7** Persia (or Paras), Kush (Sudan), Put (Libya), and Bet-Togarmah have featured among Tyre’s trading partners and Egypt’s allies (e.g., 27:10, 14; 30:5). Gomer was next to Magog and father of Togarmah in Gen 10:2–3. The name suggests the Cimmerians, who lived in Turkey or further north. The location of Bet-Togarmah, “the remote parts of the north” (יַרְכְּתֵי צׇפוֹן), is an expression used more broadly in 38:15; 39:2. Behind Ezekiel’s use of the phrase is the occurrence in Jeremiah (6:22),[[134]](#footnote-134) behind that the use in Isaiah (14:13),[[135]](#footnote-135) and associated with that the use in Psa 48:2 [3]. Yahweh speaks, then, of people from the north and from the south (Kush, Put) on the other side of the Mediterranean, which fits the overlap with accounts of Tyre’s trading associates. A major impetus, perhaps the major impetus, to the acquiring of an empire is the acquiring of wealth, to which trade is key. That will be the aim of Gog and his cronies. They will be being expansionist. They will form an axis of invasion from both sides of the known world. Gog is not portrayed as monstrous, frightening, mythic, arrogant, godless, or even evil. He is simply threateningly powerful and grossly greedy. Being a global economic power is what is in his mind. At another level of intent, however, unbeknown to himself, he is simply someone “summoned like one who has been conscripted for military service” (Zimmerli, 2:307). For now, even as the general of an army, he awaits instructions, making sure his troops are ready to move when bidden.

**38:8–9** “After many days” (מׅיׇּמׅים רַבּׅים) is a general term for a long period of time. It otherwise comes only in Josh 23:1. “At the conclusion of years” (בְּאַחֲרׅית הַשׇּׁנׅים) occurs only here, though 38:16 has “at the conclusion of the days,” an expression that recurs in the First Testament. Either of these latter expressions is slightly more definite than “after many days” and could suggest a period of time that had to elapse (because Yahweh said so?), as 38:7 hinted. None of the terms suggests a reference to the end of the age or the end of time. They do denote a time quite a while after the fulfilment of the promises in 37:15–28, or at least quite a while after the issuing of those promises. The time will eventually arrive, however, when Yahweh wishes to have Gog come “to a country restored from the sword, gathered from many peoples,” a country for which at least the promises in 37:21 have indeed come true. So they are not the people to whom Ezekiel would be speaking in Kebar, but they are a community that he and they look forward to. Something similar applies regarding “Israel’s mountains,” a term for the land as whole, which “had continuously been a desolation” but which Yahweh had undertaken to restore (cf. 36:1–12). This promise will have come true by the time Yahweh issues his strange and worrying bidding to Gog. Yes, the Israelites have now been able to dwell with confidence in their security in their land: Ezek 38–39 speaks five times of living “in security” (לְבֶטַח). It’s not their fault that it will turn out to be false confidence, but Gog is indeed going to make this confidence turn out to be desperately false (38:9). He will come up “like a storm” (שֹׁאׇה), the Jewish word for the Holocaust, the Shoah. He will come like the cloud (עׇנׇן) that suggests the awesome and frightening presence of Yahweh. The second of those words is one that Ezekiel has used (see 30:3), but the combination of words suggests another recollection of Zephaniah (1:15).

**38:10–13** Things will happen “on that day,” then. Ezekiel uses this expression six times in Ezek 38–39, the same number of times as it occurs in the entire rest of the scroll. Elsewhere in the First Testament, it can refer to Yahweh’s day or simply to whatever day the document has just referred to. Ezekiel speaks explicitly of “Yahweh’s day” only in 13:5 and 30:3, though elsewhere he uses other expressions that mean something similar: see, e.g., 7:1–22. Here, it looks as if “that day” is the day when Gog decides to undertake his expedition, so it might be inferring too much to think that it denotes Yahweh’s day, but it might be inferring too little if one were to exclude the idea that the “day” is a really important one when the fulfillment of Yahweh’s purpose is about to happen. Ezekiel will make clear that it is. In 39:22 LXX has “this day,” the day of fulfillment in the Seleucid or Roman period.[[136]](#footnote-136) And it is an example of an expression that could mean something different in the Second Temple period from its meaning in the Babylonian period.

One could have got the impression from 38:1–9 that Yahweh intends somehow to manipulate or force Gog to invade Israel, but here Ezekiel makes explicit that he presupposes the same combination of Yahweh’s will and the human king’s will as applies with Nebuchadrezzar. If anything he makes the point more clearly here with his juxtaposition of a strong description of Yahweh’s initiative in 38:1–9 and now a strong description of Gog’s decision-making. First Yahweh says that “things will go up into your mind.” This could suggest Yahweh putting ideas into Gog’s head, though not his imposing them on him but his floating to Gog the idea of an attack on Israel. It is then up to Gog what he does with it. But other occurrences of similar expressions (11:5; 14:3–4, 7; 20:32) don’t suggest ideas coming to someone from outside but ideas they generate. That fits Yahweh picturing how Gog will “formulate a dire intention,” make a plan that will have disastrous implications for its victims. Yet it is possible for someone to have their own aims and intentions but for there to be other forces at work that move in quite different directions (Blenkinsopp, 186), and so it is here. Gog’s victims are portrayed more concretely in connection with their assumption that they are safe and secure. They live in “settlements” (פּרׇזוֹת), residential communities without walls. They assume they don’t need walls, or gates and bars on these walls. There is no reason why they should fear anyone attacking them, or strolling in with hostile intent, or thinking they can walk off with whatever they find there. Ezekiel is not thinking about a city such as Jerusalem. Once again he is reminding his readers that this land is the one-time wastes that Yahweh promised to repopulate with people whom he gathered from the nations (36:24–38), a promise he has fulfilled by the time presupposed by this message. He adds reference to cattle and other acquisitions, which could form a temptation to anyone who fancied them. Some more of Tyre’s mercantile partners from either side of the Mediterranean appear in 38:13 (see 27:12, 15, 20, 22, 23), who will be interested in trading with Gog’s loot (Allen, 2:206). “These merchants are vultures, hoping to take advantage of the spoils of this war” (Block, 2:449). It is “as if they will say, ‘Here we are, ready to buy loot from your hand’” (Altschuler, in MG). It is in this connection that Israel stands in the middle of the nations to which Ezek 38–39 refers, “at the center of the earth.” William Tooman’s diagram illustrates the point.[[137]](#footnote-137)



Israel is unfortunate enough to sit on the crucial land bridge and thus trade route between Mesopotamia and Turkey to its north and Arabia and Africa to its south, a vulnerable location. It will not be not thinking about that vulnerability, given the security Yahweh has given it. But the Gog coalition will be thinking about it. And the aim of their expedition will then be (literally) “to plunder plunder and to loot loot.” The double, double expression emphasizes the point. If Ezekiel is taking up words from Jer 49:30–31 in 38:10–13,[[138]](#footnote-138) his doubling is one of the ways he makes them his own.

**38:14–16** “Therefore” in Ezekiel often compares with the therefore of other prophets, in leading into a declaration of the action Yahweh intends to take in light of a critique he has just issued, though Ezekiel’s “therefore” can function more loosely as a link between paragraphs. Here Yahweh’s further message to Gog might be an originally separate one overlapping with 38:1–13, but in its position in the chapter, at least, the bulk of it is resumptive, and its significance lies in what it adds to 38:1–13. First, Gog will be going up against “my people Israel” (38:14, 16). Israel has hardly been named in 38:1–13 (only in the expression “Israel’s mountains”), and here the addition of the phrase “my people” is significant—though one could not be sure how it is significant. Does it suggest jealousy, or resentment, or commitment, or what? (see, e.g., 11:20; 13:9–23; 14:8–11; 21:12 [17]; 25:14; 33:31; 34:30; 36:8, 12, 28; 37:12–13, 23, 27). Yahweh follows up the expression with a reference to “my country,” which otherwise occurs in Ezekiel only in 36:5 and is rare elsewhere. There is no doubt that it suggests something like jealousy. So what is Yahweh doing getting Gog to come against his country?

I intend, he says, “to show my sacredness through you” before the eyes of the nations, who will thus come to acknowledge him. Things start to become clear. Yahweh is not arousing Gog for the same reason that he aroused Nebuchadrezzar, in connection with Israel’s waywardness. While so far there has been no affirmation of Israel’s commitment to Yahweh, neither has there been any critique. Israel is going to be the innocent victim of a plan Yahweh has, to reveal himself to the nations. He intends to show his sacredness—that is, to show that he is distinctively God. The promises in 36:16–38 had included Yahweh’s intention to make his name sacred by taking his people back to their land and thus reverse the impression he gave by having them leave it (36:20–23). A presupposition of Ezek 38–39 is that he has done this by the time of Gog’s expedition. But there is evidently another level of revealing his sacredness that he also has in mind, a revelation that he will achieve on “that day.” That day is the day when Gog comes and Israel is subject to great peril, but thus becomes the means whereby Yahweh reveals himself—not because Israel does anything but because it goes through what Yahweh makes it go through. It will mean Gog and his allies will not only acknowledge that he is Yahweh but “acknowledge me” (cf. Cook, 77). The unique formula implies a commitment of the whole person, not merely a recognition in mind and voice.

**38:17–19a** Gog and his army are to replay the roles that Assyria and Babylon have previously played, and in 38:1–16 Ezekiel has used expressions that other prophets used of them.

You will go up… like a cloud (38:9)

He will go up like clouds (Jer 4:13)

Like a storm … like a cloud (38:9)

A day of storm … a day of cloud (Zeph 1:15)

You will go up like a storm when you come (38:9)

The storm will come from afar (Isa 10:3)

Words will go up into your mind and you will formulate a dire intention (38:10)

But he does not speak so and his mind does not formulate so (Isa 10:7)

I will go up… to take plunder, to seize loot (38:11–12)

I will send him… to take plunder, to seize loot (Isa 10:6)

Yahweh’s message has taken up the wording of earlier prophets’ messages and reapplied them from Assyria and Babylon to Gog. In 38:17 he points out what he has been doing as he speaks of “my servants the prophets,” a phrase that recurs in the work of Ezekiel’s contemporaries (e.g., 2 Kgs 21:10; 24:2; Jer 35:15; 44:4). It associates Ezekiel with prophets such as Jeremiah while also dissociating him from the prophets whom Yahweh has not sent and who prophesy out of their minds (e.g., 13:1–16; Block, 2:453). The implication is not that the great age of prophecy lies in the past—the very words of this prophecy show that they are not. Nor is it that the earlier prophecies have not been fulfilled or that Gog is claiming to fulfill them, either legitimately or illegitimately. It is rather that there is an un-surprising coherence and continuity about the words of the prophets. They speak by the commission of the one Yahweh.

Sennacherib, Nebuchadrezzar, and Gog, are all embodiments of the same paradoxical servant of Yahweh. Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah did not have Gog in mind when they spoke of Assyrian and Babylonian kings, but Yahweh had Gog in the back of his mind in giving them their words. These kings were all expressions of the same divine purpose. “My anger and my fury will pour out” (Jer 7:20). Yes, now “my fury will go up in my anger” (38:17). This action will give expression to “the fire of my passion” (Zeph 3:18; cf. 1:8). Yes, “in my passion and in my furious fire I am speaking” (38:19), and thus making things happen by declaring what is to happen. Ezekiel has reflected those words of Zephaniah earlier, in 36:5–6.

So Gog’s coming will be a fulfillment of words in these earlier prophets as well as in Ezekiel (Theodoret, 255, adds Hosea, Joel and Micah).[[139]](#footnote-139) Whereas Yahweh sent Sennacherib and Nebuchadrezzar as an expression of angry fury with Israel, however, the good news that will emerge here is that Gog is now the victim of his angry fury, like other nations in due course in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah, and so they have already been in Ezekiel. With Gog there is an extra nuance. In Isaiah it was particularly clear that Yahweh first made use of Assyria, then turned on it because of its wrongdoing. There was a narrative sequence in Yahweh’s involvement. Yahweh has enabled Ezekiel to stand further back and have a broader perspective on his involvement with the nations. Actually, he knew before he commissioned Assyria or Babylon that in due course he would be putting the nations down. He knew that his day, that day, would come. The day when Gog comes will be “that day.”

**38:19b–20** Once again, Ezekiel refers to Gog’s coming as “that day,” then another prophetic echo follows.Jer 10:22 had also spoken of “a great quaking” bringing about desolation in Judah. Ezekiel picks up that phrase but reverses its significance. The quaking will happen “on the land of Israel,” but its victims will not be Israel. While it will affect fish, birds and animals, which recalls Zeph 1:2–3, with a nice irony Zephaniah mentions them in connection with catastrophe for the world in general, and only then comes to his real concern with Israel. In reverse, Ezekiel is here speaking as if envisaging a catastrophe for Israel, but it will become clear that the nations are his actual focus. Significantly, further, Ezekiel includes reptiles as well as the creatures mentioned in Zephaniah, which makes his list correspond to Gen 1. This parallel compares with other allusions to Gen 1 in Ezekiel (e.g., 26:19–21). Yahweh’s message threatens an act of uncreation, a threat extended in the picture of the fate of mountains, embankments or terraces, and walls. “I can hear the Wagnerian music now as Yahweh’s entrance is marked with every kind of special effect Hollywood can muster. Earthquakes, fire, hail, brimstone.… The battlefield is changed when the Divine Warrior steps into the scene.”[[140]](#footnote-140)

**38:21–23** Which sounds like a catastrophe that must affect Israel’s own earthworks and fortifications, but Ezekiel skips over that possibility—perhaps the tumbling of mountains and walls is simply a stock feature of any portrait of earthquake-like catastrophe. He goes on to develop the portrait of how calamity will come to Gog, using images that speak more of the human side to what Yahweh will cause people to experience. One image is that he himself will act like the battle general that he is, in summoning hordes of people to fight. In theory they will be fighting in Gog’s army, but Yahweh will have in mind their fighting against Gog. They will be such hordes that they end up fighting each other (cf. Judg 7:22). It will be a parody of a battle. Another image is that Yahweh will be acting like the president of the community court who will engage in issuing a ruling (שׇׁפַט niphal) for Gog and will utilize two of his classic penalties, epidemic and bloodshed. He will act as the God who controls the weather, pouring down rain, hail, and sulfur (the kind of evil substance that issues from volcanic eruption). It will all show his “greatness,” his power, and thus his “sacredness,” his distinctive deity. He cannot be messed with and he has to be acknowledged. The closing verse of Ezek 38 sums up “the real purpose of the Gog episode” (Joyce, 215). “Gog’s campaign is not an undertaking like many other wars but is a war at the center point of the world in which there is therefore involved a decisive event of world history” (Zimmerli, 2:311). The medieval chapter division has something to be said for it.

**39:1–5** Once more Yahweh starts again in what might be a separate message or might be a continuation that first sums up the message so far. Then Yahweh nuances his action in three ways. He will cause Gog’s military defeat in a different fashion, by making him drop the weapons with which he is aiming to shoot at unsuspecting Israelite villagers. The weapons are now bows rather than swords. Is the assumption that the villagers will then slaughter the paralyzed attackers? Ezekiel does not say so. He describes no battle. More likely it is Yahweh who strikes the attackers down (cf. 38:22). Either way, Yahweh will add to the distress of the potentially doomed military by drawing attention to the inevitable fate of their corpses. They will not join their ancestors in a family tomb and rest in peace, but be consumed on the battle field by creatures of the wild, with no one to protect them (contrast 2 Sam 21:10). They will experience the fate threatened for Israel in Deut 28:26 and lamented by Israel in Psa 79:2. Things will be the same on another semi-final day: “Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather” (Matt 24:28).

**39:6** Then Yahweh will act like another military commander who undertakes a counter-invasion of Gog’s own territory and the territories of his allies, and sets fire to their towns where their people are living in their own false sense of security. But “the destruction of Gog and his hordes is not Yahweh’s ultimate goal in chaps. 38–39; rather it is the means by which larger goals of crucial importance within the book of Ezekiel will be achieved. In 38:16b, one of those goals was identified: that the nations come to know Yahweh’s unparalleled sovereignty and power. Gog is Yahweh’s vehicle—the means by which Yahweh will display the Lord’s holiness in the sight of the nations” (Darr, on 39:1–8).

**39:7–8** Recognizing Yahweh’s sacred name is an alternative formula for recognizing him in his sacredness (38:23). A person’s name refers to, reveals, and brings home the reality of this person (see 20:9). Yahweh therefore cares passionately about his name (39:25). Recognizing it is the opposite of profaning it by treating it as ordinary, which implies treating Yahweh himself as just any old god (cf. 20:39; 43:7–8). Does Yahweh’s determination to get an acknowledgment of his sacred name among the Israelites imply that they have still not been acknowledging it? Ezek 38–39 gives no such indication in the context of his having brought them back to the land and their living there with a sense of security that must derive from him. But neither has Ezekiel given any explicit indication that they have been acknowledging it, and 39:22 will speak of their coming to acknowledge Yahweh, while 39:26 will speak of their needing to keep their shame in mind. It would not be surprising if Yahweh’s overwhelming their invaders added depth or seriousness to their recognition. Or perhaps Yahweh refers to a recognition of him that the nations will give when they see him act in Israel’s midst in the way 39:1–6 describes. It will contrast with the incidental profaning of him through Israel through his expelling them from his land because of their waywardness (36:16–23). Either way, it will be the day Yahweh has long spoken of, the fulfillment of the vision long expressed by prophets (38:17). In the meantime, however, the Israelites whom Ezekiel actually addresses are people who do not seriously acknowledge Yahweh, so rhetorically they feature as the audience in the message here.

**39:9–10** There now follows the first of three concrete midrashic parodies of earlier Scriptures. Ezekiel has had his thinking stimulated by a passage from the Scriptures and has built on it with his characteristic imagination.

Go look at Yahweh’s acts,

 how he has set great desolation in the earth,

stopping battles to the end of the earth,

Breaking bow and shattering spear,

 burning shields in fire. (Psa 46:8–9 [9–10])

Every boot of someone tramping with quaking

 and the clothing rolled in much blood

Yes, it will be for burning,

 consumed by fire. (Isa 9:5 [4])

You know the picture the psalm gives of the rescue Isaiah promised Jerusalem at the time of Sennacherib’s invasion, and the picture Isaiah himself painted? “The great event is playfully caused to vanish into humdrum usefulness for the citizens of the new era” (Eichrodt, 527). And if Isaiah and the psalm portrayed something of monumental size, Ezekiel makes it even bigger. Oh, and there will also be plenty of opportunity to reverse the looting operation that the now deceased Gog army thought they were going to indulge in. Yes, people will enjoy themselves “like people dividing up plunder” (Isa 9:3 [2]). The note about plundering extends the link with earlier Scriptures and also puts this little midrash in 39:9–10 into more explicit connection with the wider context of the Gog chapters and their concern with Yahweh taking action against Gog as the plunderer.

**39:11–16** The second midrashic parody presupposes another need for cleaning up, a more serious one from the perspective of the people’s relationship with Yahweh. Once again Ezekiel portrays something that neatly transposes a warning that was issued to Israel itself earlier. Yahweh had threatened to throw the people’s corpses down in front of their idols and scatter their bones around their settlements (6:5–6). Now there will be a reverse of that. It is especially clear here that speaking in terms of parody does not imply that Ezekiel disparages the subjects of the texts he takes up—here the assumptions about defilement and cleansing. The parody constitutes an imaginative enhancement of what the rules about cleansing would need to mean in a situation such as the one described in these chapters, and an enhancement of what the event itself would mean, though it might still make his audience grin.

Any dead body is a source of defilement, and Yahweh therefore gave Israel rules about burial and about how to counteract defilement (e.g., Num 19; Deut 21:23). The slaughter of Gog and his forces therefore raises issues about defilement in the land, and Ezekiel lays down a procedure for dealing with them, without commenting on the relationship between these instructions and the animals devouring corpses (39:4–5). The idea is that there will be a huge burial place for Gog’s forces, which will appropriately be entitled Gog’s Horde Ravine. The cleaning up operation is one for which “Israel’s household” as a whole, “the entire citizenry” (see 7:27), accepts responsibility. But the process also involves the appointing of special people to see that the job is done thoroughly. The “seven months” follows up the “seven years” for the firewood and recalls the importance of “seven” in Israel’s life with God. Once again, “that day,” the day when Gog comes, is “the day of my getting myself honor,” and Israel’s activity in accepting responsibility for the burials draws attention to its not fighting in the battle. As is the case with the disposing of the weapons, it is simply engaged in the clearing up operations. It gets a name for the way it does that. In addition, the reaffirmation that this is “the day of my getting myself honor” makes explicit the point about the midrash in this context. The huge task of cleaning up that the paragraph describes testifies to the magnitude of the destruction that Yahweh has undertaken in asserting himself over the forces of greed ranged against his people. While Yahweh speaks most often in these two chapters about manifesting his sacredness (38:16, 23; 39:7, 25, 27), he has also spoken of manifesting his greatness (38:23), and here he speaks of manifesting his honor (cf. 39:21). All are ways of making essentially the same point. His greatness is his power that enables him to do as he wishes in the world and over against the supposed greatness of the likes of Gog. His sacredness is his distinctiveness as the great and powerful God that also distinguishes him from other so-called gods. And his honor is the shining splendor that reflects that distinctiveness and calls for recognition.

It is more or less impossible to gain a coherent picture of the location and naming of the burial place. Ezekiel is more interested in working with the potential meaning of the names and their associations. The difficulty reflects the message’s nature as a parody. It is like a cartoon. The obvious understanding of the place’s first designation is “The Ravine of People Passing Through” (הׇעֹבְרׅים; so LXX, Vg., Sym.), but there are no references elsewhere to such a place and there is no reason to invent such a name. On the other hand, understanding the name to denote “The Ravine of People Passing On” in death would make much sense as a name to invent. The name of the ravine, Oberim, is virtually the same as the actual name of the mountain region that includes Mount Nebo, Abarim (Num 27:12; 33:47–48; Deut 32:49), which is mentioned by Jeremiah (22:20). It was east of the Jordan and it could thus count as “east of the sea” if the sea was the Dead Sea. It would be a great place to dispose of the bodies outside the land of Israel—but Ezekiel locates the burial place “in Israel.” So “east of the sea” would have to mean east of the Mediterranean.[[141]](#footnote-141) The advantage of that location is that it makes for a link between Gog’s Horde Ravine (גֵּיא הֲמוֹן גּוֹג), Ge Hamon Gog, and the Hinnom Ravine, which was notoriously the location of a place for offering human sacrifice (e.g., Jer 7:31–32).[[142]](#footnote-142) It was just below the city of Jerusalem, and the subsequent incidental reference to a city named Hamonah might make people think of Jerusalem.[[143]](#footnote-143) The Hinnom Ravine would also make a good place for disposing of the remains of Gog’s army. Wherever the ravine was, if they all went there, it would ironically or appropriately mean that the ravine would get so full of the horde of people who had passed on that it would stop other people passing through in the future. Ezekiel gives the expression “the people passing through” one more association as a reference to the people appointed to pass around the country making sure no bones have been missed.

**39:17–20** The third midrashic parody takes us back to 39:4 and again presupposes that the successive paragraphs in Ezek 38–39 do not work as a logical sequence, in that it reverts to a time when the burying has not yet happened. The sense in which this message is a parody of earlier Scriptures again differs from the previous examples. Whereas 39:11–16 was an extreme version fulfilling principles from the Torah, 39:17–20 envisages something contrasting with the Torah. In the festivity that could be an aspect of a sacrifice, drinking blood and eating fat is exactly what people were not supposed to (e.g., Lev 3:17). Perhaps Yahweh is (ironically) issuing an invitation to a מַרׅזֵחַ, a wake, an event a little like a Christian agape which was a festive meal of a semi-religious kind, but which in the case of a marzeah would be an illegitimate commemoration of someone’s death (cf. Jer 16:5; see Cook, 99–103). In this wake, however, instead of human beings gorging themselves legitimately or illegitimately on creatures from the animal world, the animal world gorges itself on creatures of the human world who fulfill the role of the sacrificial animals in the event. In the context of the Gog chapters, the significance of this parody is again to enhance the impression of a slaughter of great magnitude among earth’s princes that Yahweh has undertaken. In addition, “the elimination of the corpses of Gog and his warriors thus contrasts starkly with the divinely perpetuated ‘living’ dead of Israel in 37:1–14, here representing the returning exiles, to whom the land is said to belong.” [[144]](#footnote-144)

In a further difference in the sense in which Ezekiel is lampooning earlier Scriptures, he is not the first prophet to work with the image taken up in this message, though scholars hold different opinions concerning the date of the relevant passages. In that connection, the least controversial is again Zephaniah (1:7): “Yahweh has prepared a sacrifice.” It means that Yahweh’s sword “will devour and be full and drunk from [his adversaries’] blood, because the Lord Yahweh has a sacrifice in the northern country” (Jer 46:10). Most extensively:

Yahweh has a sword full of blood,

 gorged with fat,

With the blood of lambs and goats,

 with the kidney fat of rams.

Because Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah,

 a great slaughter in the country of Edom.

Wild oxen will fall with them,

 bulls with steers.

Their country will be filled with blood,

 their dirt will be gorged with fat. (Isa 34:6–7)

This Ezekiel passage is also subsequently taken up spectacularly in Rev 19:17–21, where the midrashic parody gives birth to another midrashic parody.

**39:21–22** As happened at the conclusion of 39:1–8, before the three vivid concrete parodies, after them Ezekiel shifts to generalization in such a sharp fashion that one might have wondered whether this is the beginning of an originally separate message that has lost its introduction. But in Ezekiel’s characteristic fashion, he is here providing his readers with an interpretation of the parodies and of the parable he has been telling through 38:1–39:20. To put it another way, the effect of the shift in 39:21–22 is to make explicit the relationship of the Gog chapters to their context in Part Five of the Ezekiel scroll, and in particular their relationship to the promises that preceded in 37:15–28 with their implicitly incomplete agenda. The entirety of 38:1–39:20, the three parodies in particular, and the wake parody in even more particular, have been concerned with Yahweh’s putting or laying down or demonstrating his honor (or sacredness or greatness: see 39:21) among the nations. Indeed, the Gog message has portrayed his implementing his ruling or sentence (מׅשְׁפׇּט; Cook, 105) before the eyes of all the nations. His hand has been at work. Like the eventual fate of Assyria or Babylon or any empire, the fate of Gog as the expansionist aggressor or would-be worldwide dominant power offers insight to the rest of the world, and also draws Israel into acknowledgment of Yahweh. They are the same double aim that Yahweh had in mind in 39:7–8, though here it is stated in reverse order. As in 39:7–8, Ezekiel hardly implies that the Israel of Gog’s day does not really acknowledge Yahweh, but he likely does imply that the acknowledgment of Yahweh by the Israel that he addresses leaves something to be desired. The closing phrase “from that day and onward” follows up nicely “that is the day I have spoken of” (39:8).

**39:23–24** Yahweh’s continuing statement of his aim further explicates his statement in 39:7–8. Israel in exile threatened to turn Yahweh’s name into something ordinary, because its leaving the land could give the impression that Yahweh was too weak to hold onto it and keep Israel in possession of it (Rashi, in MG). Subsequent events will show that this cannot be a correct interpretation. Yahweh may imply that it is the great battle that will have that effect, or may be referring to his subsequent restoration of Israel, to which 39:25–29 will refer. Either way, it’s not clear how the nations will make the jump from their understandable but mistaken assumption of Yahweh’s weakness to a realization of the real dynamic behind what happened.

But asking such questions seems literalist (as it is literalist to query Yahweh’s saying that “all of” the people fell by the sword, a favorite hyperbole\* of Ezekiel’s). Ezekiel doesn’t actually imagine the nations meditating on the implications of the Israelites’ exile but again makes his point here for the benefit of his own readers, to remind them of the dimensions of their moral and religious failure. He wants them to recall their “waywardness” in walking a different way from the one Yahweh directed, their ”trespass” in ignoring Yahweh’s rights, their “defilement,” the stain that they bore as a result of their bloodshed and other contaminations, and their “rebellion,” their declining to comply with his authority in their political life. In the middle of the powerful and unparalleled combination of images for their wrongdoing and again at the end is a description of Yahweh’s reaction that is also unparalleled in Ezekiel: “I hid my face from them.” Yahweh’s threat to hide his face goes back to Deut 31:17–18, which makes clear the implication of the image. If a king or a parent or God shines his face, it generates action that provides and protects, while hiding the face conversely implies a withdrawal of love and protection. The image recurs with such implications in the Psalms (e.g., 13:1 [2]; 22:24 [25]; 30:7 [8]; 44:27 [28]; also Isa 54:8; 64:7 [6]). In the Psalms, Israel sometimes asks why Yahweh is hiding his face (e.g., 44:24 [25]). Here Ezekiel answers that question expressed in Israel’s prayers and reminds his audience that there was good reason why they were in exile. It will not do to assume that the invariable or even regular answer to the theodicy question is that suffering issues from human sin, but this time, it does.

**39:25–29** Once again, Ezekiel’s “therefore” makes only a loose connection with what precedes (cf. 38:14), as the new introduction makes for a transition in the chapters and reestablishes a connection of substance, though not of words, with 37:15–28. The verses serve “to express… the final security of God’s people in the face of the worst of threats, as well as to reaffirm the fundamental promise of return to the land” (Allen, 2:204).

An intriguing feature of these closing verses is their combining characteristic Ezekiel motifs and words[[145]](#footnote-145) with ones that are not typical of him, as already 39:23–24 did. Like hiding the face, having compassion (רׇחַם piel) occurs only here in Ezekiel. The verb is an Isaiah and Jeremiah word, but the related noun recurs in the Psalms. Ezekiel here indicates that “divine compassion lies hidden behind Ezekiel’s icy-sounding rhetoric of God acting solely for the sake of God’s holy name” (Cook, 108). The verb “be passionate” (קׇנׇא piel) is also virtually unique here in Ezekiel (the Eden trees are its subject in 31:9) but Ezekiel often uses the related noun (e.g., 38:19). He does picture passion as one of Yahweh’s traits and he is concerned about his sacred name. The notion of continuing to carry shame in a way that can have positive significance compares with the notion of continuing to feel some self-loathing in a way that can positive significance (36:31). And while Ezekiel has often referred to Yahweh’s spirit, the epilogue ends with the striking unique reference to Yahweh’s having poured out his spirit on Israel.

An implication of the epilogue is either that Ezekiel has acquired a string of new expressions or that this passage points to the hand of someone who closely identifies with Ezekiel’s thinking but also introduces expressions from elsewhere that help to give expression to that thinking.

Biblical Theology Comments

In the fourth century AD, in the context of pressure on the Roman empire from the Goths (who were themselves under pressure from the Huns), Ambrose of Milan sought to encourage the emperor by identifying the Goths as Gog’s forces, who were acting in fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophecy, and were therefore bound to be defeated.[[146]](#footnote-146) Soon after, just after the fall of Rome, Jerome (428–29) expresses his frustration with people who project forward the fulfillment of the Gog prophecies to a period that will follow the millennium or who relate them to demonic attacks on the heavenly realm. He sees them as relating to the church’s experience in the present. In the eleventh century, Pope Urban and St Bernhard identified the Saracens as Gog’s forces, and in the sixteenth century, Martin Luther identified the Turks as Gog’s forces.[[147]](#footnote-147) These are but a few examples of the ways in which expositors over the centuries have seen Gog as a person of their own day.

The book *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey is said to have sold tens of millions of copies over the fifty years since its publication. Its framework of thinking being premillennial rather than postmillennial or amillennial,[[148]](#footnote-148) it assumes that we should expect things in the world to get worse as years go by and as the time draws near when Jesus will return, and that the First Testament prophets have an important part to play in enabling us to know how events will unfold. It takes Ezek 38–39 as a key text and as referring to a great final crisis in which world powers will attempt to crush Israel but will find that God intervenes. They will come to recognize him, and Jesus’s return will shortly follow. When the chapters talk about events to come “after many days” and “at the conclusion of years,” they are referring to our time. When they refer to a range of powers to the north of Israel, they are referring to Russia and associated powers. When Ezekiel uses the word רֹאשׁ, Rosh, he refers to Russia, while Meshek refers to Moscow. Other names also link with the names of modern countries.

Lindsey’s approach to interpreting names, and his working with a big picture of theological and prophetic expectation constructed from different parts of the Scriptures, compares with the interpretations that Jews and Christians have used over the centuries. They cannot be proved wrong when they are articulated, though history regularly proves them wrong. The years that have passed since Lindsey’s book’s publication have already seen it experiencing the same fate as other interpretations (for instance, the USSR no longer exists and Egypt has concluded a peace treaty with Israel). Modern readers of Ezekiel would be wise to allow for a possible contemporary fulfillment of Ezekiel’s vision of a battle in which God puts down a coalition of nations, which might presumably include the United States and the United Kingdom. But it would also be wise to assume that we would be ill-advised to try to work out the details from Ezekiel and elsewhere, since everyone so far who has tried to do so has been proved wrong.

Application and Devotional Implications

In the 1600s, Puritan theologians such as Joseph Mede in England were inclined to fear that the American colonies were in danger of being an incarnation of Gog and Magog.[[149]](#footnote-149) It is a great example of the pot calling the kettle black, because the England that was engaged in developing its empire in Africa and Asia as well in America (along with other European powers) was also behaving as such an incarnation.[[150]](#footnote-150) Indeed, in a positive way “Gog and Magog become the personification of the British nation. They become figures representing the expansion of England/Britain into Empire.”[[151]](#footnote-151) Being such an embodiment is built into being an expanding or imperial power. Yahweh does not call Gog evil. His critique is that it is off “to take plunder, to seize loot” (38:12), as “Sheba and Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish” also note (38:13). It is what its predecessors, Assyria and Babylon had likewise been doing. It is built into being a power with expansionist aspirations. In an age of globalization, people who work in international companies as well as people engaged in the leadership of national powers have to look in the mirror and ask whether they see Gog.

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1. See, e.g., Christophe Nihan, “De la fin du jugement sur Jérusalem au jugement finàl des nations en Ézéchiel: Ézéchiel 33-39 et l'eschatologie du recueil,” in Jacques Vermeylen, ed., *Les prophètes de la Bible et la fin des temps: XXIIIe congrès de l'Association catholique française pour l'étude de la Bible (Lille, 24-27 août 2009)* (Paris: Cerf, 2010), 99–146. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See the translation footnote on 24:26. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. אׅם לֹא, literally, simply “if not.” On “I am alive” and such clauses, see 5:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Tiemeyer, “Abraham.” [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See, e.g., Klein, *Schriftauslegung*, 24–80; “Prophecy Continued,” 575–78. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Klein, *Schriftauslegung*, 337–47. Milgrom (“Leviticus 26”) begins here in his comparison of Lev 26 and Ezekiel. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Nihan (“Ezekiel”) suggests a mutual interaction between Ezekiel and Lev 26. See also Ganzel and Levitt Kohn, “Ezekiel’s Prophetic Message”; Kopilovitz, “What Kind?”; Lyons, “How Have We Changed?”; Haran, “Ezekiel”; Tooman, “Covenant.” [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See the translation footnote on 13:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. LXX, Vg. have “slaughter,” but זׇבַח denotes killing in connection with making an offering, and it is thus distinguishable from טׇבַח. When זׇבַח denotes more ordinary slaughter (e.g., 1 Sam 28:24), it likely always carries a hint of reference to sacrificial slaughter—especially in the thinking of a priest like Ezekiel. Here, its juxtaposition with reference to eating fat links with this hint (see the verse-by-verse commentary). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ezekiel uses the niphal participle from חׇלׇה, “be sick,” then the qal; cf. the alternation of qal and hiphil of שׁוּב in 14:6 (Zimmerli, 2:204). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. On “I am alive” and if-clauses whose apodosis\* is left unstated, see 5:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. צֹאן, “flock,” is f. but “them” on וּבׅקַּרְתּׅים, “I will inquire into them,” is m. Through 34:11–15 and in 34:23 Ezekiel continues this alternating, which links with the fact that the “flock” comprises people. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. On the grammatical construction, see the translation comment on 16:27. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. That is, on rich pasture they will pasture: I keep the “shepherd” terminology to match the way the Hebrew works. So also in 34:18–19. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The flock. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. “Animal” is שֶֹה, which covers both sheep and goats, so there is not an English equivalent word. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Yahweh will make the wilderness and the woods an embodiment of blessing and will do the same for the Jerusalem area, appended in case it seems odd to omit it. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. I take the two preceding sentences as both comprising an extraposed subordinate clause with the subject before the verb, followed by a *waw*-apodosis.\* [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. אׇסַף can denote being “gathered” to one’s family when one dies, and Ezekiel might be referring to this kind of gathering (Moshe ben Shesheth, 75). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. See Konkel, “Ezechiel-Septuaginta,” 49–51 (Konkel discusses many other difference between MT, Papyrus 967, and the main LXX text). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Mein, “Profitable and Unprofitable.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Anum, Enlil, and Inanna are gods; Isin is a city south of Nippur and thus, coincidentally, near Kebar. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. On 34:27, see Lyons, “Marking,” 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. See Deeley, “Ezekiel's Shepherd”; Porter, “Sheep”; further Biwul, *Theological Examination*; Obinwa, *“ I Shall Feed Them”*; Fowler and Strickland, *Influence*, 89–95. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. “Sermon 46,” 263, 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. “Sermon 46,” 264–65. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. “Sermon 47,” 302, 315. Heil, “Ezekiel 34,” looks at the shepherd metaphor more broadly in Matthew. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Crane, *Israel’s Restoration*,36. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. On “I am alive” and such incomplete declarations, see 5:11. This example is unique in Ezekiel for the כּׅי, “that,” which makes explicit that the declaration is an oath (cf. Jer 22:24; 46:18). LXX takes it as asseverative, “surely”; cf. EVV when they do not explicitly translate it. There is another variant in 35:11 and further incomplete declarations in 36:5 and 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. That is, you didn’t want your blood shed. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See the translation footnote on 35:6. This example is also unique, for the resumptive *waw* on וְעׇשֹׅיתׅי, which I take as overtly treating “I am alive” as extraposed. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. EVV have the entire “earth” rejoicing, but in Ezekiel אֶרֶץ more often means “land,” and that makes sense here (Trapp, 486) [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. I take this as BDB’s שׇׁאַף II, a byform\* of שׁוּף (see also *HALOT* on שׁוּף). Cf. Vg. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Literally, “and went up on the lip.” [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The elliptical\* expression perhaps suggests that the nations intended to treat the Judahite land as their common land, as מׅגְרׇשׁ, the open land around a town that belonged to no one family. It would no longer belong to “Israel’s household.” [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. “You” is now f. sg. אׇתְּ (in pause), referring to the land. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Salo (“Sondergut”)argues that this and other distinctive phrases in Ezek 35 are expansions on the earlier text lying behind MT. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Cf. Wojciech Pikor, *The Land of Israel in the Book of Ezekiel*, LHBOTS 667 (London: T&T Clark, 2018), 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Briggs, “Idols.” [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Stevenson, “Earth.” [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Wendland, “Bones,” 258. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Häner, “Ezekiel 36,” 323. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Dale F. Launderville, *Spirit and Reason: The Embodied Character of Ezekiel’s Symbolic Thinking* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 349. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. The participial circumstantial clause is followed by a *waw-*consecutive. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. The “myself” marks Ezekiel’s inclusion of the semantically unnecessary אׇנֹכׅי, as in Jer 11:4; 24:7; 30:22. Other passages have אֲנׅי (Jer 32:38; Ezek 11:20; 14:11; 34:31; 37:23; Zech 8:8) or have no pronoun (Jer 7:23; Ezek 37:23). Ezekiel’s אׇנֹכׅי hardly tells us anything about the passage’s origin (so Zimmerli, 2:249; contrast Block, 2:357). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See the translation footnote on 26:20. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. See, e.g., Crane, *Israel’s Restoration*, 207–64; Leene, *Newness*, 172–183; Schnocks, “Geist.” [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Patmore, “Shorter and Longer Texts,” 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Keys, “Hearts Sprinkled.” [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Leene, *Newness*, 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Some Qumran references take the spirit as itself a means of revelation (Kozman, “Ezekiel’s Promised Spirit”). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Cf. James E. Robson, *Word and Spirit in Ezekiel*, LHBOTS 447 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 213–62. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Piotrowski, “‘Ί Will Save,’” sees these two as influences on Matt 1:21. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. John F. A. Sawyer, *TDOT* 6:445. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. The first clause has the object before the verb and leads asyndetically\* into the second clause. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Leene, *Newness*, 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Leene, *Newness*,169. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. The *weqatal*\* וְהֶעֱבׅירַנׅי looks ungrammatical by CBH standards. One would expect a *waw*-consecutive.\* The same applies to the further instances of *weqatal* in 37:7, 8, and 10. Janina M. Hiebel, *Ezekiel's Vision Accounts as Interrelated Narratives: A Redaction-Critical and Theological Study*, BZAW 475 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), 144–51, discusses these verbs. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Whereas עֲצׇמוֹת, “bones,” is f., עֲלֵיהֶם has m. suffix, referring to the people whose bones they were. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Ezekiel uses the regular formulation כֹה אׇמַר, but here and in 37:9 the expression refers to a more instantaneous/performative\* form of speech. One might translate “is saying.” [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. וַתּׅקְרְבוּ is a second-person form and is thus anomalous; one would expect וַתּׅקְרֹבְנׇה. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Whereas the forms of נׇבׇא, “prophesy,” in 37:4, 7, and 9 have been Ezekiel’s usual niphal, וְהׅנַּבֵּאתׅי is hitpael, the form used of the women prophesying in 13:17. There it has pejorative connotations, as it commonly does elsewhere in the First Testament. Here it simply reflects Ezekiel’s liking for variation when he repeats things: the next verb is “he commanded me” rather than “I was commanded” as in 37:7. And see the translation footnote on 37:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. נׅגְזַרְנוּ לׇנוּ, literally “we have been cut off as regards ourselves” (see JM 133d). [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. וְהׅנַּחְתּׅי is a different form of נוַּח hiphil from וַיְּנׅיחֵנׅי in 37:1. BDB gives different meanings for the two forms, “set down” for the first” and “settle down” for the second, but Ezekiel’s use does not correspond to what one would expect (as BDB notes), so we should likely ignore that theoretical difference and see this as another instance of Ezekiel’s liking variation (see the translation footnote on 37:10. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Olley (“Trajectories,” 213) also locates one in the middle of 37:9; cf. Crane, *Israel’s Restoration*,96. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Seitz, “Ezekiel 37,” 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. See further Davis, “Treaty Parallel”; also Greenberg, 2:748. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Biwul, “Vision,” 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Konkel, “Ezechiel,” 344. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Biwul, “Restoration,” 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Hiebel, “Visions,” 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Barth, *CD* 2,2: 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Barth, *CD* 3,1: 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Grey, “Acts of the Spirit,” 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. See Basdeo-Hill, “Sights and Sounds.” [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Welch, “Ezekiel 37.” [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Cf. Rüttenauer, *“Ihr wollt das Land besitzen?”* 309–28. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Pohlmann (494) sees 37:11–14 as the original text if the vision. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Olyan, “Cut Off.” [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Olyan, “Unnoticed Resonances.” [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Launderville, “Threat.” [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. See further Block, “Prophet”: also Maré, “Ezekiel.” [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. So MacDonald, “Spirit,” 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Tuell, “True Metaphor.” [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. See Coetzee, “Ideology.” [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Coetzee, “Ideology,” 9; cf. Evans, “Extent.” [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Cf. Grassi, “Ezekiel xxxvii.” [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. See Block, 2:390–91. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Wiesel, “Ezekiel,” 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Biwul, “Vision.” [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Boshart, “Can These Bones Live?.” [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Qubti, “Ezekiel 37.” [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Cf. Weyde, “Messianic Expectations.” [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Whitley, “Literary Expansion,” offers a more complex study of the passage’s growth, while Sweeney (“Royal Oracle”) reads it in light of the aims of Josiah’s reform. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Whereas “get” in 37:16a was the usual short form קַח, here Ezekiel indulges in his liking for variety in using the long form לְקַח. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. אֲחׇדׅים, literally “singles.” The pl., which elsewhere means “a few,” is perhaps assimilated to the pl. verb “they will become.” In 37:19, the word is sg. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. See the translation footnote on 3:11. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. This “inconstruable” occurrence of נׇתַן (Greenberg, 2:757) is an aspect of 37:26–28 following 34:25–31, specifically 34:26, which refers to Yahweh’s making the land a blessing (cf. Tg. here, and NRSV). Ezekiel omits the word “blessing” and leaves an ellipse,\* in going on to reformulate the promise in terms of causing the people to abound. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. See Crouch, “Dynasties,” for this understanding, with reference to the lines of Zedekiah and Jehoiachin. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Keck, “Ezekiel 37.” [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. See further Klein, *Schriftauslegung*, 211–70. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. See the translation footnote. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. See further Lust, “Utopian Expectations.” [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Greenwood, “Jewish Hope,” 384. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Mead, *Two Sticks*, presses the point in a seventeenth-century context. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. See Suh, “Ephesians 37”; see also Jolivet, “Ethical Instructions.” [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. See, e.g., Zimmerli, 2:296–304; Klein, *Schriftauslegung*, 6–17. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Paul D. Hanson, *The Dawn of Apocalyptic: The Historical and Sociological Roots of Jewish Apocalyptic Eschatology* (Revised ed., Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Cf. Boadt, “Mythological Themes,” 223–26. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. So Tooman, *Gog*. Strine (“Compositional Models”) questions Tooman’s exposition of this understanding but not the concept itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Cf. Klein, *Schriftauslegung,* 111–69. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Tooman discusses the notion of midrash and uses the word *parody* of 39:11–16 and 17–20 (*Gog*, 21–23, 181–82, 187–88). [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. The compound expression נׇשֹׅיא רֹאשׁ is unique, and only here in Ezekiel does “head” refer to a person. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. More literally, “be ready, get ready for yourself”: הׅכֹּן and הׇכֵן are qal and hiphil from כּון; cf. such combinations in 14:6; 18.30. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. פׇּקַד niphal usually signifies “be missing,” which would be an interesting meaning here. But in Neh 7:1; 12:44 it suggests being appointed to a position or taking up a position, which corresponds to one of the meanings of the qal as “appoint” or “summon to take up a position.” This fits the parallelism\* in the line, with “come” in the second colon paralleling but going beyond “take up your position” in the first colon. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Through 38:8 the “country” refers to its people, who have by now been enabled to come back to Canaan. The people then becomes “they” in the next colon. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. More specifically, טַבּוּר likely means “navel,” its meaning in PBH (cf. LXX here). It otherwise occurs in the First Testament only in Judg 9:37, perhaps as a place name. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. In 19:2–6; 32:2; 44:19, כְּפׅיר referred to a species of lion, but this and a number of related words can refer to villages, as common nouns or as proper nouns (cf. LXX, Theod.). [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. מַדְרֵגוֹת, “embankments” or “terraces,” occurs otherwise in the First Testament only in Song 2:14, but see *m. Shebiit* 3.8; *DTT*, 735, *HALOT*. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. שׁׅשֵׁא, “drive on,” is a hapax\* which LXX translates as “lead down” and Vg. as “lead on.” It puts less concretely the image of “put hooks in your jaws” in the equivalent place in 38:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Literally, “of every wing.” [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. The accent on the second syllable marks the first verb, בׇּאׇה, “it is coming,” as a participle (BDB), the kind of participle that refers to something that is about to take place. The second verb, וְנׅהְיׇתׇה (niphal), “it is happening,” is a *waw*-consecutive that continues the significance of the participle. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. While דּׅבַּרְתּׅי in 38:19 and 39:5 was a *qatal*\* with performative\* significance meaning “I am speaking,” this דּׅבַּרְתּׅי is a regular *qatal* like the one in 38:17. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. See 7:27. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Presumably metonymy\* for charioteers or chariot horses. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. See the translation footnotes on 16:53 and 29:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. LXX probably and Vg. definitely take this infinitival clause (and the following noun clause) thus to refer to the future, as in 38:14 (Cook, 106–7). KJV takes it to refer to the past. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. See the discussion between Wong, “Masoretic and Septuagint,” and Lust, “Spirit.” [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. See Lee, “Enemies Within.” [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. He does appear in Num 24:7 where MT has Agag: see Tooman, *Gog*, 139–43. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Strine, “*Chaoskampf*”; see further Fitzpatrick, *Disarmament*, on the “chaos” myth; Galambush, “Necessary Enemies.” [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. Cook, 87; cf. Klein, *Schriftauslegung*, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Bøe (*Gog*, 88–106) has a substantial survey of the names in the Gog passage. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. See Klein, *Schriftauslegung*, 132–37. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Cook (82–83) sees a broad reworking of Isa 14 in Ezek 38–39. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Crane, *Israel’s Restoration*, 204–5. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Tooman, *Gog*, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Tooman, *Gog*, 28, 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. With different presuppositions from Theodoret’s, Tooman (*Gog*, 146) and Strine (“Compositional Models”) hold different views on whether Ezekiel knew Joel or Joel knew Ezekiel. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Carvalho, “Gog Creates,” 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Though Tg. and Rashi (in MG) envisage east of Lake Kinneret. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Irwin, “Molek Imagery.” [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Odell, “Hamonah.” [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Stavrakopoulou, “Gog's Grave,” 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Tooman (*Gog*, 119–22) draws particular attention to parallels with 28:25–26. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 2:16 (A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Series 2, 10:544). [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. See further, e.g., Railton, “Gog.” [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Beale, “Millennium,” comments on these alternatives in connection with Ezek 38–39. Moskala, “Fulfillment,” illustrates a contemporary Adventist approach, while Jackson, “Holiness,” traces the influence on Pentecostalism of the approach expounded by Lindsey. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. E.g., Joseph Mede, “Epistle XLI,” in *The Works of the Pious and Profoundly-Learned Joseph Mede, B.D*. (London: Royston 1672),796–802. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. See Railton, “Gog,” 39–40; regarding later centuries, Mein, “Armies,” 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Swindell, “Gog,” 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)