

EZEKIEL 38 AND 39
Part XXIII
by Thomas Ice

And as for you, son of man, thus says the Lord GOD, "Speak to every kind of bird and to every beast of the field, assemble and come, gather from every side to My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of mighty men, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as though they were rams, lambs, goats, and bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan. So you will eat fat until you are gluttoned, and drink blood until you are drunk, from My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you.

And you will be gluttoned at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of war," declares the Lord GOD.

—Ezekiel 39:17–20

This passage spends an inordinate amount of verbiage on the clean up aspects following the battle where God wipes out Gog (Ezek. 39:9–20). "The first instructions deal with the disposal of the weapons (verses 9–10), which are to be burned. . . . The next instructions (Ezekiel 39:11–20) deal with the proper disposal of the slain soldiers of the Gog army."¹

MY SACRIFICE

Dr. Randall Price notes that, "it may be that two phases of disposal are in view. The first phase of disposal is that performed by the wild animals assembled to reduce the corpses to skeletons (verses 18–20)." This would be the section that is now under consideration. "Then the bones of the enemy will be properly buried by 'all of the people of the land' (verse 13)."²

In verse 17 the Lord God tells the prophet Ezekiel to speak to every kind of bird and beast of the field to gather themselves from all directions to partake of "My sacrifice which I am going to sacrifice for you, as a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel." Thus, it is the Lord, through the word of the prophet that rounds up this great herd of animals for them to feast upon. There appears to be a polemical purpose intended by the Lord in this passage. The irony is that earlier Gog and his armies attacked Israel for the stated purpose "to capture spoil and to size plunder" (38:12). Yet, because of the Lord's intervention, they become spoil for the wild animals and birds to feast upon. "With the gathering of the weapons for burning there is associated the plundering of the fallen foe (v. 10*b*)," notes Keil, "by which the Israelites do to the enemy what he intended to do to them (Ezek. 38:12), and the people of God obtain possession of the wealth of their foes (cf. Jer. 30:16)."³

The Lord calls the massacre of the invaders "My sacrifice" to the animals and birds. The Lord says He will sacrifice this meal and then calls it a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel. So the Hebrew word for "sacrifice" is used three times in verse 17. Jewish rabbi Fisch indicates that the Jewish translation is "feast," but that it literally means "sacrifice." "The two ideas are interconnected, since one was usually the

occasion of the other. To an Israelite, the sacrifice here described is a grim parody of the true sacrifice, since the 'guests' drink the blood, a rite absolutely forbidden in Israel."⁴

THE MENU

The Lord enumerates the menu that will be on hand for scavenger animals and birds attending this feast. Those whom the Lord describes includes "mighty men" and "the princes of the earth" (39:18). The Hebrew term "mighty men" is the plural of the word for mighty and means "mighty, powerful, i.e., pertaining to being strong, i.e., pertaining to having political or military force."⁵ Therefore, these would be top of the line military soldiers like the ones in our special forces units. The other Hebrew term denoting a human leader means "leader, ruler, chief, prince, i.e., one who governs or rules a group either selected by ability or blood relation."⁶ Not only were the top fighting men destroyed, but also their leadership. The Hebrew text could have just spoken of the princes and it would have been understood that they were from the earth. However, "of the earth" is included to likely indicate that the best from the earth were destroyed by the ruler of heaven and earth—the Lord Himself.

Since the Lord is describing the slaughter of His enemies using the language of a sacrificial feast, He equates the human carnage in terms of sacrificial animals often used in Israel's temple worship. This time the actual sacrifice are the enemies of Israel who are served to animals and birds. "Usually people slaughtered and ate sacrificed animals. Here, however, the men of Gog's armies will be sacrifices; they will be eaten by animals."⁷ "The animals mentioned are figurative of the different ranks of the slain men."⁸ "To give due prominence to this thought, the birds and beasts of prey are summoned by God to gather together to the meal prepared for them. The picture given of it as a sacrificial meal is based upon Isa. 34:6 and Jer. 46:10. In harmony with this picture the slaughtered foes are designated as fattened sacrificial beasts, rams, lambs, he-goats, bullocks; on which Grotius has correctly remarked, that "these names of animals, which were generally employed in the sacrifices, are to be understood as signifying different orders of men, chiefs, generals, soldiers, as the Chaldee also observes."⁹

The phrase "all of them fatlings of Bashan," refers first to a "fattened animal, i.e., a relatively young mammal (usually of the bovine species), weaned animal choice for consumption."¹⁰ Secondly, Bashan refers to "the fertile country bounded by the Jabbok River on the south, the Sea of Galilee on the west, a line from Mount Hermon eastward on the north and the Hauran range on the east."¹¹ As Charles Feinberg notes, "Bashan was famous for its fine pastures and well-fed cattle."¹² If you go to the Golan Heights in Israel today you will see that it is the primary area where cattle graze in pastures and livestock is raised.

Once again verse 19 is a polemic which notes that Gog and his hoards came down to Israel for the purpose of plundering the land, instead, she was the one plundered. In this instance, Gog and his armies will provide the fat and blood by which the animals and birds will be gluttoned and drunk. In order for them to be gluttoned and drunk, there would have to be an excess to eat and drink. Such will be the case in this instance of Gog's defeat upon the hills of Israel.

Verse 20 says, "And you will be gluttoned at My table." "The sacrificial feast mentioned in verse 19 is referred to as 'my table' (v. 20) because it is the Lord who will hold the feast," notes Feinberg. "It is a vivid figure to bring out the idea of vast carnage, deserved judgment and irrevocable doom."¹³ Thus, verse 20 restates literally: "you will be gluttoned at My table with horses and charioteers, with mighty men and all the men of

war," what was said in verse 18 symbolically: "You shall eat the flesh of mighty men, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, as though they were rams, lambs, goats, and bulls." Once again, the clear focus of this passage is upon the fact that our Sovereign Lord is the One who is in control of history and is the One superintending this entire event, even though Gog and his allies had their reasons for the invasion. This entire message is said to be a declaration from the Lord GOD, who reigns over heaven and earth.

CONCLUSION

Even though Ezekiel 39 still has nine verses until it ends, the prophecy of the battle of Gog and Magog ends with verse 20. Dr. Price explains as follows:

Allusions to the Gog War cease with verse 22 and the focus turns exclusively to God's past deliverance of His people and their devotion to Him at the time of their future restoration. Verses 21-22 are transitional verses that restate the divine purpose of Gog's defeat—to bring revelatory information concerning God to the nations (verse 21) and to Israel (verse 22).¹⁴

In coming installments, this writer will take the information gleaned from the prior installments in order to apply to the contemporary or a future world various possibilities that flow inductively from the text. Some of the issue that will need to be addressed are as follows: when, where, why and what will happen in order for a future occurrence of this prophecy to be fulfilled in history. Maranatha!

(To Be Continued . . .)

ENDNOTES

¹ Randall Price, "Ezekiel" in Tim LaHaye & Ed Hindson, editors, *The Popular Bible Prophecy Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2007), p. 194.

² Price, "Ezekiel," p. 194.

³ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002), Vol. 9, p. 338.

⁴ Rabbi Dr. S. Fisch, *Ezekiel: Hebrew Text & English Translation With An Introduction and Commentary* (London: The Soncino Press, 1950), p. 262.

⁵ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), DBLH 1475, #1.

⁶ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, DBLH 5954, #1.

⁷ John F. Walvoord, Roy B. Zuck and Dallas Theological Seminary, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983-c1985), Vol. 1, p. 1302.

⁸ Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), p. 231.

⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, *Commentary*, Vol. 9, p. 339.

¹⁰ Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*, DBLH 5309.

¹¹ R. Laird Harris, Robert Laird. Harris, Gleason Leonard Archer and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999, c1980), p. 137.

¹² Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 231.

¹³ Feinberg, *Ezekiel*, p. 231.

¹⁴ Price, "Ezekiel," p. 194.