

Ezekiel #31

Studies in Ezekiel

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Okay, we're turning this morning to Ezekiel 38 and 39, these chapters that deal with the conflict of Gog and Magog with the armies of the Lord and this great victory that God accomplishes at that time. Now, as we come to this section, we're bringing our study of Ezekiel to a close. I know many of you are, some of you now, are coming into the class for the first time, I think what we'll be talking about in this section and while it is germane and fits with the context of what we've been doing all the way through our study, I think you can come in in midstream here and at least see the significance of these two chapters. They're difficult chapters. They are chapters around which there is a great deal of controversy, difference of interpretations as to who Gog, Magog, these particular peoples are, as well as when this particular battle takes place.

Now, last time I spent a good deal of the class establishing the basic premise from which I'm going to approach these chapters. We reviewed a little bit last week the millennial positions, and depending upon your premise and your position as far as the millennium is concerned, it's going to dictate how you interpret these passages in this particular battle. I was certainly hoping that I would have this done before Mark came back, but here he is, and now we have to go at this head to head here. And that's all right. I made the statement last week, and I think we would have to agree with this, that how we view the millennium, whether we believe in a literal millennial reign of Christ upon earth or no, depends upon our presuppositions as we come to deal with the texts. I think those that have different opinions are not going to come to an individual text and interpret it greatly differently; if we believe in the grammatical and historical exegesis of the scripture, there is going to be a tendency to interpret the individual passages pretty much the same way but the differences of opinion come basically with the presupposition, the premise, that we approach the passages with. I indicated to you last time that a premillennial position basically comes to these passages with the premise that there is a literal land promise that God has given the people of Israel. I do not deny that there are spiritual aspects to the Abrahamic covenant, and I've stressed those many times. I do not deny that there are spiritual aspects to the Mosaic and the Davidic covenants, and I've emphasized those many times. And as I've gone through these salvific passages in Ezekiel with you over these last couple of months, I have emphasized over and over again the spiritual significance that these passages dealing with deliverance and dealing with salvation have in Ezekiel's prophecy and we cannot deny that, and to deny the spiritual implications of these

messages of deliverance and messages of salvation will blind us to the overall scope and the intent of Ezekiel's preaching.

Now, while that is true, I would also contend because I come to these passages with the premise that there is a literal land promise that must be fulfilled, that there are some physical promises and physical aspects of this deliverance as well. So I just want to make it clear that as we come to this section, I'm viewing it from a premillennial standpoint. If you have questions, I'll be happy to deal with those with you as we have time. I'm not going to be dogmatic here because this is indeed a very difficult passage. But regardless of how we interpret the fulfillment of this Gog, Magog instance, I would recommend to you that we put it in the proper context of Ezekiel's preaching, in the proper place in the prophecy. I noted last time again the basic two issues that we have here in these chapters. Number one is when does this conflict take place, and number two, who is involved in this conflict and you have basic interpretations there even from a premillennial perspective. I noted to you last time that the book of Revelation chapter 20 also mentions a conflict between Gog and Magog and the Lord, and if we follow the clear statements of Ezekiel or Revelation chapter 20, that conflict takes place at the end of that thousand-year period, whatever that means, whatever that means, and we can argue about that. But Revelation is explicit that at the end of that period, Satan is loosed, toward the end of that period, Satan is loosed, and you have this conflict that takes place.

Now my contention is that if we understand the context of Ezekiel properly, that Ezekiel is viewing that same conflict that John does in the Apocalypse in chapter 20, contrary to what you'll have in some of your dispensational reference Bibles that indicate that the battle of Gog and Magog takes place either before the tribulation period, in the middle of the tribulation period, or at the end of the tribulation period, putting it at least a thousand years prior to when the Bible says it is. And the reason that's done essentially is because of this propensity to interpret the Bible in the light of the newspaper and current events, and we want to see Russia in here; how can we preach about Gog and Magog if we don't do it was saying Russia in the same breath, in the same sentence. And so if we're going to see Russia here, then we have to put it prior to the millennium, because obviously Russia would not be existing as an entity at that time. So if we follow the newspaper and current events and interpret the Bible in that light, then I suppose we'll put this as a different conflict.

Now, I say that's a mistake for two reasons, more than two reasons. Number one, we never interpret the Bible in the light of the newspaper, number one, and number two, that involves a complete misunderstanding, I'm convinced, it involves a complete misunderstanding of where Ezekiel places this particular conflict. Now chapter 40, and I think this is part of the problem as well, chapter 40 in Ezekiel begins a very difficult section, a description of the temple, a description of the sacrifices that the prophet Ezekiel sees to be reinstated. When, again, is a major question there, the nature of those sacrifices, the nature of that temple that appears to be different in some respects from the temple of Solomon. Major problems. Now, most premillennialists are going to interpret chapter 40 and on to be a reference to what takes place in that millennial era. All right, now if that be the case, it doesn't take a lot of sense to see that chapter 38 and 39 come

before chapter 40, and if chapter 40 deals with the millennial era and 38 and 39 come before that, ah, conclusion 38 and 39, Gog and Magog must take place before that millennial era. All right, that seems to be true on the surface and that basically is the problem, because most of the dispensational interpretations there are only surface interpretations, but that's beside the point.

Now, my suggestion to you is that we put this in the context of Ezekiel. I told you last time I have a lecture that I give on this in a class that I teach on Ezekiel, no doubt, that is called "Gog and Magog in Context." Gog and Magog in context, one of the few ways you hear this passage dealt with in context. Now let me suggest something about the context. I have in the last few years, there are different ways of studying the Bible, yes, different approaches, different methodologies, different things that we look for, different techniques as we do book studies, theology studies, what have you. One of the things that I've been involved in in my own personal study in the last few years is concerned with what we call the structural analysis of the book. The structural analysis. What clues are there in a book itself that suggest the outlining and the organization of that book? All of us are interested in having outlines of books and organizing those books according to the themes and this, that, and the other, and I found that many times the outlines, you read a commentary in the opening part of that commentary, here's an outline of that book, maybe some of your Bibles have outlines of the books and so forth, what I have found that many of those outlines of books are basically based upon subjective interpretation. We read it, "Oh, I think the theme changes here, so we'll make a new point of our outline at this point." And whatever our subjective inclinations are, we have the division along that line, and that's certainly an acceptable way if we can organize the book in whatever way that's going to help. But what I've been impressed with over these last years, particularly I say in my own study, is that these books are written well. The Holy Spirit of God as the author of these books knew how, and I say this reverently, please understand me please, the Holy Spirit as the divine author of these books knew how to write and he knew how to deal with language and how to be logical, and I'm afraid sometimes that we come to the Bible and we use it almost as a, what can I say, we use the Bible almost, we'd be happy enough if it occurred in a three by five index card, right? We have the little problems that we want to face so we go to our index thing, you know, promises for this and we find those little verses here and there that deal with the particular problem that we're after, and we so many times fail to see how these books of the Bible are wonderful, and I say this reverently, please don't misunderstand me, beautiful pieces of writing and literature, all right? They are beautiful pieces. The Holy Spirit is the author and the way he puts the books together is logical, it's exquisite, and if we can find then some objective clue, and what I'm saying here in structural analysis, are there some objective clues in the language of that book itself that will give us some hint as to how that book is developed, how that book is organized, and if I can find the outline, if you will, that the Holy Spirit uses, well, I'm going to be more comfortable with that than what I may come up with on my own.

Now, I don't know what I look for. Can I just talk a little bit about the methodology? When I come to a book or I come to a chapter, I don't know what I'm looking for, but you read it with your eyes open, yes? Sometimes there's going to be certain words, certain

phrases that repeat themselves, sometimes certain grammatical constructions that repeat themselves that seem to be the peg upon which the book is built. Many different things that we look for. Now, I'm saying that to say this, when you come to Ezekiel, different ways of organizing it, but I would suggest this to you, that each of the literary units, each of the units of thought in Ezekiel's prophecy is introduced invariably by a chronological statement. I made this statement, I think, at the close of the period last time, that each of the main divisions or units, paragraphs, chapters, whatever you want to call them, the units of thought are marked in Ezekiel's prophecy by a chronological statement. Now I'm saying this because it's going to be necessary to understand this if we put Ezekiel 38 and 39 in its proper context. So let me just point out some of these with you please.

Look at chapter 1. Obviously the book's going to begin in chapter 1. Notice in verse 1, "Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, in the fifth day of the month." Verse 2, "In the fifth day of the month." All right, that's what I mean by a chronological statement. Ezekiel here is identifying precisely the time in which he is giving this particular message. Now, we have then in this section the inaugural vision of the prophet, we have the Lord's commission to the prophet on the basis of that inaugural vision.

All right, now the next time we see this is in chapter 8 in verse 1, "And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house." And here in this section, the Lord gives Ezekiel a vision of the temple back in Jerusalem, and the consequences of that vision, the sin of the people, the apostasy of the people, the idolatry of the people, is described in this section introduced by this vision.

Now the next statement that we have is in chapter 20. In chapter 20, and all of that between chapter 8 and chapter 19 are dealing with that basic theme that was established in that vision in chapter 8. All right, look at chapter 20 now, verse 1, "And it came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth month." Another chronological statement. And here we have warnings from the past. Chapter 20 is a history lesson as the Lord reviews his past dealings with Israel and how he had brought them out of Egypt and led them in the wilderness for the sake of his own name and for the sake of his own glory, but they kept rejecting that and they did not respond properly to the Lord's goodness and the Lord's grace. And so he deals with that aspect of the past.

Now there are other things that are dealt with there. We have in chapter 23, for instance, part of this same section, the allegory that he tells concerning these two sisters, the whoredoms of Aholah and Aholibah, but still the theme there is the historical transgressions of the people as God warns them; here's an allegory, but it's part of that warning that he gives from the past relationships with the people.

The next one is in chapter 24. "Again in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of the LORD came unto me." Another chronological statement. And here we have the beginning of the siege. He begins here with the parable of the pot and with this little story of the pot, illustration of the pot, the prophet begins to describe what's going to happen in the siege that Babylon lays against Jerusalem.

In chapter 26, in chapter 26, we have the next one. Another chronological statement, "it came to pass in the eleventh year," and so forth and here we have the theme of Tyre and the guilt and the punishment that's going to come upon the nation of Tyre, the city of Tyre, because of their sin and God's judgment upon them.

In chapter 29, I'm not going to point out all of these to you, but in chapter 29 verse 1, you have the next chronological statement where a message there is against Pharaoh and against Egypt. In chapter 29 verse 17, another statement, and here Nebuchadnezzar is brought into the picture and showing how Nebuchadnezzar is the conqueror of Egypt. The next one occurs in chapter 30 in verse 20. We have a message against Pharaoh and a specific word against the king of Egypt. Then in chapter 31, verse 1, the next one. And again, it's a message that is directed specifically to Pharaoh, but it's self-contained. It's not a continuation of what had preceded. It is a new pericope, a new message. a specific self-contained message, if you will, of judgment that God gives to Pharaoh. Then in chapter 32, verse 1, the next one, and we have the dirge over Egypt. In chapter 32, verse 17, the next one, where Egypt is seen to be in Sheol, and God's symbolic judgment there of Egypt.

The next one is in 33, verse 21 and now we're getting to the point where I'm particularly interested that we settle down. In chapter 33:21. Turn there, please. 33:21, "And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month." Chronological statement. The next chronological statement that we're going to see is in chapter 40. Look at chapter 40 and verse 1, "In the five and twentieth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month."

Now do you see what I'm doing here? Follow me, please. I'm saying that each of Ezekiel's units of thought, each of his messages that are contained as specific messages, are introduced with a chronological statement and that can be verified all the way through the book. Now you'll notice, please, that chapter 40 begins with a chronological statement. That tells me that chapter 38 and 39 is, what? Not logically connected to chapter 40 and following. Are you with me? Chapter 38 and 39, according to Ezekiel's organization, chapter 38 and chapter 39, according to God's Spirit's organization is in the section chapter 31 verse 21 to chapter 39. According to Scofield's organization, 38 and 39 go with chapter 40 and following. Now you take your pick. You take your pick. Whose organization do you want to follow? I would suggest, please, that there's more credence and more authority in following what Ezekiel does. Following what Ezekiel does.

All right, now, if then, if then, chapter 38 and 39 go logically with the preceding chapters and specifically beginning at chapter 33 verse 21, then that is a self-contained unit. Now within that unit, within that unit, let's see where chapters 38 and 39 fall. Dale asked the question last week as to where the events of chapter 37 took place. All right, here's the answer to that question. We need to see in this literary section, 33:21 to chapter 39, where all of these events are taking place.

All right, now let's look at this section very quickly to put it in the context. Now, in this section, we have six specific messages. There are six specific messages that are linked together, messages of hope and encouragement that Ezekiel is giving to the people. 33:21 to 39 are messages of hope and encouragement, I'm saying, that Ezekiel is giving to the people. Now, he begins at the beginning. In chapter 33, the first message, and let me just summarize these quickly, please, in chapter 33, verses 23 to 33, we have the first message. This concerns the land specifically. Why, and the question basically is this, if God promised the land to Abraham, and we saw that promise in Genesis 15 last week, if God promised the land to Abraham, then why are we now losing the land? Why are we being expelled from the land? Why is that land being taken away from us? Why are the Babylonians coming in here and captivating, capturing all of our people? Why is that taking place if God made that promise to Abraham? Well, this section explains why the land was being lost. Because you've disobeyed. You have rejected God's grace as a nation. You have disobeyed the covenant, and you go back to the Pentateuch and you have the warnings that Moses gives the people. Their participation and their enjoyment in the land was always contingent upon their obedience. "If you obey me, the land is yours. If you don't obey me, then you're going to be expelled from that land." Go back to Deuteronomy 28 and following, you have that stated very, very clearly, individual participation. That was an inviolable promise that God had given Abraham, but the individual participation and enjoyment of that was conditioned upon their obedience, certainly, and when they disobeyed, Israel, the northern kingdom, disobeyed and God brought the Assyrians in to get them out of the land. When Judah, the southern kingdom, disobeyed, God brought the Babylonians in and got them out of the land. Now, what's his name? Jeremiah told us that that was going to last for 70 years. They were going to go back. And Moses said the same thing, that it was not going to be an eternal exit from the land. But here are the people, they're in the midst here of this Babylonian captivity. They're out and it was going to get worse before it got better. Now, how is it that if God promised Abraham that his people would have this land, that we're not enjoying the land? Well, there's the section. There's the section that deals with that. That's the first message.

The second message in this section in chapter 34 that we spent a little time with earlier, looking at the messianic implications of it. We emphasized this chapter from the spiritual perspective of the salvation, the gospel that is defined for us here, but let's put it again in the context. When we come to the end of chapter 33, everything appears to be lost. Chapter 34 tells us that not everything is lost, that the Lord is going to remove the false shepherds. Remember how chapter 34 began, the Lord prophesies, tells Ezekiel to prophesy against the shepherds of Israel, those false shepherds that had led the people astray, that had brought the people into this place of captivity. Everything seemed to be lost and hopeless from the perspective of what those false shepherds were going to do, but everything was not lost because in verse 11 and following we have that contrast. Here the Lord says what he's going to do and we have this messianic promise. What's the hope and what's the solution to the sin problem of these people? The coming of Messiah and the work of Messiah, and very expressed and explicit statements in chapter 34 concerning the true shepherd, the good shepherd, that's going to come and bring this peace and this covenant of peace once again to the land. And by the time we come to the end of chapter 34, we have the foreign oppressors eventually being removed from the land. The true

shepherd comes, and here's now the message of hope. Your sin has brought you here, but a message of hope, here's the true shepherd, David, my servant, the Messiah, that's going to come and bring this wonderful deliverance for the people.

All right, the third message, beginning in chapter 35 all the way through chapter 36 and verse 15. The Lord here now spells out some of the ways by which He's going to affect that promise. God is going to clear out the land. Chapter 34 ended by the promise that all of the oppressors are going to be removed. How is that going to happen? Are these people going to voluntarily up and leave? Chapter 35, 36 shows us how God is going to clear the land from all invaders in preparation for his, from my perspective here, again from how I'm viewing the land, for Israel's restoration to that land. There's an emphasis in this section upon Edom. I have reference there to Mount Seir, for instance, that you see in verse 3, verse 2, 3 and following. Seir, that represents Edom. You know that Edom in the Old Testament became a common figure to designate the enemies of God's people in general. The book of Obadiah, for instance, deals with the day of the Lord against Edom. Now Edom as a nation was not a particularly significant nation. Edom as an individual nation was never a great threat to Israel. They were just little. They had no real power of their own. They were never a military threat against Israel but nonetheless, God over and over again in the Old Testament scriptures singles out Edom as the epitome of those who are the enemies of God and God's people. Edom, the descendants of Esau, were constant haters of Israel, and as such they became representative of all of the enemies of God's people. The book of Obadiah, I say, picks that up. Other prophets as they deal with the day of the Lord mention Edom as the enemy of God par excellence. Well, here Ezekiel is doing the same thing and Edom in this context would not represent just that little bitty nation. They've been destroyed many, many years. The Persians came in and wiped out the Edomites. But nonetheless, they stand as a representative of all of those powers that are hostile against the Lord and against his people. So this section shows how they are going to be dealt with. God's going to do to Edom what Edom was glad God was at this time doing to Israel. Remember, they were mockers and they rejoiced when the captivity came upon Israel. They just stood back and laughed. They weren't a real part of it, but they were glad to see it come. And the same thing is going to happen, the enemies, the enemies are going to be eliminated and destroyed.

Now we come to the fourth message in this section, verse 16 of chapter 36 all the way through chapter 37 verse 14. Now once the people have been assured that the oppressors are going to be removed, once they've been assured that the enemies are going to be taken away, then we have their restoration back to the land. The message here begins with God's rehearsal of the past as a sign of comfort, "Look at all the things that I've done in the past, I've brought you out of exile, I've brought you out of Egypt, I've delivered you so many times before," so many deliverances, and that becomes a foundation for the hope of what he's going to do in the fulfillment of this prophecy whenever that is. Now they're going to be brought back into the land. There is a spiritual participation, and I emphasize much the gospel message that is part of this section, verses 25 and following in chapter 36. Wonderful gospel message there, the essence of the New Covenant, which we enjoy, which they enjoyed, the regeneration, the necessity of a true heart. If there is to be participation even in this context in the national blessings, there must be that spiritual

renewal as well. And here's the necessity of the new heart and I say we talked about the a wonderful gospel message that occurs in verses 25 and following. So here's God's blessing, God's restoration that comes upon the people. In chapter 37, we have the Valley of the Dry Bones, that vision, all part of it. Here's the restoration. Now again, wonderful spiritual lessons that we've made from chapter 37 but the context again makes it clear that this is a reference to the nation of Israel, and if we take that at face value, then the nation is going to, from being scattered all over creation, be brought together, stand up as a great army. As a great army. There is a restoration here of the nation of Israel.

Now then, the fifth message in verse 15 and following, we now have this imagery of the two sticks. "The word of the LORD came again unto me, saying, Moreover, thou son of man, take thee one stick, and write on it Judah, and then take the other stick, and write Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and then join those sticks together, and they'll become one in thy hand." Here is a symbolic picture of the reunion of the divided kingdom. Here's Israel, Ephraim, the northern kingdom, been long separated from Judah, long in captivity, who knows where they are, scattered all over creation. Here's Judah separated from the north, kingdom divided from the time of Rehoboam, and it's never been reestablished together. Kingdom after Rehoboam divided it and Jeroboam took the north, Rehoboam took the south. That division has constantly existed. And then the north fell to the Assyrians in a hundred or so, two hundred years almost later, we have the fall of the south to Babylon. Divided. But here's something that's going to happen where these two sticks, Judah and Israel, are going to be reunited together and they're brought together into one nation once again. Amos chapter 9, another passage that deals with that same theme. So here is the reunion of the two nations and the restoration of those nations in the land.

Now, again, I can only speak from my perspective here. As I see this, as I see this from the perspective of taking that land promise literally that God gave to Abraham, we have here a reunion of the two nations, we have here the reestablishment of the nation in the land. When did that take place? Historically, it has not taken place. I'm just giving you my premise here that I'm coming to this passage with. It has not taken place and from a premillennial standpoint, if we believe that this is going to take place, we put it in that millennial era, and if you don't believe in that land promise, then we take the spiritual aspects of it and don't worry about it. And as I said last week, when you look at some of the details here that we have to horse around with, almost all persuades me to be an amillennialist. It would be much easier to take care of some of these problems. But from that perspective, I'm saying, and it's the premillennial position, that these things are going to take place literally upon the Earth.

All right, now, get it, please. By the time we come from my interpretation, I may be wrong, but from my interpretation by the time we come to the end of chapter 37, where is Israel? Are you listening to me? By the time we come to the end of chapter 37, where is Israel? They're united together and they're in the land, right? And we would take that to be the enjoyment. The Messiah has already come. There's messianic contact. There's messianic blessing. There's salvation that's taken place here. They're in that land of restoration. Now, it's only after they are in that land of restoration, only after the Messiah

has manifested himself to the people, as is clear in chapters 34, 36, and 37, that we have this episode with Gog and Magog. Now, if that's the case, we have this taking place then, within that period of their restoration in the land, that millennial era, if you will. The same place then, and notice when Ezekiel 38:30 comes, the people are already there, they've already been enjoying the Messianic blessing, they've already been enjoying the Messianic contact in presence, and now comes Gog and Magog. You put this back in the context of Revelation chapter 20 and you have exactly the same time framework. Exactly the same time framework, that here is this period of time, at the end of this period of time we have Gog and Magog coming against the people of God. Ezekiel, I'm saying, and Revelation, I'm saying, are putting this in exactly the same temporal relationship one with the other. Same temporal relationship one with the other.

My time is gone again. Millie, I need more than today, all right? If you give me another week? All right, next week I'll try to finish and then the next week we'll give Mark's rebuttal. All right, my time is gone today. So next week here's what we'll do, next week I'll summarize for you some of the nature of chapters 38 and 39 and then we'll get into this identification, whether it's Russia or not, and I'll show you next week how absolutely absurd the exegetical arguments are for identifying Gog and Magog as Russia. And it's really funny, I think. I had a good time mocking them at that point. All right, well, my time is gone, so let's close in prayer. So you kids that are here for the first time, you come back, Charlie. You follow me at all, boy? As much as at home anyway, huh? All right, let's close in prayer.

Gracious heavenly Father, we thank you for your goodness to us. Thank you for the opportunity we have to study the word. We're thankful, Lord, for the beauty of it. We're thankful that even though there are things that we find difficult to understand that as we look at the parts and as we look at the whole, regardless of the difficulties, our faith shows us the beauty and the glory of our Savior and the greatness of our God. So, Lord, we pray that through all of this, that that would be our main objective, that we would see our Savior, that we would see his power, his glory, his absolute sovereignty, and that when all is said and done, the victory is Christ's. We rejoice in that. Help us today as we worship here. Grant to us a sense of your presence in the service to follow, especially around the table. May we enjoy that spiritual feast upon Christ as we worship there. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.