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A Pilgrim Mind, Part 3

Right before Christ ascended to heaven, His disciples asked a question which obviously was very important to them:

Acts 1:6, "And so when they had come together, they were asking Him, saying, 'Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?'"

Christ's answer was equally important and one which we must not miss.

Acts 1:7, 8b, "He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but... you shall be My witnesses both in

Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth.”

Christ exhorted His disciples to get out of the “prophetic business” and into the serving business when it comes to God, His purpose, and so the extension of His Kingdom on this earth.

That essentially is the message that God gave the newly arriving exiles in 586 BC. God’s people just suffered a massive blow to everything they valued. The exiles watched as the Babylonians had raped, tortured, and murdered their loved ones; destroyed their city; enslaved its remaining population; razed their temple, and transported the survivors to Babylon mocking them as they marched, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!” (Psalm 137:3-4a)

Accordingly, to frame the thinking of these newly arriving exiles, God gave Ezekiel 38-39 in which He took up not only the abuse of the Babylonian’s, but also the conflict that has and continues to exist in this world between Satan and his people¹ and the people of God! Accordingly, God gave this section not to make His people prophetic, but to give them encouragement and hope in the midst of their suffering!

The focus of this section is Ezekiel 39:21-29 which we’ll consider next week. However, beginning last week and continuing this morning, we are walking our way through these chapters looking at the high point and so the message of each section. Our goal is to understand the mind that God wanted His people to have prior to receiving God’s answer to the question which no doubt raged in their minds, “Where is God in tragedy? Why the exile? What is God doing?”

Recall the first truth God wanted His people to know is that Gog and Magog are in God’s sovereign control.

Ezekiel 38:4, “And I will turn you about, and put hooks into your jaws, and I will bring you out, and all your army, horses and horsemen...”

What does an animal do with hooks in its jaw? Anything you want! God’s point in this section is to teach His people that everything that occurs in this life is according to His Sovereign will.

Proverbs 16:4, “The Lord has made everything for its own purpose, even the wicked for the day of evil.”

Do you understand? Everything that God’s people just suffered was according to God’s plan from all eternity! Again, Gog and Magog (the fallen world in which we live which is hostile to Christ and His people) has “a hook in its jaw” such that it does what God ordains! Jeremiah noted “*Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill go forth?*” (Lamentations 3:38) Recall, the word for “ill” here is רָעָה (raah) which is the Hebrew word for “evil.” God is in charge of everything!

At first this may sound like dreadful news UNTIL you realize that the God of this universe who

ordains all things is GOOD! And so it is with everything in this life.

Romans 8:28, “And we know [Paul spoke as if this is the conviction of ALL God’s children] that God causes all things [Stop there! Of all passages, this text teaches that there is NOT a rogue atom in this world... everything is under God’s sovereign control. Yet notice the telos when it comes to the child of God] to work together for good to those who love God...”

So YES, God’s people were in exile... and YES, they suffered greatly under the hand of the Babylonians, BUT they were right where God wanted them to be and so where they needed to be in order to enjoy that for which they longed! This does NOT Absolve Gog and Magog/Satan/Wicked Men from Guilt, for the intention of Gog and Magog is always and ever only evil, Ezekiel 38:10-13.

Ezekiel 38:10, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘It will come about on that day, that thoughts will come into your mind, and YOU will devise an evil plan.’”

Though God has ordained all things, man is not a puppet! We have a *free* will- that is, the freedom to choose according to our nature- such that we are responsible for our actions! This means there is no free ticket for Gog and Magog... it is culpable before God for its sinful actions. Though God raised up Assyria to discipline the Northern Kingdom, nevertheless Assyria would be punished,

Isaiah 10:5-7, 12, “Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger and the staff in whose hands is My indignation, I send it against a godless nation and commission it against the people of My fury to capture booty and to seize plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets. Yet it does not so intend nor does it plan so in its heart, but rather it is its purpose to destroy, and to cut off many nations... 12 So it will be that when the Lord has completed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, *He will say*, ‘I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria and the pomp of his haughtiness.’”

Just know that while God is sovereign over all of life such that He has ordained all things, nevertheless man is responsible for his actions! Both doctrines are true! This means in the end, Gog and Magog will suffer under the wrath of God for what it did to God’s people!

The Passion of Gog is to Oppose God’s People

Ezekiel 38:16a, “And you will come up against My people Israel like a cloud to cover the land...”-

Throughout the age in which we live and culminating in the last days, Gog and Magog have and will continue to oppose and attack anything and everything related to God. This is the “spirit of the age” in which we live, the mind of man that is propagated in the songs, movies, Universities, and entertainments of this world.

From this we were warned to beware of the propaganda which is part and parcel of everything in this world. This doesn't mean we don't read secular books or watch secular movies. Rather, it means that we scrutinize these cultural mediums, discerning the chaff from the wheat! Furthermore, for the exiled child of God this means that we don't view this world as a friend of grace! Rather, we must remain wary of the leaven and so the teaching of man, lest we eat the food of the Babylonians (cf. Daniel 1:8)!

Now, when the culmination of the desires of Gog and Magog are brought to a climatic point in time, God will bring about severe judgment upon this earth.

Ezekiel 38:18, 21-22, “And it will come about on that day, when Gog comes against the land of Israel,’ declares the Lord God, ‘that My fury will mount up in My anger... 21 And I shall call for a sword against him [‘Gog and Magog’] on all My mountains,’ declares the Lord God. ‘Every man’s sword will be against his brother. And with pestilence and with blood I shall enter into judgment with him; and I shall rain on him, and on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, a torrential rain, with hailstones, fire, and brimstone.’”

Most of you are familiar with the words of Paul:

1 Corinthians 2:9a, Paul wrote, “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him...” (NIV)

Do you realize that no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor mind conceived what God has prepared for those who hate Him? Gog and Magog someday will be dealt! When that day comes, great will be its suffering!

Now, Ezekiel is going to return to this again in chapter 39 which we are going to consider in a moment, so I won't belabor the point here! For now, understand that as bad as the child of God has suffered at the hands of cruel men in this world, their suffering is nothing in comparison to the misery that awaits the sinner! We are going to skip v. 23 for this constitutes the point and so the message that God is conveying to His people here. Chapter 39 and a fifth point that God wanted His exiled people to understand as they process the bitterness of God's recent providence God will make the passion of the world — which is to attack and so destroy God's people — its undoing. When Gog and Magog perform God's bidding and attack God's people, notice what God is going to do:

Ezekiel 39:3-5, “And I shall strike your bow from your left hand, and dash down your arrows from your right hand. You shall fall on the mountains of Israel [This doesn't mean that they are going to attack Israel, but they shall be vanquished in their attack...], you and all your troops, and the peoples who are with you; I shall give you as food to every kind of predatory bird and beast of the field. You will fall on the open field; for it is I who have spoken,’ declares the Lord God. And I shall send fire upon Magog and

those who inhabit the coastlands in safety; and they will know that I am the Lord.”

It is interesting to me that when you consider the idea of birds feasting on people in the Bible, the context is notably that of judgment and great cursing. In Genesis we read this of the baker concerning his dream:

Genesis 40:18-19, “Then Joseph answered and said, ‘This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days; within three more days Pharaoh will lift up your head from you and will hang you on a tree; and the birds will eat your flesh off you.’”

We know that Scripture says, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree” (Galatians 3:13). No doubt that is where the curse-motif of birds eating the flesh of man came from. As the criminal was hung on a tree, before he died birds would descend and begin their feasting. And so were read in Deuteronomy speaking of the curse of Covenant rebellion, Moses said this:

Deuteronomy 28:25-26, “The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you shall go out one way against them, but you shall flee seven ways before them, and you shall be *an example of* terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. [What is that terror?] And your carcasses shall be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten *them* away.”²

Such is that which awaits Gog and Magog! Because it attacks God’s people, God will attack it! Yet the conflict is NOT a one for one exchange. Any and every attack that Gog perpetrates against the Christian will be met with an eternity of suffering in woe- which is what the Lake of Fire is all about (cf. Revelation 20:9-10)!

From the very beginning God has been explicit... if you attack God’s people, you will pay the price! Paul wrote of the persecution of the church:

1 Corinthians 3:17, “If any man destroys the temple of God [the church], God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are.”

So understand! Insofar as you are attacked, ridiculed, persecuted, or tormented by this fallen world, there will be a day of reckoning. No matter how hard your life might be today, God is taking note of everything! Today your persecutors laugh... tomorrow it will be God.

Psalms 37:12-13, “The wicked plots against the righteous, and gnashes at him with his teeth. The Lord laughs at him; for He sees his day is coming.”

How comforting this would have been to the exiles of 586 BC who suffered so much at the hands of the Babylonians! Think of the words of John:

Revelation 6:9b-10, “I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained;

and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?'"

The answer is... not much longer! The net-result of all worldly opposition against God's people will be for the benefit of God's people.

Ezekiel 39:9-10, "'Then those who inhabit the cities of Israel [that is, the people of God after God deals with Gog and Magog] will go out, and make fires with the weapons and burn *them*, both shields and bucklers, bows and arrows, war clubs and spears and for seven years they will make fires of them. And they will not take wood from the field or gather firewood from the forests, for they will make fires with the weapons; and they will take the spoil of those who despoiled them, and seize the plunder of those who plundered them,' declares the Lord God."

Family of God this is amazing! Do you realize that with every attack that is perpetrated against the child of God, the child of God comes out on top? That's the idea here!

Now don't miss it, there are certain laws that God has established in this world which govern mankind- like these:

- The law of reaping and sowing (Galatians 6:7-8)!
- The law of blood-guiltiness- as in "the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23)!
- The law of working and resting (Genesis 2:1-3; 2 Thes. 3:10)!

Herein we read of another law which goes like this: No matter how much a Christian is beaten, persecuted, threatened and tried, they will always come out the winner! Listen to the promise/warning God gave Satan after the Fall:

Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; He shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel."

You all know this as the *Proto-Evangelium* (the First Gospel). And by now most of you know that there is a distinction being made here between a "Heal Wound" (which is not fatal and that which Christ would receive at the cross) and a "Head Wound" (which is fatal and that which Satan would receive on account of the cross).

Accordingly and get this! While Christ hung on the cross, the persecution of Gog and Magog toward God came to a head. Satan was in his glory! But little did he know that at this moment of deepest woe, God was bringing about:

- The destruction of the devil!
- The liberation of His people from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15)!

- The establishing of His Kingdom on this world!

To the persecuted church in Smyrna, God gave this command and promise:

Revelation 2:9-10, “I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”

The irony is that the primary export of Smyrna was myrrh — a resinous substance used as a perfume. The more you beat and worked with the plant, the better it smelled! Such an apt description of the people of God! In fact, we see this principle established at the cross. No matter how much Kingdom Citizens are beaten, persecuted, threatened and tried in this world, they will always come out the winner! And we see that here in Ezekiel.

- Gog and Magog are pictured here as on the attack! And yet what is the ultimate result? God’s people would NOT need to “gather fire wood for seven years” in order to keep warm as now they had the shields and implements of war used by Gog and Magog in their attack against Christ and His people!
- Truly, every time Gog and Magog attacks a child of God, the child of God is the one benefitted! It is on account of this that we have so many amazing statements of trust and dependence in the Bible when it comes to the child of God in his suffering ...

James 1:2, “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance.”

Psalm 119:71, “It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes.”

Joseph reflecting back upon his perilous journey, spoke to his brothers concerning the treachery they perpetrated against him:

Genesis 50:20, “And as for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.”

William Cowper, who was no stranger to trial and difficulty, wrote, “Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take; the clouds ye so much dread are big with mercy, and shall break in blessings on your head.” (Commissions, 1990, p. Hymn 128) So yes my fellow exiles, the way is hard and the road is tough! This world is hostile toward Christ and His people. But understand, they lose nothing who gain Christ!³ Truly, no matter how much a Christian is beaten, persecuted, threatened and tried, they will always come out the winner!

The end of this world and worldliness involves a curse, grief and woe that defies imagination and description! Consider the last two points that God makes here. Humanly speaking, upon the judgment of Gog and Magog, it would take all of God’s people seven months to bury those

whom God will destroy on account of their rebellion.

Ezekiel 39:11-12, "And it will come about on that day that I shall give Gog a burial ground there in Israel, the valley of those who pass by east of the sea, and it will block off the passers-by. So they will bury Gog there with all his multitude, and they will call *it* the valley of Hamon-gog. For seven months⁴ the house of Israel will be burying them in order to cleanse the land."

It is hard to imagine what is involved in the judgment of God against His and our enemies- its scope and intensity! Imagine a large group of people working full-time every day burying the dead of Gog and Magog AND taking seven whole months to complete the task! We are talking here of a judgment that defies imagination! Yet consider the last and final point before God addresses His people's questions.

A most horrid picture of God's judgment once again involves the eating of the body by birds; such is that which awaits any and all in this world outside of Christ. Speaking of the wild animals and birds of the last day:

Ezekiel 39:18-19, "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."

Again, this speaks of greatest woe as the curse of sin and rebellion is met out upon the sinner! God's victory over both His and our enemies involves a curse, grief, and woe that defies imagination and description! In fact, speaking of the time referenced in Ezekiel 38, Christ said this:

Mark 13:19-20, "For those days will be a *time of* tribulation such as has not occurred since the beginning of the creation which God created, until now, and never shall. And unless the Lord had shortened *those* days, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect whom He chose, He shortened the days."

As frightening as this promise might be, nevertheless it is fraught with comfort for the child of God! On the last day when all of mankind is judged — which is what is being pictured here — the child of God also will stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. And do you know what will be revealed?

- NOT our sin and rebellion for which we will be quite ashamed- for these shall all be shown to be forgiven in Christ!
- RATHER for the believer the Last Judgment is the time that God beholds everything done in the name of Christ, declares it to be His glory, and so issues forth the glorious commendation, "Well done, good and faithful slave..." (Matthew 25:21, 23)!

Hebrews 6:10: “For God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints.”

For the non-believer, it is quite another thing- as we just saw! For them the Last Judgment means that God will not miss even the smallest sin; every sinner will be held accountable before God for every sin they have ever committed (cf. Romans 2:5-6)!

Such incredible truths God gave His people to frame their thinking as He addressed the “Why?” of His people’s suffering (which we’ll look at next week). For now, let these truths comfort you! Let them inspire you to stand all the more for Christ! But, let them also burden you.

Revelation 10:8, 10, “And the voice which I heard from heaven, *I heard* again speaking with me, and saying, ‘Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.’”

And I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and it was in my mouth sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.”

Such is the nature of the judgment that is coming on this earth. As we think of the suffering and woe inflicted upon the church by Gog and Magog, it is a gloriously sweet message to know that the world/sinner will have their come-up-ins! Yet when we digest this message just a little, we begin to think of those who someday will be judged- loved ones, friends, neighbors, co-workers and the like. And suddenly the message becomes bitter to our stomachs. May the bitterness of judgment burden you to share of the hope that lies within you!

Now all of this brings us to the point of these two chapters, the climax and so the teaching that God wanted His people to walk away with (Ezekiel 39:21-29)- which we’ll look at next time!

References

Commissions, G. (1990). *Trinity Hymnal*. Peach Tree: Great Commissions Publications .

Ed Note(s)

¹ Satan’s host has been variously identified as the City of Man or, as our text does, “Gog and Magog.”

² Cf. also 1 Sam. 17:45-46 and many more.

³ *Letters of Samuel Rutherford*, Letter IV, p. 42.

⁴ J. B. Taylor observed, “The repeated reference to the number ‘seven’ is a reminder that we are here dealing with apocalyptic symbolism, and that therefore literal fulfilment of these details is not to be sought.” (*Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC, p. 241)