

Gog and the Pouring Out of the Spirit

*Reflections on Ezekiel 39:21–29*¹

INTRODUCTION

DURING THE PAST HUNDRED years, scholarly discussions on Ezekiel's Gog Oracle (Ezek 38–39) have focused primarily on two major problems: (1) the authenticity of the oracle in the prophecy of Ezekiel, and (2) the connection between the oracle and the context within which it is embedded. Although before the turn of the century this text was still commonly attributed to the prophet Ezekiel, and thought to derive from the period of Judah's exile,² after 1900 it became increasingly fashionable to look elsewhere for its origin and setting.³ In recent years interpreters

1. This essay was originally published in *Vetus Testamentum* 37 (1987) 257–70.

2. E.g., Smend, *Prophet Ezechiel*, 293–306; Bertholet, *Hesekiel*, 187–94.

3. In 1943 William A. Irwin could write, "Recent critical opinions is practically unanimous that these chapters are spurious" (*Problem of Ezekiel*, 172). Charles C. Torrey (*Pseudo-Ezekiel*, 96) saw in רָאשׁ (38:2; 39:1) a reference to Javan (Greece) and in Gog Alexander the Great. So also Browne, *Ezekiel and Alexander*. Van den Born ("Études sur quelques toponymes bibliques," 197–201) interprets אֶרֶץ הַמָּגוּג (38:2) as "land of the Macedonian." Berry ("Date of Ezekiel 38:1–39:20," 224–32), understands 1 Macc 6:18–19 as the background to the Gog oracle, and equates Gog with Antiochus Eupator. The basic problems with the Ezekielian interpretation are summarized by Cooke (*Ezekiel*, 406–8).

have become more modest in their understanding of the text, generally acknowledging at least the core of the prophecy as from the prophet himself.⁴

The problems raised by this oracle are not restricted to its relationship to the broader context of the book. The text itself presents a host of difficulties. It is obvious that the prophecy against Gog consists of a series of smaller units that appear to present a collage of scenes sometimes only loosely conjoined.⁵ Our concern here is restricted to the conclusion of the pericope that presents enough difficulties of its own.

The conclusion to the Gog oracle presents many questions. Where does the oracle against Gog actually end? Why does 39:21–29 contain a series of recognition formulae? How should we account for the literary features that occur only here in the book? Why do these verses appear to have so little to do with the themes of what precedes? What is the function of the conclusion in its present context? These questions are complex and to my mind have not yet been satisfactorily answered.

RECENT TREATMENTS OF THE CONCLUDING SECTION

Long before the non-Ezekielian interpretation of the Gog prophecy had become popular the anomalous character of 39:21–29 was being acknowledged. In 1880 Smend recognized that verses 25–29 presented a contrast to the bombastic (*schwülstig*) and lack-lustre (*matt*) tone of 38:1–39:24, which he regarded as the product of simple reflection.⁶ Fifty years later this section had been completely amputated from its context. The principal issue remaining in the debate was the best location for the actual amputation.

4. Fohrer, *Ezekiel*, 212–29; Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 286; Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 2, 296–305.

5. See the helpful study by Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 2, 933–95 (English translation, 296–324). However, Zimmerli's exploitation of these differences to support his theory of the history of the text is not entirely satisfactory. The composite nature of the oracle is as problematic for his interpretation as for those who argue for basic unity of authorship. Surely the final hypothetical redactor responsible for the present canonical shape of the text would have been as sensitive to the points of apparent disjunction as would a single author. For a demonstration of an exegetical methodology based upon the canonical form of the text and assuming essential unity of composition see Greenberg, *Ezekiel* 1–20; Greenberg, "Design and Themes," 181–208. For a comparison of the methods represented by these interpreters see Levenson, in a review of Zimmerli and Greenberg, *Interpretation* 38 (1984) 210–17.

6. Smend, *Ezekiel*, 295.

Some ended the Gog oracle as early as 39:16. Following the lead of G. Hölscher,⁷ Cooke argued that by the time YHWH calls the predatory birds and beasts to his sacrificial feast, Gog and his hordes have all been buried. They are not mentioned again. Instead, the fare at this banquet is made up of the flesh and blood of the mighty men, the princes of the earth (v. 18), that is, the enemies of the Jews in general. Therefore, verses 17–20 represent a new mini-apocalypse. Verses 21–29, for their part, have nothing to do with either the Gog prophecy or the immediately preceding scene. They represent a summary of Ezekiel's teaching, forming a conclusion to chapters 34–37.⁸

Wevers ends the Gog oracle at verse 20. He maintains that verses 21–22 are an expansion of the oracle, but their secondary nature is recognizable by the reference to the house of Israel as the subject of the recognition formula in verse 22. He also holds verses 25–29 to be distinct, serving as editorial insertions intended to bring chapters 37–39 to a close on the theme of restoration.⁹ Zimmerli, who provides the most detailed study of this part of the text, also concludes the oracle here. He argues that the kernel of Ezekiel's prophecy against Gog is now represented by 38:1–9, 39:1–5, 17–20.¹⁰ To him verses 21–29 are a final expansion, with verses 21–22 still looking back to the Gog oracle, but verses 23–29 leaving it entirely and bringing the reader back to the basic themes of the prophet's message. However, Hermann's interpretation of the last section (vv. 25–29) as the conclusion to chapters 13–37 is rejected. Verses 25–29 are tied to 23–24 by the expression, "to hide the face" (הִסְתִּיר פָּנָיו). The entire section, verses 23–29, is treated as an extended expansion of 21–22. The repetition of the recognition formula in verse 23 resumes the combined beginnings of the latter.¹¹

Although Fohrer does not deal with this text in his article, "Die Glossen im Buche Ezechiel,"¹² he deletes verses 23–29 without discussion in his commentary as a (*variierende*) gloss, apparently from several hands.¹³

7. Hölscher, *Hesekiel*, 178, 186–88.

8. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 421–22. That this epilogue represented the conclusion to chapters 34–37 prior to the existence of the Gog pericope had already been proposed by Herrmann, *Ezechiel*, 251.

9. Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 285.

10. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 2, 289–89.

11. *Ibid.*, 319–21.

12. In Fohrer, *Studien*, 204–17.

13. Fohrer, *Ezechiel*, 218.

By proposing that only verses 25–29 represent extraneous material to be excised from the Gog oracle, Herrmann and Eichrodt have cut away the smallest portion. The former treats verses 21–24 as an encouraging conclusion to the Gog material, fashioned in characteristic Ezekielian expression and thought. However, as already noted, verses 25–29 are tied to the preceding, neither chronologically nor with reference to content. The return to the great themes of salvation, the change in Israel's fortune, her regathering and resettlement in her own land, suggest that this section originally could have served as the conclusion to chapters 34–37 before the Gog prophecy had come into existence and had been inserted in its present position.¹⁴ In similar vein Walther Eichrodt comments,

Finally, in 39.25–29 we find a portion of text clearly dissimilar to all that has preceded it, which shows no acquaintance with the main concern of these chapters and differs linguistically. It is certainly directed towards a different historical situation and towards a different objective, which are on exactly the same line of thought as ch. 34–37. One may therefore feel inclined to regard it as the original transition from 37.28 to 40.1ff.¹⁵

Although at first sight it appears that Eichrodt is following Herrmann here, later he proposes that this conclusion was composed subsequent to the insertion of the Gog oracle to re-establish the tie with chapter 37.¹⁶

The apparent unanimity of scholars in recent years in deleting the last verses of chapter 39 from the actual Gog oracle is impressive. However, so is the lack of agreement on the boundaries of the segment to be excised. All seem to find convincing arguments for their positions, but the general confusion hardly encourages confidence in either the procedures or the results. Most have assumed that the primary task of the interpreter is to isolate the various units that constitute a composition on the basis of divergent linguistic and literary styles, and then to propose a reconstruction for the history of the passage.

This method is suspect for several reasons. First, it assumes that ancient writers were bound by the same rules of consistency and clarity as modern scholars. Second, it fails to recognize that isolating the separate literary fragments and proposing origins for them does not resolve the tensions created by the text as it stands. These tensions may be the result of deliberate composition, regardless of whether the account derives from

14. Herrmann, *Ezekiel*, 251.

15. Eichrodt, *Ezekiel*, 521.

16. *Ibid.*, 529.

a single author or a final redactor (unless, of course, the entire book was produced by random arrangement of the various identifiable segments). Finally, by concentrating on the disjunctures in a pericope, the intention of the entire pericope may be lost, not to mention its function in the broader context. Wherever one may make the excision, in their present context the final verses of Ezekiel 39 do in fact represent a conclusion to the Gog oracle, which in turn concludes Ezekiel's message of hope and restoration. Should we not ask ourselves what the significance of these verses is in their present position? This procedure does not blind the student of the text to its difficulties. Rather, it provides an approach to those points of tension that is essentially positive rather than nihilistic.

A SUGGESTED ALTERNATIVE INTERPRETATION

The Characteristics of Ezekiel 39:21–29

Even if they do not agree in the fine points, it is not surprising that scholars have isolated the last part of Ezekiel 39 from the Gog oracle. In the first place, in verse 23 the chronological perspective changes, reverting from the eschatological conflicts between YHWH and Gog back to the exile of Israel, circumstances that had last been dealt with in chapter 37. Second, the center of attention shifts from the fate of Gog and his hordes to the prospects for Israel following the exile. In fact, Gog is never mentioned after verse 16. Third, verses 21–29 introduce the reader to several stylistic forms that are unique, not only to the Gog oracle, but to the book as a whole: “from that day and onwards” (מִן־הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְהָלְאָה, v. 22);¹⁷ “I will hide my face from them” וְאֶסְתֵּר פָּנַי מֵהֶם, vv. 23, 24, 29).¹⁸ “Their adversaries” (צָרֵיהֶם, v. 23) as a reference to Israel's enemies;¹⁹ YHWH's exercise of “mercy” (וְרַחֲמָיו, v. 25).²⁰ Beyond these we should note the only occur-

17. The expression occurs elsewhere only in Num 15:23 and 1 Sam 8:9. But cf. the phrase בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי וְהָלְאָה in Ezek 48:27; Lev 22:27.

18. The expression is common elsewhere: Deut 31:17–18; 32:20; Isa 8:17; 54:8; 64:6[7]; Jer 33:5; Mic 3:5; Pss 13:2[1]; 22:25[24]; 27:9; 30:8[7]; 69:18[17]; 88:15[14]; 102:3[2]; 143:7 (cf. also 44:25[24]; 104:29); Job 13:24; 34:29. For a full-length study of the concept see Balentine, *The Hidden God*.

19. The expression occurs elsewhere in 30:16, but the text is doubtful. Cf. *BHS*. Its usage resembles Neh 9:27. Cf. the use of אֹיְבֵיהֶם, in verse 27.

20. The root is used in its literal sense, “womb” in 20:26. רַחֵם as a designation of YHWH's mercy is common in other prophets (cf. *BDB*, 933), but Ezekiel seems to prefer רַחֲמָיו. Cf. v. 11; 7:4, 9; 8:18; 9:5; 16:5; 36:21.

rence of Israel as the subject of the recognition formula in verse 22, and the rare absolute use of Jacob for Israel in verse 25.²¹

In spite of the novel features in verses 21–29 caution against haste in eliminating the text as non-Ezekielian or inauthentic or misplaced on these bases is advised. The apparent concentration of unique forms does not need to indicate a change in authorship any more than do *hapax legomena* in other contexts.²² In fact, it has been observed that many echoes of earlier prophecies of Ezekiel are to be found here: the revelation of YHWH's glory (cf. 28:22); the recognition of YHWH's patron divinity status for Israel (cf. 28:26; 34:30); Israel's return, that is the recovery of the nation from the diaspora, still viewed in anticipation (cf. 20:42–43; 36:24, 28); YHWH's execution of justice (עֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט, 18:5; cf. vv. 8, 10); the falling of the people by the sword (cf. 23:25; 24:21); the reference to Israel's uncleanness (36:25, 29); jealousy as the motive of YHWH (cf. 36:5).²³ All these features argue strongly for at least some connection of verses 21–29 with Ezekiel.

It remains to be seen whether this can be extended to a direct and intentional connection with the Gog prophecy. It is to this question that we now turn. What evidence is there for interpreting the last verses of chapter 39 as an intentional part of and conclusion to the Gog oracle?

The *terminus a quo* of the Concluding Unit

Concerning the *terminus ad quem* of the final unit of Ezekiel 39 there is no dispute. The concluding signatory formula, יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֱלֹהֵינוּ²⁴ followed by the date formula in 40:1 fixes it at the end of verse 29. However, the beginning of the unit is not so easily determined.

It is doubtful whether we should find the beginning of the epilogue in verse 17, as did Hölscher and Cooke, who were offended by the invitation of the birds and beasts of prey to a banquet, the fare of which consisted of the corpses of Gog and his hordes after their bones had already been buried.²⁵ But this is a visionary oracle, played out in

21. Cf. the reference to “my servant Jacob” in 18:25; 37:25.

22. For a discussion of the vocabulary of Ezekiel, see Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 1, 21–24.

23. Cf. Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 422–23.

24. The signatory formula in this full form occurs some eighty times in the book. It has already served to punctuate the Gog prophecy at 38:18, 21, 39:5, 8, 10, 13, 20. The abbreviated form יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ appears an additional four times.

25. Hölscher, *Hesekiel*, 178, 186–88; Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 421–22.

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several different scenes, whose connections need not always conform to our standards of logic and progression. Verses 17–20 seem to have been understood by Henry Van Dyke Parunak as happening simultaneously with, if not prior to, 39:11–16. As he observes, “the earlier paragraph describes the burial of bones, which is all that one would expect the beasts to leave after a period of exposure that persists as long as seven months.”²⁶ In any case, verses 17–20 appear to be an expansion of the brief reference to YHWH’s giving the troops of this enemy host up to the predatory creatures in verse 4.

The correctness of the opinion of Zimmerli and Wevers that the Gog oracle proper ends with verse 20 is confirmed by the dramatic change in subject matter as the text moves from verse 20 to 21. In the former the concern is still the banquet of YHWH at which the beasts gorge themselves. Verse 21 introduces an entirely new idea, the implications of the Gog episode for the honor of YHWH. The feast is never mentioned again. Thus the outer limits of the final unit are defined by the concluding signatory formula, *נָאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה*, which occurs at the ends of verses 20 and 29.²⁷

Coherence and Structure of the Concluding Unit

The epilogue to the Gog oracle as delimited contains no sharp formal divisions. The “therefore” (*לָכֵן*) in verse 25 serves both as a weak divider as well as a sign of coherence in that the succeeding material is connected logically to the preceding.²⁸ Beyond this the text contains three occurrences of modified forms of the recognition formula (vv. 22, 23, 28).²⁹ However, although elsewhere these may indicate conclusions to separate sections, here they highlight the central thesis of the message, rather than breaking it up into neat sections. In fact, the verbatim parallelism of the beginnings of verses 22 and 23 immediately juxtaposed argues against dividing them too sharply. Furthermore, verse 23 is not in the shape of the usual

26. Van Dyke Parunak, *Structural Studies* 505, n. 11.

27. Van Dyke Parunak’s division after verse 21 is not convincing.

28. So also Wevers, *Ezekiel*, 294.

29. Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 2, 319, also sees the recognition formula in verse 21. But this is doubtful. As in 21:4[20:48], *רָאָה* should be interpreted in its unusual sense “to see.” The text is not yet dealing with the nation’s recognition of the intended implications from YHWH’s actions, only with their status as witnesses to that action. This applies to “all flesh” in 21:4 as well.

recognition formula, since it is not the person of YHWH that is being acknowledged, but the reason for his treatment of his people.

It seems better to divide the text logically into two parts, verses 21–24 and 25–29. Although in many respects each section goes its own way, still this results in a remarkable balance and symmetry. Both sections may be divided into four parts:

A	the actions of YHWH	21a	25
B	the response of the objects of his action	21b	26–27
B'	the recognition formula (tied to Israel's exile)	22–23a	28
A'	a reference to YHWH hiding his face	23b–24	29

As the letters to the left suggest, in addition to this parallel structure, a chiastic pattern is also discernible in each. Both sections begin and end with descriptions of the divine action, between which are sandwiched the human responses.³⁰ This suggests a certain deliberateness in the arrangement of the material. This conclusion is supported by the fact that each ends with a reference to YHWH's hiding his face, a concept that is otherwise foreign to the book. In content, however, the two parts are not identical, but represent two different sides to YHWH's treatment of Israel: the first dealing with his judgment, the second with the permanence of his restoration.

The Relationship of the Epilogue to the Gog Oracle

If these two sections do indeed represent a deliberately composed unit, their relationship to the Gog oracle after which they appear remains to be accounted for.

It has already been observed that marked differences in style exist between this section and the preceding. This could just as well be attributed to the nature of the material as to different hands. But the links between the epilogue and the Gog oracle proper should not be overlooked. On the one hand, the motive for YHWH's setting his glory (כְּבוֹד, v. 21) among the

30. I am not the first to recognize a chiastic structure in this passage. Van Dyke Parunak (*Structural Studies*, 506) sees a simpler ABA' pattern in 39:22–24. The A and A' segments consist of verses 22–24 and 28–29 respectively, showing correspondence through the repetition of יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיהֶם אֲנִי, “And the house of Israel will know that I am YHWH their God” (both verses, 22 and 28, using the unusual form אֱלֹהֵיהֶם) and אֶסְתִּיר פְּנֵי מֹתָם, “I will hide my face from them.” The latter is affirmed and converted in both verses 23 and 24, whereas verse 29 using a future sense denies the action of YHWH.

nations, which begins the first half of the epilogue, echoes the reference to him glorifying himself (נִקְבֵּד) in verse 13. On the other hand, the introduction of the second part (v. 25) with a reference to YHWH's concern for his holy name (שֵׁם קָדְשִׁי) finds its counterpart in 39:7.³¹ Appropriately, the concern for his glory in both instances is expressed in the context of the nations, whereas the holiness of his name is defended within the context of Israel in both. This agreement hardly seems accidental.

A second connection is drawn between the epilogue and the oracle by the עַתָּה, "Now," with which YHWH's speech is introduced in verse 25. This presents a deliberate contrast to the eschatological מִיָּמִים רַבִּים and בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים in 38:8, בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים in 38:16, and בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא in 38:10, 14, 18, 19; 39:11, thrusting the prophet back into the world of the present. The conflicts involving Gog are still in the distant future, a period that follows on a return of peace and security for Israel in its land. The description of Israel in verse 27 appears to contain a deliberate summing up of the state of the nation at the time of Gog's invasion as described in 38:8, 11. But עַתָּה, "Now," brings the prophet back to the present crisis, the exile of Israel, a crisis that requires an equally dramatic demonstration of divine mercy and power.

These are not the only connections. Verses 21–22 are obviously transitional. The past tense of the verb in "my justice that I have executed" (מִשְׁפָּטִי אֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי)³² and "my power that I have imposed upon them" (יָדִי אֲשֶׁר-שָׁמַתִּי בָהֶם) points back to the war against Gog. Specifically, the pronominal suffix in בָּהֶם requires an antecedent, which would be missing if this marked the beginning of a totally new section. The same applies to "from that day and onward" (מִן-הַיּוֹם הַהוּא וְהַלְאָה) in verse 22. Without the preceding oracle, the reader would be left asking, "What day?" Since these first two verses are tied so closely to the prophecy, and the entire epilogue is written as a coherent unit, it may only be concluded that this section is

31. Cf. also the reference to YHWH sanctifying himself in 38:16 (נִקְדָּשׁ) and in verse 23 (הִתְקַדָּשׁ), which also speaks of him magnifying himself (הִתְגַּדָּל), and making himself known (נִודַע).

32. The interpretation of מִשְׁפָּטִי as "my justice" rather than the commonly accepted "my judgment" may be defended on several grounds: (1) in Ezek 18:8 the phrase עָשָׂה מִשְׁפָּט requires the sense "to execute justice." Zimmerli's reference to יָנֻס בְּתוֹכָךְ in 8:8 as a parallel (*Ezekiel* 2, 319) is not convincing since our text lacks the suffixed preposition and uses the singular rather than the plural of מִשְׁפָּטִים. (2) In the present context, "to execute judgment" (or "enter into judgment") is rendered with the *niphāl* שָׁפַט. Cf. וְנִשְׁפָּטִי in 38:22. (3) What the greed and opportunism of Gog demands, attacking innocent unsuspecting Israel, is justice. Cf. 38:10–13.

intentionally placed where it is. Without this epilogue the Gog oracle is left hanging with no conclusion at all.³³

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF 39:21–29 IN ITS CONTEXT

Having argued that the epilogue is structurally and thematically integral to the context in which it is embedded, one must enquire concerning its function here. What does it contribute to the Gog oracle? What contribution does it make to the message of the book as a whole? We offer several suggestions.

(1) The epilogue provides the Gog oracles with a satisfactory conclusion. In the first place, it highlights the revelatory impact of YHWH's defeat of Gog, first on the nations, and then on Israel. Recalling YHWH's goals in 38:16, 23; 39:7, 13, this text declares that when the nations witness YHWH's execution of justice and demonstration of power on Gog, his glory will be set among the nations. Second, it emphasizes the revelatory impact of the defeat of Gog for Israel. The expanded recognition formula in 39:22 emphasizes that the victory of YHWH serves as the *terminus a quo* of the house of Israel's acknowledgement of him as their God.

(2) The epilogue highlights the revelatory impact of YHWH's dealings with Israel. Although structurally connected to the previous verses, in verse 23 Gog fades from view and the implications of YHWH's more immediate dealings with Israel return into focus. This section begins with a long recognition formula for the nations, according to which they will now see the cause of Israel's exile (her covenantal treachery [מַעַלְלֵי־בִי]). But more than this, they will also recognize that, far from being a symptom of YHWH's impotence (cf. 36:20), the nation's experience was the deliberate expression of his wrath. YHWH had hidden his face from them;³⁴ he had given them into the hand of the adversaries; he had dealt with them according to their rebellion (פִּשְׁעֵם), as well as their uncleanness (טִמְאָה).

33. If this section had originally served as the conclusion to the salvation oracles of chapters 34–37 as Herrmann, *Ezekiel*, 251, and Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 422, suggest, critics would surely have treated it as secondary to that context as well. The transition between 37:28 and 39:21 is harsh and the material redundant.

34. Cf. verse 17 above. Also van der Woude, “פָּנִים *pānīm* Angesicht,” 446–59, esp. 452–53.

(3) In returning to the needs of the present, the epilogue emphasizes the role of divine mercy (note the first occurrence of the term רחם in this sense in the book) in creating the conditions that immediately precede the Gog debacle: a nation regathered and secure in its own land (v. 27). As in 28:25, the regathering of the nation also serves as a demonstration of YHWH's holiness.

(4) With the expanded recognition formula taking up the last two verses, the text emphasizes that the covenant relationship involving deity, people, and land has been reinstituted. Its restoration is full and permanent. YHWH will never leave any of them, neither will he hide his face from them again. In so doing these verses also serve as a fitting conclusion to the salvation oracles of chapters 34–39 as a whole. The grand themes of this great section are summarized in a new announcement of renewal, return, and restoration.

(5) The last clause highlights the special role of the Spirit of YHWH in the confirmation of the covenant. The conjunction אשר specifically attributes the permanence of the new relationships to the pouring out of the Spirit upon the house of Israel. This conclusion applies whether the particle is interpreted temporally³⁵ or, as I prefer, causally.³⁶ Although the clause is reminiscent of the giving of the Spirit described in 36:27, a fundamental difference in significance seems to characterize the two phrases. “To put my spirit within” in the former is obviously associated with the renewal of the covenant, but it seems to relate more immediately to the rebirth of the nation, her receiving new life (cf. the fuller exposition of this notion in the vision of the valley of the dry bones, 37:1–14). In 39:29 to “pour out my Spirit upon” represents a sign and seal of the covenant. This represents the divine mark of ownership, which accounts for YHWH's intervention against Gog on Israel's behalf before the latter is even touched.

The expression “to pour out” God's “Spirit upon” occurs several times in other prophetic writings. In Joel 3:1[2:28], as in our text, the concept appears in a salvation oracle, specifically in the context of the renewal of the covenant and the restoration of prosperity and peace for Israel.³⁷ In

35. So Zimmerli, *Ezekiel* 2, 295. Cf. LXX ἀνθ' οὗ; Vg. *eo quod*.

36. So Cooke, *Ezekiel*, 424, in the sense of יָצַן אֶשְׁרֵי. Cf. 12:12; 16:43; 21:9[4]; 26:2; 31:10; 44:12.

37. Cf. Joel 2:18—3:2[2:29], specifically 2:18. “Then YHWH will be zealous for his land, and will have pity on his people,” and verse 27, which immediately precedes the reference to the pouring out of the Spirit, “thus you will know that I am in the midst of

Zech 12:10, the pouring out of the spirit of grace and supplication occurs in the context of the restoration of the dynasty of David and God's renewed activity on behalf of Jerusalem, and in the context of the renewal of the covenant.³⁸ Although a different verb is used in Isa 32:15 (יִטֶּרָה), once again the pouring out of the Spirit from on high represents the divine activity that immediately precedes the restoration of peace and prosperity in Israel. These are normally the consequence of the reestablishment of the covenant. The covenantal context of the pouring out of the Spirit is unmistakable in Isa 40:1–5:

But now listen, O Jacob, my servant;
And Israel, whom I have chosen.
Thus says YHWH who made you,
And formed you in the womb,
Who will aid you,
“Do not fear, O Jacob my servant;
And you, O Jeshurun, whom I have chosen,
For I will pour (יִצֵּק) water on the thirsty land
And streams on the dry ground;
I will pour (יִצֵּק) my Spirit on your descendants;
And they will spring up among the grass
Like poplars by streams of water.”
This one will say, “I belong to YHWH”;
And that one will call on the name of Jacob;
And another will write on his hand, “Belonging to YHWH,”
And will name Israel's name with honor.

It would appear from all these references that the pouring out of the Spirit of YHWH upon his people signified the ratification and sealing of the covenant relationship. It represented the guarantee of new life, peace, and prosperity. But it signified more than this. It served as the definitive act

Israel, and that I am YHWH your God, and there is no other; and my people will never be put to shame.” As Wolff (*Joel and Amos*, 67) points out, the context requires that קָלִי-בָשָׂר, “all flesh” not be interpreted universally, as it is commonly understood, but for all Israel. In Peter's Pentecost sermon this sense is not changed. Acts 2:5 notes that the people gathered on the occasion in Jerusalem were Jews from all parts of the empire. Peter himself emphasizes that he is speaking to the men/house of Israel. Cf. vv. 22, 36.

38. Note the reference to the covenant formula in 13:9, “I will say, ‘They are my people,’ and they will say, ‘YHWH is my God.’” Admittedly, there is some distance between the two verses, and it may be argued that originally these were uttered as separate oracles. But the repeated references to “in that day” (12:11; 13:1, 2, 4) suggest some connection, as does the juxtaposing of these oracles.

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whereby he claimed and sealed the newly gathered nation of Israel as his own.

CONCLUSION

Although some continue to argue that chapters 40–48 once followed immediately upon chapter 37,³⁹ with my interpretation of the epilogue and the pouring out of the Spirit we may have stumbled upon the answer to the enigma that the prophecy concerning Gog poses in its present context. Ezekiel 37:15–28 had concluded with an emphatic declaration that the covenant of peace (בְּרִית שְׁלֹום, v. 26) that YHWH was establishing with the newly revived nation and the Davidic dynasty was to be an eternal covenant (עוֹלָם בְּרִית עוֹלָם, v. 26). In fact, the term “eternal” (עוֹלָם), occurs five times in the last four verses. However, in the present context, the promise of the permanence of the new relationship between deity and nation remains just that, a promise, a word. The function of the Gog oracle is to provide specific and concrete proof for the prophet that YHWH meant exactly what he said.

The oracle foresees Israel as prosperous and secure in her land for a considerable period of time. In fact, in contrast to the immediacy of the prophetic utterance, the Gog episode is set in the latter days (38:8, 16), when YHWH’s people will enjoy all the blessings attendant on the revival of the nation and her relationship with her deity (38:8, 11, 14). Into this pacific and tranquil land YHWH deliberately brings these hordes from the north (38:4–9), who may imagine that they are operating of their own free will (38:10–13). However, like the Pharaoh of Egypt (Exod 7–14), Gog is merely functioning as an agent serving the revelatory purposes of YHWH. That purpose has two dimensions: to declare the greatness, holiness, and glory of his person (38:16, 23; 39:7, 13, 21, 25, 27) and the firmness of his commitment to his people (38:14–16; 39:7, 22–9 [note the reference to “my people Israel” and “my land”]). The defense of this people, who did not need so much as to lift a sword, vindicated his great name while at the same time confirming his word. The causal clause, “For I shall have poured out my Spirit on the house of Israel,” explains not just the events described in the immediately preceding verses, that is, the regathering of the nation,

39. Lemke, “Life in the Present,” 180, n. 19, points out that 37:26–28 makes reference to YHWH’s dwelling with his people and his sanctuary being in their midst. Appeal can be made to at least one ancient manuscript, Papyrus⁹⁶⁷, which in fact exhibits such an arrangement. Cf. Filson, “The Omission of Ezekiel 12:26–28,” 27–32.

but also YHWH's fulfillment of his covenant to his people. The presence of the Spirit of YHWH, poured out upon his people, served as the permanent witness and seal of the *בְּרִית שְׁלוֹם* and the *בְּרִית עוֹלָם*.⁴⁰ The presence of the Spirit of YHWH poured out upon the returned exiles guaranteed that he would never leave any of the house of Israel at the mercy of her enemies, and that he would never hide his face from them again, as the contemporaries of Ezekiel had just witnessed. In short, Gog becomes the agent through whom YHWH declares concretely that 587 B.C. shall never again repeat itself.

40. The implications this covenantal interpretation of the pouring out of the Spirit has for the progress of the Holy Spirit's activity in the book of Acts are tantalizing, but beyond the scope of this article. It should be noted, however, that with every stage in the advance of the gospel, and the incorporation of new groups of people into the church, reference is made to the manifestation of the Spirit's presence. Cf. the coming of the Spirit upon the Jews of Jerusalem (Acts 2:4, 33, 38), the Samaritans (8:14–17), the Gentile proselytes of Judaea (10:44–48, cf. 11:16), and the Gentiles of Asia Minor (19:1–6). Each account represents a new advance in the scope of the new covenant instituted in Christ. Furthermore, when Paul speaks of being sealed with or by the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13; 4:30), is he not also speaking of the reception of the Holy Spirit as the divine confirmation of the covenant?