

**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**  
**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**  
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**Yechezkel: The Book of Ezekiel**  
**By Dr. Tova Ganzel**

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Sponsored by Aaron and Tzipora Ross and family  
in honor of the *yahrtzeits* of our esteemed grandparents:  
Neil Fredman (Shmuel Nachamu ben Shlomo Moshe HaKohen, 10 Tevet),  
Clara Fredman (Chaya bat Yitzchak Dovid, 15 Tevet),  
and Walter Rosenthal (Shimon ben Moshe, 16 Tevet).  
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**Shiur #28b Yechezkel's Prophecy about Gog from the Land of Magog (38-39) (continued): The Purification of the Land**

**First Stage**

So far, the *Sefer* has made no mention of either the purification of the land or of Jerusalem. This seems to be because it is impossible to purify the land without its inhabitants undergoing purification as well – just as it was the people who caused the land to become defiled in the first place. Following this line of thought it could be possible for the purification of the people to even cause the land to automatically become purified, without requiring any specific process.

But Chapter 39 describes, for the first time, the actions necessary to purify the land (v. 12). So while we may have assumed that the purification of the people would also have led the land to be purified, there is, in fact, a precondition: removal of the causes of defilement.

The purification of the land entails several stages:

1. God allots Gog a specific burial place in Israel;
2. The bodies of Gog and of all his multitudes are buried there;
3. From now on this burial place is known as “the Valley of Hamon-Gog [the Multitude of Gog]”;
4. The burial campaign, following which the land will be restored to its purity, lasts seven months, and it is undertaken by “the people of the land”;
5. “Rangers” pass through the land, after these seven months, burying any bones that might remain;
6. These rangers mark every place where human bones remain, until these too are brought for burial in the Valley of Hamon-Gog.

In order to purify the land after Gog and his army are defeated, it becomes necessary to bury the many casualties. What, then, has caused the defilement of the land mentioned in these verses? The great number of corpses strewn over the land seems to be what makes the purification necessary; it is their presence that has made the land defiled. The impurity of a corpse is mentioned explicitly in *Yechezkel* 9:7, and accords with the Torah's teaching that physical contact with bones, or their presence together with a person within a tent, cause the person to become ritually impure (*Bamidbar* 19).

The fact that the corpses of Gog and his soldiers are lying about with no burial place, as required by the law in *Devarim* 21:23 causes the defilement of the land. The removal of the corpses will purify it. Therefore, *Yechezkel* describes here how over a period of seven months the house of Israel will bury all the dead, and thereby purify the land. In addition, the valley in which the corpses will be buried – the “valley of those who travel” - will henceforth be known as the “Valley of Hamon-Gog”. This name may allude to the past sins that were committed in the Valley of Ben-Hinnom, a place known as a location where children were passed through fire (*Yirmiyahu* 2:23; *Divrei Ha-yamim* II 27:3).

So on a deeper level the prophet is hinting that the passing of children through fire - which had been common in the land - is what caused its defilement. (Also see *Vayikra* (18:21-30).)

There are two elements to the purification of the land through burial of the dead. There is on the one hand, a technical solution: the bones are gathered up (this removes the defiling elements) and prevents bodies from remaining unburied (this allows the land to be purified). But in addition, , this is a ceremony of purification specifically bound up with the wickedness of Gog. During this ceremony, the ground swallows up Gog and thereby rids itself of his defilement (39:14), in a similar manner to the Torah's statement about the murderer: “... and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed in it, except by the blood of him who shed it” (*Bamidbar* 35:33). The land is cleansed only when the murderer is properly punished, and the blood or bones of those who sinned upon the land are then buried.

So, in addition to purifying the land from the casualties of war, this ceremony also purifies the land from the sins of the past.

Let me adduce support for this from the similarity between the purification of the land through burial of the dead in *Yechezkel* and the purification of the person who is ritually impure through contact with the dead, as set forth in the law of the red heifer (*Bamidbar* 19:11-22).

There are several points of comparison:

1. The purification process for a *tamei met* (someone who is ritually impure as a result of coming into contact with a corpse) lasts seven days (*Bamidbar* – *ibid.*, and we find in *Yechezkel* 44:26 – “And after he is cleansed they shall count for him seven days), and the duration of the burial campaign in order to cleanse the land is seven months.

2. During the purification process, the *tamei met* undergoes a cleansing on two occasions (on the third day and on the seventh day). Correspondingly, the burial of the dead is not concluded by means of a one-time act; rather, another round of inspection is necessary in order to ascertain that everything requiring burial has indeed been buried.

3. Anyone who comes into contact with a human bone (*inter alia*), is impure for seven days (*Bamidbar* 19:16); correspondingly, *Yechezkel* emphasizes the need to bury human bones: “And the rangers that pass through the land, when any sees a human bone, then he shall set up a sign by it, until the buriers have buried it in the Valley of Hamon-Gog.”<sup>1</sup>

## **Second stage – removal of possible worship sites**

Following the burial of the dead there is another prophecy that describes a banquet that the God of Israel prepares from the flesh of the mighty and the blood of the princes, a banquet intended – surprisingly enough – for the birds and the animals. This banquet will demonstrate God’s judgment to all the nations:

“And you son of man, thus says the Lord God: Speak to every feathered bird and to every beast of the field: Assemble yourselves and come, gather yourselves on every side to My festive meal that I prepare for you, a great feast upon the mountains of Israel, that you may eat meat and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bullocks, all of them fatlings of Bashan. And you shall eat fat until you are full, and drink blood until you are drunken, of My feast which I have prepared for you. Thus you shall be filled at My table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, says the Lord God.” (39:17-20)

This prophecy complements the purification of the land. Although burying the dead bodies can stop those bodies from causing impurity, the burials cannot stop the graves from becoming a pilgrimage site. Furthermore, according to pagan belief, a human grave symbolizes a place where the dead have a continued presence. The dead, in their burial place, served as a pilgrimage site and often received offerings that included food. Sometimes, burial places also served to signify ownership over some territorial unit. In these verses, the dead

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<sup>1</sup> It should be pointed out that the expression “*etzem adam*” (human bone) in this exact form is found only in the two sources discussed here. A variation of this expression, in the plural – “*atzamot adam*” – is found in three places in *Sefer Melakhim*.

themselves become flesh for consumption. Those who consume them – the birds and the beast of the field – could have been sacrificed as offerings to the dead (in the pagan context), while here the situation is reversed: they themselves eat the flesh and drink the blood of God’s enemies. By means of these two stages, following consecutively one after the other, Yechezkel prepares the ground for the appearance of God’s glory to the nations.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps these verses might even be regarded as a prophecy of revival for Am Yisrael, since in Yirmiyahu’s prophecies before the Destruction, the punishment foretold for the nation included a parallel punishment directed against them:

“Therefore days are coming, says the Lord, it shall no more be called Tofet, nor the Valley of Ben-Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter, for they shall bury in Tofet, because there is no room. And the carcasses of this people shall be food for the birds of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth, and none shall frighten them away.” (*Yirmiyahu* 7:32-33)

(To be continued)

Translated by Kaeren Fish

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<sup>2</sup> See F. Stavrakopoulou, “Gog’s Grave and the Use and Abuse of Corpses in Ezekiel 39:11-20”, *JBL* 129, 1 (2010), pp. 67-84