

MATAN AL HAPEREREK

The Six-Year Online Weekly Tanach Learning Program



Perek 38

In perakim 38-39 we find the prophecy of the war of Gog from the land of Magog, known more familiarly as the “War of Gog and Magog”. This prophecy closes the unit of prophecies of redemption in the book and describes the last stage of the redemption which will occur after the nation returns to their land and the tribes are reunited. The war will involve a large army and many nations and is expected to conclude with a harsh defeat of Gog on Israeli land. The purpose of the war is to sanctify and glorify God’s name, in keeping with the perceptions of exile and redemption which we have found throughout the book.

- 1 Examine pesukim 4 and 16-17, and 10-13, and analyze the contradiction between them in terms of who begins the war and what the motives are. How can we resolve the contradiction? See **Rashi**:

and I shall put hooks into your jaws: It is customary to lead out a beast with the hooks in its jaws because it does not want to go [voluntarily]. I, too, will put thoughts into your heart and an urge that will draw you from your land to come upon Israel.

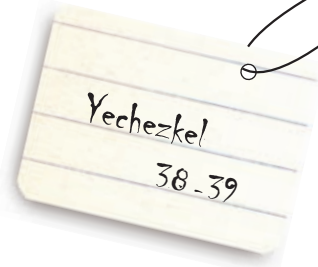




- 2 “It will come to pass on that day that words will enter your heart and you will think a thought of evil.” (10) In pesukim 10-13 the evil thoughts of Gog are described. Note the repetitive use of the words “spoil” and “loot” (in Hebrew the verbs and nouns are from the same root so that to take spoil is to spoil spoil – *leshlol shalal* – and to plunder loot is to loot loot – *lavoz baz*.) Pay attention to the contradiction between the war-like thoughts and the description of the nation which is living in peace. Compare the thoughts of Gog to the prophecy of consolation found earlier, in perek 34:25, 28. How is the cause of the downfall of Gog already found in the thought to go to war?
- 3 God’s war with Gog is described in pesukim 18-23; this is comparable to other events in the Bible in which God fights His enemies. The most extensive parallel is to the exodus from Egypt, a parallel which we see in many places in the perek and especially in these pesukim. Pay special attention to parallels in the goal of attacking the nations and their kings, the motive for the actions of the king and also the phrases shared by perek 38 and the plagues in Egypt. In addition, compare pasuk 22 to the description of the overturning of Sodom and Gomorrah in Bereshit 19.

Perek 39

Perek 39 includes an additional prophecy about the war with Gog and parallels perek 38 in many ways, but the focus of the perek is different: while perek 38 deals mostly with Gog coming to the war and ends with its downfall, perek 39 describes at length and in detail Gog’s downfall and the results of the downfall – burning the weaponry, cleansing the land of the fallen - and ends with the purpose of the war, the knowledge of God that will spread among the nations and Israel.



- 4 a) Compare the description of the defeat of Gog in the end of perek 38 (18-23) to the description in the beginning of perek 39 (1-5). Note the differences between these two descriptions and the means by which the war of God with Gog occurs according to each perek.
- b) Two “fallings” are mentioned in the beginning of the prophecy, and their results are described in the continuation of the prophecy: the arrows falling from the hands of Gog (3), and Gog and his army falling on the mountains of Israel (4-5). See the description of the burning of the weaponry in pesukim 9-10, and the call to the wild animals and the birds of the heavens in pesukim 17-20. What is the meaning of the fall of Gog and his weaponry in light of his evil thoughts which were described earlier in 38:12-13?
- c) Study the prophecy of the end of days in Yishayahu 2:4, and note the similarity to the prophecy of Yechezkel in pesukim 9-10. What additional meaning is given to the falling and the burning of the weaponry? Pay attention as well to the differences between the two prophecies in terms of their mood and their attitude toward the nations.
- 5 In Pesukim 11-16 the process of burying the army of Gog after the war is described. The process is divided into two stages: the first stage (11-13) will take seven months and will involve the whole nation; the second stage will come afterward and will only involve special people (rangers) who will travel the country (14-16).
- a) What is the explicit purpose of the burial in the pesukim? What is the spiritual meaning and the symbolism of this burial? Compare it to the description of the sins of the nation (36:18).
- b) Read the midrash in **Bereshit Rabbah 36** to discover another meaning:
- Said the Holy One Blessed be He to Yaphet – you covered the nakedness of your father, by My life I will pay you back: *“I will give Gog a place there as a grave in Israel.”* (39:11)



- 6 The purpose of the war is described several times in perakim 38-39.
- Follow the different times it is mentioned and note the development and expansion each time: 38:16, 38:23, 39:7 and 39:21-29.
 - The final and most detailed time it is mentioned appears at the end of the perek in the pesukim 21-29: examine these pesukim, and note to whom else they are addressed here. Another new idea in this section has to do with the understanding of the past, and is connected to the concept of Hester Panim (the hiding of God's face) in the exile which is mentioned three times here (23, 24, 28). Hester Panim is mentioned for the first time in Devarim 31:16-17 – what is the concern expressed there and how does the war of Gog resolve it? See the **Seforno** there:

And I will hide my face from them – Not as they thought when they said that I am not amongst them, for in every place they will be My Spirit will be found there, but I will hide my face from saving them.

Appendix

The unique vision of the war of Gog deals with the stage after the redemption, in the end of days. Over the years, this vision has been interpreted in numerous ways, and attempts were made to connect it with various historical events. The place of the war of Gog and Magog in the process of the end of days was discussed in various midrashim and was connected to the arrival of the Messiah:

If you go to war in your land against an adversary that oppresses you – The text is referring to the war of Gog and Magog. Is it talking about the war of Gog and Magog, or perhaps it is talking about all the wars in the Torah? We can learn from the biblical text: “*and thus be saved from your enemies*”, go and see what war is the one in which Israel is saved and there is no subjugation afterwards, this is only the war of Gog and Magog. (Sifri Bamidbar 76)

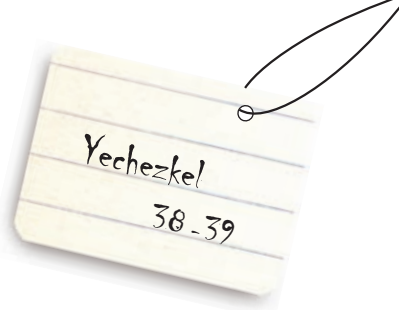
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Throughout the generations there were many people who dealt with calculations of the end of times and who tried to figure out when the war would take place:

R. Hanan b. Tahlifa sent [word] to R. Joseph: I once met a man who possessed a scroll written in Hebrew in Assyrian characters. I said to him: 'From where has this come to you?' He replied, 'I hired myself as a mercenary in the Roman army, and found it amongst the Roman archives. In it is stated that four thousand, two hundred and thirty-one years after the creation the world will be orphaned. [As to the years following,] some of them will be spent in the war of the great sea monsters, and some in the war of Gog and Magog, and the remaining [period] will be the Messianic era, whilst the Holy One, blessed be He, will renew his world only after seven thousand years.' (Sanhedrin 97b)

We will end with the words of the **Rambam** in the end of **Hilchot Melachim** (the laws of Kings) 12:2, which expresses a fundamentally negative position in relation to dealing with questions of this sort:

Our Sages taught: "There will be no difference between the current age and the Messianic era except the emancipation from our subjugation to the gentile kingdoms." The simple interpretation of the prophets' words appears to imply that the war of Gog and Magog will take place at the beginning of the Messianic age. Before the war of Gog and Magog, a prophet will arise to inspire Israel to be upright and prepare their hearts, as Malachi 3:22 states: 'Behold, I am sending you Eliya.'... All these and similar matters cannot be definitely known by man until they occur for these matters are undefined in the prophets' words and even the wise men have no established tradition regarding these matters except their own interpretation of the verses. Therefore, there is a controversy among them regarding these matters. Regardless of the debate concerning these questions, neither the order of the occurrence of these events or their precise details is among the fundamental principles of the faith. A person should not occupy himself with the Aggadot and homiletics concerning these and similar matters, nor should he consider them as essentials, for study of them will neither bring fear or love of God. Similarly, one should not try to determine the appointed time for Mashiach's coming. Our Sages declared: 'May the spirits of those who attempt to determine the time of Mashiach's coming expire!' Rather, one should await and believe in the general concept of the matter as explained.

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