

Homiletics Analysis: Ezekiel 38

Content & Intent

Broader Unit — Ezekiel 33–48: Ezekiel 38 belongs to the great restoration section of the book (chapters 33–48), which follows the oracles of judgment (chapters 1–32). Having announced Israel’s restoration to the land, the renewal of the covenant, and the resurrection of the dry bones (chapters 34–37), the LORD now addresses the question lurking beneath every restoration promise: *What about the enemies who will come against the restored people?* Chapters 38–39 form a discrete unit within the restoration section — a single extended oracle addressing the assault and annihilation of Gog of Magog. Chapter 38 announces the assault and God’s sovereign orchestration of it; chapter 39 announces the total defeat, the burial of the dead, and the sacrificial feast. Chapter 38 cannot be read in isolation from chapter 39, but it does have its own distinct emphasis — the sovereign gathering and confrontation — and that emphasis controls the analysis here.

This Text — Content: Ezekiel 38 presents the LORD announcing that He will summon a great military coalition — Gog of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, together with Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, and Beth-togarmah — against the restored, peacefully dwelling people of Israel. The attack appears irresistible: a vast army descending on an unsuspecting, unfortified nation. But the LORD reveals that the entire assault is His sovereign doing — He will bring Gog against His land (vv. 3–4, 16). When the attack comes, the LORD Himself rises in holy jealousy and devastating fury, shaking the earth, summoning sword, pestilence, flooding rain, hailstones, fire, and brimstone against Gog (vv. 18–22). The purpose: that God will be magnified, sanctified, and made known before the nations.

This Text — Intent: God is seeking to produce in His restored people — and in all who read this oracle — an unshakeable confidence that no future threat, however overwhelming it appears, falls outside His sovereign control or will succeed in undoing His redemptive purposes. More specifically, God intends to press His people past the anxiety of “but what about the enemies still to come?” into a settled rest on His sufficiency. The oracle also confronts any temptation to trust in Israel’s own security arrangements, geographic peace, or national strength — the restored nation dwelling in open, unwalled villages is entirely dependent on the LORD, and He intends them to know it. God will display His greatness through the very assault that seems to threaten His people’s existence.

Subject Sentence: The LORD sovereignly summons and destroys Israel’s final enemies to display His own supreme greatness.

Primary Claim: God is assuring His restored people — and every generation of His people since — that no coalition of enemies, however vast and however perfectly timed, can ever undo His redemptive purposes, because He is not watching the attack unfold; He is *orchestrating* it for His own glory and their ultimate security.

Interpretive Evaluation

The Identity of Gog and Magog — Literal Nation vs. Eschatological Symbol: The most significant and recurring interpretive controversy in Ezekiel 38 is the identification of Gog of Magog and the associated nations. Dispensational interpreters, following a tradition running from early premillennialists through Scofield and into contemporary prophecy teachers, typically identify Gog as a specific future nation — most commonly Russia (on the basis of a supposed etymological connection between “Rosh” in v. 2 and “Russia,” and “Meshech” with “Moscow”). They read the chapter as a precise prophetic map of end-times geopolitics, often placing the fulfillment immediately before or during the Great Tribulation.

This reading must be *refuted* at several levels. First, the etymological identification of “Rosh” with Russia is almost universally rejected by Hebrew scholars — “Rosh” here is almost certainly a common noun meaning “chief” or “head” (*rosh* = head), not a proper noun identifying a people group. Second, the ancient nations named — Persia, Cush, Put, Gomer, Beth-togarmah — are identified in their ancient Near Eastern context (Genesis 10) as known peoples in Ezekiel’s world and its environs; they function as a representative sweep of compass-point nations (north, south, east, west), not a geopolitical blueprint for modern states. Third, Revelation 20:8 does use Gog and Magog as symbols for the final assault of all nations against God’s people — but in a way that suggests John is *borrowing Ezekiel’s imagery* to speak of the eschatological finale, not confirming a geo-specific fulfillment.

The Timing — Pre-Tribulation, Post-Tribulation, Millennial: Within dispensational systems, there is significant internal disagreement about whether Ezekiel 38–39 depicts an event before the Tribulation, mid-Tribulation, at Armageddon, or during the Millennium (the latter because Revelation places “Gog and Magog” after the thousand years in Revelation 20:7–9). No consensus exists. This internal fragmentation within the system that most insists on a literal-specific identification is itself evidence that the passage resists the precise geo-temporal mapping being imposed on it.

The Reformed / Amillennial Reading — Preferred: The Reformed and amillennial reading, represented by Greenberg, Block, and broadly by Reformed biblical theologians, understands Gog as a typological-symbolic figure representing the ultimate, definitive enemy coalition that will come against God’s people at the end of the age. The passage uses hyperbolic, apocalyptic imagery (earthquake, fire, hailstones) and representative nation-lists to depict the totality of opposition to God’s restored people — and the totality of God’s overwhelming victory over it. This reading is preferred because it: (a) takes the

ancient Near Eastern context of the named nations seriously without anachronism; (b) accounts for the intertextual relationship with Revelation 20 without forcing a strict chronological map; (c) reads the passage's stated purpose ("that the nations may know that I am the LORD") as a claim about God's character that applies across all ages, not only a future geopolitical event; and (d) preserves the passage's primary function — assurance of God's sovereign protection — without reducing it to a historical curiosity awaiting calendar fulfillment.

Contribution Worth Retaining from Dispensational Reading: Dispensational readers rightly insist that this oracle has a *future* orientation — it is not describing something already past but something definitively yet to come. The passage's "latter days" language (vv. 8, 16) and its cosmic scope guard against any over-realized or purely historical fulfillment. The Reformed reading should retain that future-eschatological orientation while refusing the geo-specific mapping. The oracle is about the real future; it is not a newspaper in code.

Key Canonical Support

- **Genesis 10:2–6** — The Table of Nations places Magog, Meshech, Tubal, Gomer, and Togarmah as sons of Japheth and grandsons of Noah; this establishes these as ancient ethnic/geographic designators, grounding the oracle in real human history rather than modern geopolitics, and framing Gog's coalition as a sweep of the known world's peoples arrayed against the LORD's land.
- **Psalms 2:1–6** — "Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves...against the LORD and against His Anointed." The universal pattern of Ezekiel 38's assault is the pattern of Psalm 2 — the nations in futile coalition against the LORD's purposes; and the LORD's response is laughter, not alarm. Ezekiel 38 enacts what Psalm 2 declares.
- **Isaiah 54:14–17** — "No weapon formed against you shall prosper." The LORD's covenant assurance to restored Israel that every enemy coalition and every accusation will fail — the same theological claim Ezekiel 38 makes, set in the same restoration context. Isaiah provides the prophetic warrant; Ezekiel 38 provides the eschatological drama that enacts it.
- **Romans 8:31–39** — "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Paul's argument that no created power, no height, no depth, no principality can separate believers from the love of God in Christ Jesus is the New Testament fulfillment and generalization of the Ezekiel 38 claim: the complete failure of every assault against God's elect is guaranteed by God Himself, not by their own strength.
- **Revelation 20:7–10** — John uses the Gog-Magog imagery directly to describe the final assault of Satan-led nations against the beloved city after the millennium,

confirming that Ezekiel's imagery is typological-eschatological and finds its ultimate fulfillment in the last battle before the new creation. The fire from heaven in Revelation 20:9 echoes the fire, brimstone, and flooding rain of Ezekiel 38:22.

Aim: To demonstrate that the LORD's sovereign orchestration of even the most overwhelming opposition to His people is the ground of their unshakeable confidence — and to press readers past theoretical trust in God's protection into concrete rest in His government of history.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1–2	The oracle formula: “Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him.”	Standard prophetic commission. “Set your face against” indicates a hostile oracle. “Gog” appears only here and ch. 39 in the OT (apart from a genealogical reference in 1 Chron. 5:4 — unrelated).
3–4	The LORD declares He is against Gog and will turn him and bring him out — hooks in his jaws, a great army fully equipped.	Critical: the LORD does not merely <i>permit</i> this assault; He <i>initiates and directs</i> it. “Hooks in the jaws” = irresistible divine summons.
5–6	The coalition enumerated: Persia, Cush, Put (v. 5), Gomer and Beth-togarmah (v. 6) — all with their armies.	Compass-point nations: south, east, west, north. Together = totality of the world's military power arrayed.
7	“Be ready and keep ready, you and all your hosts that are assembled about you, and be a guard for them.”	Ironic divine command — the LORD tells Gog to prepare, underscoring His sovereign control over the timing and execution of the assault.
8	“After many days you will be mustered. In the latter years you will go against the land that is restored from war,	“Latter years” / “latter days” = eschatological marker. The target is explicitly the <i>restored</i> Israel — post-exile,

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	the land whose people were gathered from many peoples upon the mountains of Israel.”	post-regathering.
9	“You will advance, coming on like a storm. You will be like a cloud covering the land, you and all your hordes, and many peoples with you.”	Storm/cloud imagery = overwhelming, irresistible military advance. The appearance of unstoppable force is total.
10–12	Gog’s internal deliberation: he devises an evil scheme to plunder and loot “the quiet people who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls, and having no bars or gates.”	The peacefully dwelling, undefended target is precisely what makes this a divine setup — no human defense; only the LORD can save them. Gog’s greed is his own, but it serves God’s purpose.
13	Sheba, Dedan, and the merchants of Tarshish with their “young lions” ask: “Have you come to seize spoil?”	Commercial nations as spectators/collaborators — their question both confirms Gog’s intent and dramatizes the universal scale of the assault.
14–16	The LORD addresses Gog again: “In that day...you will come against my people Israel, like a cloud covering the land. In the latter days I will bring you against my land, that the nations may know me, when through you, O Gog, I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.”	The stated purpose of the entire assault: “that the nations may know me.” This is not about Israel’s punishment; it is about the LORD’s global self-disclosure through the defeat of the assault.
17	“Are you he of whom I spoke in former days by my servants the prophets of Israel, who in those days prophesied for years that I would bring you against them?”	The LORD claims this event was anticipated by the entire prior prophetic tradition — this is the fulfillment of a long-promised cosmic confrontation.

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
18–20	The LORD’s fury announced: “My wrath will be roused in my jealousy and in my blazing wrath...there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish and the birds and the beasts and all creeping things...and all the people who are on the face of the earth, shall quake at my presence.”	The divine response is immediate, total, and cosmic — not a military counter-offensive but a theophanic eruption. The whole creation responds to the LORD’s wrath.
21–22	The weapons of divine judgment: every man’s sword turned against his brother, pestilence, bloodshed, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.	The coalition destroys itself through internal confusion (cf. Judges 7; 2 Chronicles 20). The natural catastrophes are classic theophanic warfare (cf. Joshua 10; Revelation 16).
23	“So I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they will know that I am the LORD.”	The capstone purpose statement: the entire oracle — assault and annihilation alike — exists for this: the LORD making Himself known as great and holy before the nations.

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–9	The Sovereign Summons: The LORD Calls Gog’s Coalition Against His Restored People
2	10–13	The Evil Scheme: Gog’s Own Greed Unwittingly Serves the LORD’s Purpose
3	14–17	The Divine Declaration: This Is the LORD’s Doing, for the Nations to Know Him

Division	Verses	Label
4	18–23	The Theophanic Response: The LORD Rises in Fury and Destroys Gog’s Coalition

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The LORD sovereignly summons and destroys Israel’s final enemies to display His own supreme greatness.

Primary Claim: God is assuring His restored people — and every generation of His people since — that no coalition of enemies, however vast and however perfectly timed, can ever undo His redemptive purposes, because He is not watching the attack unfold; He is *orchestrating* it for His own glory and their ultimate security.

Applications (Five)

1. When the opposition to God’s people appears overwhelming and coordinated, this is not evidence that God has lost control — it may be evidence that He is about to act in decisive self-disclosure. (*Mind/belief*) The believers who face organized, large-scale opposition to the faith — whether cultural, political, or spiritual — are prone to interpret the scale of the opposition as a sign of God’s absence or impotence. Ezekiel 38 directly refutes this. The most overwhelming-looking assault on God’s people in the entire Old Testament prophetic corpus is the one the LORD Himself initiates and directs. The hooks in Gog’s jaws are the LORD’s hooks. When opposition grows coordinated and threatening, the proper response is not escalating anxiety but heightened expectancy — God is not losing; He is staging something.

2. The believer’s security before God’s enemies does not rest on the believer’s defenses, resources, or preparation — it rests entirely on the LORD’s sovereign jealousy for His own name. (*Affections/worship*) The Israel of Ezekiel 38 is the most defenseless Israel imaginable: dwelling in open, unwalled villages, without bars or gates, at apparent peace. God deliberately places His restored people in this condition — utterly dependent, with no military preparation sufficient for what is coming. And He saves them anyway, through theophanic intervention. This should produce in the reader not a theology of passivity but an affective reorientation: my security is not a product of what I have assembled. The LORD’s jealousy for His own holiness is the wall between me and destruction. Learn to rest there rather than in the walls you build.

3. The purpose of God’s dramatic intervention in history — including the reversal of apparent defeats — is always ultimately the knowledge of God among the nations, not merely the comfort of His people. (*Mind/belief*) Verses 16 and 23 repeat the purpose clause: “that the nations may know that I am the LORD.” This means God’s people are not

the ultimate audience of Ezekiel 38's drama — the nations are. The LORD is using the assault and the annihilation to produce global knowledge of Himself. Believers who read providential reversals only through the lens of personal rescue miss the larger frame: God is always also working for His own fame. Recalibrate the lens. When God acts on your behalf, the primary beneficiary of that action, in God's economy, is His own glory before a watching world.

4. Stop identifying geo-political powers as the ultimate threat to the gospel's advance — the LORD who summoned Gog can just as easily summon, restrain, and destroy every contemporary coalition arrayed against His purposes. (*Will/behavior*) Christians in every generation are tempted to become functionally apocalyptic about the particular political or cultural powers that threaten the church in their moment — treating this empire, this ideology, this movement, as uniquely and finally dangerous. Ezekiel 38 invites a concrete behavioral shift: stop treating news of political threat as the dominant input shaping your ministry decisions, your financial choices, or your emotional state. The LORD who laughed at Gog's fully equipped and perfectly positioned military coalition is not trembling at the power arrayed against His church. Act accordingly — keep planting, keep preaching, keep giving.

5. Let the magnitude of God's wrath in Ezekiel 38 produce in you a deepened gratitude that Christ has borne that wrath in your place — the fire, brimstone, and flooding rain that destroy Gog fell on the cross, absorbed by the Son. (*Affections/worship*) The theophanic fury of verses 18–22 — earthquake, pestilence, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone raining down — is the unveiled wrath of God against His enemies. The Reformed reader should feel the weight of what is described, then feel the weight of the gospel: this same God, in this same wrath, could have destroyed me. He did not. He turned that fire on His own Son. The appropriate response to Ezekiel 38's picture of divine wrath is not self-congratulation about being on the right side but profound, trembling gratitude that Christ absorbed what I deserved, and a deepened worship of the God whose love is as large as His wrath.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: Ezekiel 38 makes an irreplaceable claim about the nature of divine sovereignty: the LORD does not merely *permit* the worst assaults on His people and then respond; He *initiates* them, directs their timing and scope, and uses them as instruments of His own self-disclosure. This is a hard doctrine — it means the darkest moments of covenant history are not accidents God works around but plans God works through. The passage further establishes that God's self-disclosure ("that they may know that I am the LORD") is the teleological ground of all history, including its most violent episodes. The nations are not simply enemies to be destroyed — they are an audience to be converted or condemned through witnessing the LORD's greatness and holiness.

Finally, the passage teaches that God's jealousy for His own name is the ultimate security of His people — not their walls, armies, or wisdom.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Ezekiel 38 is a sustained exegetical demonstration of what Reformed theology confesses in its doctrine of providence: that God ordains, not merely permits, the events of history, including the actions of wicked human agents, without compromising their moral responsibility or His own holiness. Gog devises his evil scheme (v. 10) by his own sinful initiative — but the LORD has put hooks in his jaws (v. 4) and declares “I will bring you against my land” (v. 16). This is double agency without contradiction — the precise structure that Reformed theology insists is not incoherent but is in fact the consistent testimony of Scripture from Joseph's brothers to the cross of Christ. The passage also insists that the ground of the people's security is entirely monergistic — no human preparation, no political alliance, no military readiness contributes to Israel's survival. The LORD alone acts, the LORD alone saves, and the LORD alone receives the glory. This is not Israel's vindication by their own righteousness; it is God's vindication of His own name through them.

Main Takeaway

The worst thing your enemy can possibly do to you — assemble the largest coalition imaginable, arrive at the moment of your maximum vulnerability, and advance like a storm on an undefended people — is still something the LORD *called and directed*, not something He is scrambling to contain. He put the hooks in their jaws. He will rain down the fire. He will be known as great and holy when it is over. You are not undefended — you are bait in a divine trap set for His own glory and your ultimate security. Stop building your confidence on the walls you can see. The LORD's jealousy for His own name is the wall that never falls.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Treating the chapter as a geo-political prophecy chart rather than a pastoral assurance.** The dominant popular handling of Ezekiel 38 is identification of modern nations in the text — Russia, Iran, Turkey, etc. — and construction of a prophetic timeline. This approach virtually guarantees that the primary claim (God's sovereign assurance to His people) is never reached, because the sermon is consumed by speculative nation-identification. The result is intellectually stimulating to some and baffling to most — and pastorally useless to all. The exposition must get *past* the identification question to the assurance claim that controls the text.

- **Treating the “latter days” language as purely future and therefore pastorally inert.** The opposite error to geo-political speculation is retreating from the passage’s eschatological force by concluding that since we cannot identify when and how this is fulfilled, the passage has nothing to say today. “Latter days” in prophetic usage is not merely a date-stamp for a distant event — it announces that the pattern being described is the definitive, final shape of God’s dealings with His enemies. It has ongoing pastoral force for every generation that lives between the resurrection and the consummation.
- **Missing that the LORD initiates and directs the assault — reading the passage only as God *responding to the attack*.** This is the single most important exegetical point in the chapter: “I will put hooks into your jaws” (v. 4), “I will bring you against my land” (v. 16). If the expositor presents the chapter as God defending His people against an attack He did not plan, the passage becomes merely a rescue story — impressive but different in kind from what it actually claims. The claim is sovereignty, not reactivity. God is not the defender who holds the wall; He is the general who set the trap.
- **Preaching the application to national or corporate Israel only, thereby insulating the congregation from the personal force of the assurance.** The oracle is addressed to restored covenant Israel — but its purpose clause (“that the nations may know”) and its canonical development in Romans 8 and Revelation 20 make clear that the assurance belongs to every member of the covenant community. The preacher must move from “this is what God promised restored Israel” to “this is what God has promised you in Christ,” with the cross and resurrection as the ultimate ground of that promise.
- **Handling the theophany of verses 18–22 without connecting it to the wrath of God in the gospel.** The fire, brimstone, flooding rain, and hailstones are not incidental dramatic detail — they are the unveiled wrath of a holy God against His enemies. A Reformed exposition cannot preach this without pausing at the recognition that this wrath was borne by Christ on behalf of those who are now the covenant people. The theophanic fury of Ezekiel 38 is a mirror that should drive the congregation to Golgotha, not merely impress them with divine power.
- **Ending the sermon on the security of the believers without landing on the glory of God as the ultimate purpose.** The passage’s own capstone is not “and therefore you are safe” but “so I will show my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations” (v. 23). The congregation’s security is real and intended — but it is a *derivative* purpose, not the ultimate one. Expositions that end on personal comfort rather than divine glory invert the passage’s own emphasis and produce a subtly consumerist Christianity. The people are saved so that the nations will know the LORD. End there.