

Ezekiel's Gog as Antichrist From Asia Minor: A Historical Survey

By Joel Richardson

The purpose of this article is to catalogue a partial list of historians, Bible scholars, commentators, and teachers, both Jewish, Christian, and secular, whose interpretations of “Gog of Magog” of Ezekiel 38-39 conflict with the popular view that Gog is an eschatological character distinct from the Antichrist from Russia.

The list includes those who either identify Gog and his hordes as coming from the region of modern day Turkey (or on the Turkish border in Syria), or who understand Gog and the Antichrist to be the same individual. In this survey, it will become apparent that the widely popular modern view of Gog as a figure distinct from the Antichrist, who comes from Russia, is largely a modern novelty, representing a significant minority position within Church history.

Pliny the Elder, The 1st-century Roman military commander, author, naturalist, and philosopher. He spoke of a city called, “Bambyce, otherwise called Hierapolis; but of the Syrians, Magog [or Mabog].” Ancient Heirapolis sat on the border of modern-day Turkey and Syria. Thus, according to Pliny, Magog—the home of Gog—was on the modern day border of Turkey and Syria.

The Talmud, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, on Numbers 11:26 identifies Gog and Magog as the ultimate final enemy of Israel, not some preliminary, or secondary end time figure: “Behold a king shall go up from the land of Magog at the end of the days. He shall assemble kings wearing crowns and lieutenants wearing armor, and all the nations shall obey him. They shall array battle in the land of Israel against the children of the Dispersion, but the Lord shall be ready for them... Their dead bodies shall fall upon the mountains of the land of Israel, and the wild beasts of the field and the birds of heaven shall come and consume them. After that, all the dead of Israel shall be resurrected, and shall enjoy the good things which were secretly set aside for them from the beginning, and they shall receive the reward of their labor.”

Hippolytus of Rome (170—235), arguably the most important Christian theologian of the 3rd century, in his work called *The Chronicon*, rejected the now well-known claim by Josephus, who identified Magog with the Scythians north of the

Black Sea. Instead, Hippolytus connected Magog with the Galatians in Asia Minor or modern-day Turkey.

Moses Ben Maimonides (aka., Rambam) (1135—1204), the revered Jewish sage, in *Hichot Terumot*, also identified Magog as being on the border of Syria and modern day Turkey.

Rabbi David Kimchi (aka., Radak) (1160—1235), another famous medieval Jewish rabbi, commenting on Zechariah 14, says this portion of Scripture—which virtually all Christians recognize as referring to the Antichrist—is a reference to the war of Gog of Magog.

Nicholas of Lyra (1270—1349), a Franciscan Hebrew scholar, and renowned Biblical exegete from the University of Paris. Lyra's works were greatly influential among the reformers. Lyra believed that Gog was another title of the Antichrist. Lyra argued that Gog means "covered" which is a reference to the Antichrist as Satan covering himself with the shape of a man.

Martin Luther (1483—1546), the German monk, priest and iconic reformer, understood Gog to be a reference to the Turks, whom God had sent as a scourge to chastise Christians.

Franciscus Junius (1545—1602), a French Huguenot scholar and theologian. Junius saw Gog as a people from Asia Minor, or modern day Turkey, who would persecute the Jews in the latter days.

Sir Walter Raleigh (1554—1618), in his classic *History of the World*, also placed Magog in Asia Minor or modern day Turkey: "Yet it is not to be denied, that the Scythians in old times coming out of the north-east, wasted the better part of Asia the Less, and possessed Coelesyria, where they built both Scythopolis and Hierapolis, which the Syrians call Magog. And that to this Magog Ezekiel had reference, it is very plain; for this city Hierapolis, or Magog, standeth due north from Judea, according to the words of Ezekiel, that from the north quarters those nations should come."

John Mayer (1583—1638), an Anglican priest and biblical exegete, agrees with Nicholas of Lyra, referring to his views of Gog as the Antichrist as the "most generally received" position of his day. Lyra also affirmed that the religion of the "Turks," a term used to refer to Muslims in general, was the religion of the Antichrist.

John Wesley (1703—1755), in his Explanatory Notes on Ezekiel 38 and 39, identified the hoards of Gog and Magog with “the Antichristian forces” who would come from the region of modern day Turkey.

Jonathan Edwards (1703—1758), one of American history’s most renowned intellectuals, philosophers, and theologians viewed modern day Turkey as the nation from which the coming Gog Magog invasion would come forth from: “We do read in Pliny that the city in Syria (the region of ancient Syria included much of modern day Turkey) was called Hierapolis, was by the Syrians called Magog”

C.F. Keil (1807—1888), the renowned German hebraist and commentator, also identified Gog of Magog as the ultimate and final enemy of God’s people before the return of Christ. In his classic Commentary on the Old Testament, Keil states: “...in the destruction of Gog and his gathering of peoples, the last attack of the heathen world-power upon the kingdom of God will be judged and overthrown, so that from that time forth the people of God will no more have to fear a foe who can disturb its peace and its blessedness in the everlasting possession of the inheritance given to it by the Lord. Gog is... depicted as the last foe...”

John Nelson Darby (1800—1882), The British-Irish evangelist and a father of modern Dispensationalism and Futurism, in his Synopsis of the Books of the Bible, he explains that Gog represents the final antichristian forces that God will bring against Israel: “Gog is the end of all the dealings of God with respect to Israel, and that God brings up this haughty power in order to manifest on earth, by a final judgment, His dealings with Israel and with the Gentiles, and to plant His blessing, His sanctuary, and His glory in the midst of Israel.”

C.I. Scofield (1843—1921) an American theologian, minister and author of the Scofield Reference Bible, viewed the oracle of Gog of Magog in Ezekiel 38, 39 as speaking of the Battle of Armageddon, led by Russia and including European, north African and Middle Eastern nations. Scofield, spoke of Ezekiel’s oracle thusly: “[T]hat destruction should fall at the climax of the last mad attempt to exterminate the remnant of Israel in Jerusalem. The whole prophecy belongs to the yet future ‘day of Jehovah’; Isaiah 2:10-22; Revelation 19:11-21 and to the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:14)”

Arthur W. Pink (1886—1952), the English author and biblical expositor, referred to Gog as one of the titles of Antichrist.

E.W. Bullinger (1837–1913) directly associates Ezekiel 38-39 with the War of Armageddon, stating: “Ezek 38 and 39 must be distinguished from Rev. 20. Ezekiel records the war referred to in Rev. 16:14; 17:14; 19:17-21, which takes place before the Millennium; while Rev. 20. takes place after it. This is clear from the fact that Israel’s restoration is mentioned after the destruction of Gog and Magog.”

G.H. Lang (1874–1958), one of the foremost latter plymouth brethren / dispensational biblical scholars of his day, spent much time arguing that Gog and the Antichrist were one and the same. Of Gog, Lang stated that he was: “...the last head of the fourth kingdom of the image of Dan. 2, the little horn of the fourth beast of Dan. 7...”

F.F. Bruce (1910–1990), the celebrated biblical scholar, who greatly contributed to the modern evangelical understanding of the Bible, in the forward to G.H Lang’s above mentioned commentary on Daniel and Ezekiel 38-39, wholeheartedly endorsed Lang’s Middle Eastern interpretation and emphasis. Writing only two years after Israel become a new nation, Bruce commended Lang’s work thusly: “It would at any time be my pleasure to commend this work... [Lang’s] exposition of the prophetic chapters is largely new, forming as original and independent contribution to their study... Mr. Lang’s emphasis on the eastern Mediterranean in prophetic geography loses none of its force in view of the increasing importance of that region today.”

Walther Theodor Zimmerli (1907–1983), the German expositor, in the Hermeneia Commentary series on Ezekiel, identifies the Gog of Magog oracle with the final and ultimate judgment against the enemies of God’s people.

Finis Jennings Dake (1902–1987), an American Pentecostal minister and evangelist known primarily for his writings on Premillennial Dispensationalism, in several of his writings, including the Dake Annotated Reference Bible, refers to Gog as the Antichrist.

Charles Lee Feinberg (1909–1995), a prominent Dispensationalist, Messianic Jewish expositor in his commentary on Ezekiel, The Glory of the Lord, states that: “The armies of chapter 38-39 would appear to be included in the universal confederacies seen in Zechariah 12 and 14.” Feinberg goes on to state that the oracle of Gog of Magog is the same as that which was predicted in Psalm 2:1-3; Isaiah 29:1-8; Joel 2:2:20; 3:9-21; Zechariah 12:1 ff.; 14:2-3)

Robert D. Van Kampen (1938–1999), the author of *The Sign and The Rapture Question Answered*, repeatedly refers to Gog as “Ezekiel’s name for the Antichrist”.

James Montgomery Boise (1938–2000), Reformed theologian, Bible teacher, pastor, in his commentary on Daniel affirmed the prophecy of Ezekiel 38 & 39 as a parallel prophecy to Armageddon as described in Revelation 16 & 19.

Charles Ryrie, (1925–2016) the well known Dispensationalist scholar, in his *Ryrie Study Bible* views Gog and his hordes as one and the same with the Antichrist and his armies: “The consummation of the battle involves birds and beasts eating the flesh of warriors , a scene similar to the description of Armageddon at the end of the Tribulation (39:17-20; Rev. 19:17-18). Also, at the conclusion of the conflict the nations will understand the judging hand of God, and Israel will know that the LORD (YAHWEH) is their God (Ezek. 39:21-22). Perhaps the first thrust will begin just before the middle of the Tribulation, with successive waves of the invasion continuing throughout the last part of that period and building up to Armageddon.”

Dave Hunt, (September 1926 – April 5, 2013) apologist, author, radio commentator, identifies the Gog of Magog Battle with other antichristic prophecies and views it as a reference to the ultimate battle of Armageddon: “Ezekiel 38 and 39 refer to Armageddon and not to some earlier World War III... There is no doubt, from both Zechariah 12 and Revelation 1 and 19, that this personal coming of Yahweh to rescue His people and to destroy Antichrist and his armies takes place at Armageddon. It is significant, then, that similar language concerning the personal presence of God is found in Ezekiel 38 and 39, thus identifying the event described there as Armageddon also” (pp. 414-415, Dave Hunt, *Cup of Trembling*).

Sverre Bøe, the Norwegian theologian and author of the exhaustive and authoritative monograph, *Gog and Magog*, recounts numerous connections between Ezekiel 38-39 and Revelation 19, commonly referred to as “the Battle of Armageddon”.

G.K. Beal, an amillennialist commentator in his voluminous commentary, *The Book of Revelation*, identifies the Gog and Magog invasion of Ezekiel 38-39 and the War of Armageddon in Revelation 19 as one and the same. Unfortunately, Beale also goes so far as to conflate the post-millennial battle as one and as the same as well.

Ralph H. Alexander, a biblical scholar from Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, and the contributing commentator on Ezekiel in the Expositor's Bible Commentary identifies the invaders of Ezekiel 38-39 with the prophecy of Revelation 19 (Battle of Armageddon) and other antichristic prophecies.

Lamar Eugene Cooper, Sr., the Senior Professor of Old Testament and Archeology and Graduate Dean Emeritus at Criswell College and the author of the New American Commentary on Ezekiel, identifies Gog and his hordes with the Antichrist and his hordes and also places them in Asia Minor.

Daniel I. Block, Old Testament scholar and perhaps the world's leading expert on the Book of Ezekiel, in the New International Commentary on Ezekiel, says, "It seems best to interpret Magog as a contraction of an original māt Gūgi, 'land of Gog,' and to see here a reference to the territory of Lydia in western Anatolia [Turkey]."

Michael Heiser, scholar in residence for Logos Bible software, in his popular Bible podcast, although viewing Gog through a more supernatural, or cosmic lens, affirms that Gog and the Antichrist are one and the same.

Conclusion:

The most popular view today among many students and teachers of prophecy is that Gog is a Russian leader whose invasion of Israel is distinct from the invasion of the Antichrist. Having now surveyed a broad range of sources spanning Church history, it is clear that the popular modern view, when weighed against this larger historical backdrop, is a minority view among scholars and is largely a popular novelty.