

Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38–39

By Gary DeMar

I. A Brief History of Interpretation

A. Ezekiel 38–39 has been the centerpiece of end-time speculation for nearly 2000 years.

1. Newspaper exegesis: whoever the bad guy (nation) of the day was, he was called into to serve as the fulfillment of Gog and Magog.
2. “In early Christian terms, Gog and Magog were often identified with the Romans and their emperor. Eusebius [of Caesarea] seems to have been the first church father to suggest this identification. In his view, Gog . . . stands for the Roman Imperium.¹
3. Various Gog and Magog Candidates
 - a. Goths (4th century)
 - b. Goths and Moors (5th century)
 - c. Huns (7th century)
 - d. Islamic Empire (8th century)
 - e. Hungarians (10th century)
 - f. Mongols (14th century)
 - g. Persecution of the Lollards (14th century)
 - h. Turks (16th century)
 - i. Mohammedans and the Papacy (16th century)
 - j. Pope and Spain (16th century)

¹J. Lust, “Gog,” *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, eds. Karel Van Der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. Van Der Horst, 2nd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 375.

- k. Native Americans (17th century)
- l. France (18th century).
- m. Modern-day Russia (20th and 21st centuries)

B. The rise of Russia.

- 1. David L. Cooper (see booklet)
- 2. Hal Lindsey: “The next war will not be with the Arabs, but with Russia” (General Moshe Dyan, 1968).²“Russia is a Gog.”
- 3. Jack Van Impe (see LP)
- 4. Ronald Reagan (40–42, WEOW).

II. What period of history?

- A. A symbolic picture of the attempts made by evil forces to overcome God’s people.
- B. The inter-testamental period, in particular, the events surrounding the atrocities of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (c. 215 BC–164 BC).
- C. Either before, during, or after the tribulation period that is still future but soon to occur.
- D. The end of the 1000 years (Rev. 20:7–8).
 - 1. Babylon
 - 2. Egypt
 - 3. Sodom
 - 4. (The events surrounding the book of Esther.)

III. What interpretive methodology should we follow?

- A. Are the literalists really literal?

²Hal Lindsey, “Russia is a Gog,” *LGPE* (1970), 59.

1. Tim LaHaye: “Jerry [Jenkins] and I have unashamedly taken the position that all prophecy should be interpreted literally whenever possible. We have been guided throughout by the golden rule of interpretation: *When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense. Take every word at its primary, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context clearly indicate otherwise.*³
 2. David L. Cooper: “When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning unless the facts of the immediate context, studied in the light of related passages, and axiomatic and fundamental truths, indicate clearly otherwise.”⁴
 3. “Here is a basic rule of thumb for interpreting the Bible: When the plain sense of Scripture makes good sense, seek no other sense.”⁵
- B. The biblical approach: The golden rule of interpretation is “Scripture interprets Scripture.”
1. Sometimes this might mean literal.
 2. Sometimes it might mean symbolic.
 3. Literal means “according to the literature.”
- IV. A summary of the most popular interpretation: The end-time bad guy is modern-day Russia coupled (now) with the Islamic nations.
- A. Ezekiel 36–37 describes Israel returning to their homeland in unbelief.

³Tim LaHaye, “Introduction,” Hitchcock and Ice, *The Truth Behind Left Behind*, 7.

⁴David L. Cooper, *When Gog’s Armies Meet the Almighty in the Land of Israel: An Exposition of Ezekiel Thirty-Eight and Thirty-Nine*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Biblical Research Society, [1940] 1958), [i].

⁵Rhodes, *Northern Storm Rising*, 20.

1. “For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols” (36:24–29).
 2. Must put a gap between Israel’s return to the time they have a “heart of flesh” (36:26).
 3. So far that gap is 62 years, beginning May 14, 1948 and continuing to today (June 19, 2010).
 4. When Israel returned from captivity from Babylon, they returned repentant. See the books of Ezra and Nehemiah 8:9: “Then Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who taught the people said to all the people, ‘This day is holy to the Lord your God; do not mourn or weep.’ For all the people were weeping when they heard the words of the law.”
 5. Notice the biblical conditions of return from captivity (Deut. 30:1–4).
- B. Israel has not returned from its “world-wide dispersion,” therefore Ezekiel 36–37 can’t be referring to the return from the Babylonian captivity.
1. The nations of that day, those that are “round about” Israel (36:4, 7).
 2. Notice that Edom is mentioned (36:5).
 3. Nothing is said about a “world-wide dispersion” in Ezekiel 36–37.
 4. “All nations” (1 Chron. 14:17; **Jer. 28:11; Ezra 1:2; Neh. 6:16; Ps. 118:10; Acts 2:5; Rom. 16:24–26**).
- C. The prophecy refers to the “latter years” (Ezek. 38:8) and “the latter days” (38:16).

1. In many cases, the Hebrew word often translated “last days” means nothing more than “in future days,” “a later time,” or “in days to come.”
 2. Thomas Ice: “Sometimes Christians read in the Bible about the ‘last days’ or ‘end times,’ and tend to think that all of these phrases, all of the time, refer to the same thing. This is not the case, just as in our own lives there are many endings: there is the end of the work day, the end of the day according to the clock, the end of the week, etc. Just because the word ‘end’ is used does not mean that it always refers to the same time. The word ‘end’ is restricted and precisely defined when it is modified by ‘day,’ ‘week,’ ‘year,’ etc.”⁶
 3. J. A. Thompson: “The phrase *in the latter days* need not be interpreted eschatologically, but merely in the sense of ‘in the future.’”⁷ There are “former days” (Deut. 4:32)—the past—and there are “future days” (4:30)—an expectation of things to come.⁸
 4. Joel Rosenberg: “It’s important to note that the Hebrew term translated as ‘the last days’ can also be translated as . . . ‘in days to come’ (NIV).”⁹
- D. Israel’s enemy comes from the “remote parts of the north” or “far north” (38:6, 15).
1. The “far north” is identified as modern-day Russia.
 2. “Beth-togarmah” (they were horse traders: Ezek. 27:14) is not located anywhere near Russia, and yet it’s described as being located in the “far north.”

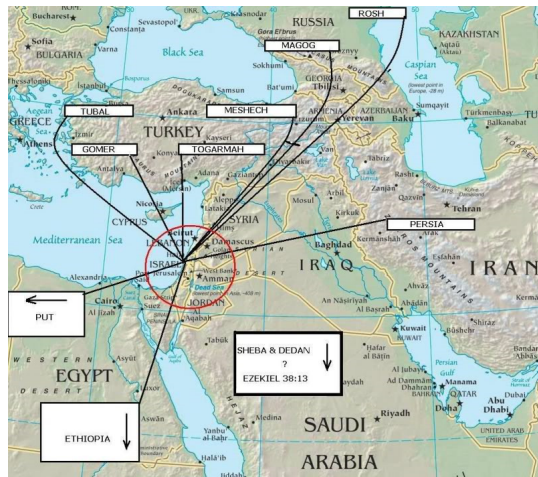
⁶Thomas Ice, “Are We Living in the Biblical ‘Last Days’?,” *National Liberty Journal* (September 2006), 4.

⁷J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 108.

⁸Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1976), 141.

⁹Rosenberg, *Epicenter*, 252.

3. What was considered to be “far north” from Israel, especially in a day of travel by donkey, horse, or foot?



E. Ezekiel 38:2–3 and 39:1 should be translated as “prince of Rosh,” taking *rosh* as a proper name

1. The word *rosh* is a common Hebrew word that means “head” or “chief.”
2. The reading of the text should be “the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.”
3. Charles Ryrie, author of *Dispensationalism Today* and the *Ryrie Study Bible*, writes: “The prince of Rosh is better translated as ‘the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal.’”
4. Daniel I. Block translates Ezekiel 38:3, “[Son of Man], *set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince, chief of Meshech and Tubal.*”¹⁰
5. Here is Block’s explanation: “[*Rosh*] is therefore best understood as a common noun, appositional to and offering a closer definition of [the Hebrew word] *nasi* [translated as ‘prince’]. Accordingly, *the prince, chief of Meshech and Tubal*,

¹⁰Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 25–48* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 432. This would counter arguments made by Thomas Ice in his “Ezekiel 38 & 39 (Part 4),” Pre-Trib Research Center: www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=308

combines Ezekiel’s preferred title for kings with a hierarchical designation, the addition serving to clarify the preceding archaic term.”¹¹

F. The use of the Hebrew word *rosh* as an identifier of modern-day Russia (Ezek 38:2–3; 39:1).

1. In 1964, S. Maxwell Coder wrote, “If you were to take the name Russia and write it in Hebrew characters today, you would have upon the page before you the very Hebrew characters which have appeared in Ezekiel 38:2 ever since the prophecy was written 2500 years ago when there was no such nation, and when the name existed only in a Biblical prophecy.”¹²
2. You don’t have to know Hebrew to see that *rosh* and Russia don’t even look alike. The modern Hebrew spelling of Russia, reading right to left as you do in Hebrew, is רוסייה,¹³ while the spelling of *rosh* is ראש.
3. ראש has a long “ס” sound, while רוסייה has an “oo” sound as in “boot.”
4. The two words only have one letter in common. Reading from right to left, it’s the first letter ר (*resh*).
5. There are two different Hebrew letters for “s” in Hebrew: ס (*samech*) and ש (*sin* or *shin*). The modern-Hebrew spelling of Russia uses ס (*samech*) while *rosh* uses ש (*shin*).

¹¹Block, *Ezekiel*, 2:435

¹²S. Maxwell Coder, “The Future of Russia,” *Focus on Prophecy*, ed. Charles L. Feinberg (Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1964), 82–83.

¹³<http://tinyurl.com/4k6uxp>. A search for “rosh,” as in “Rosh HaShana,” will show that it is spelled ראש. The Hebrew ראש is consistently translated as “chief,” as in Chief of Staff and Chief of Intelligence.

6. In Hebrew, Russia is spelled with five letters while *rosh* has three (the “o” sound in *rosh* is part of the second letter and appears as a dot on top of the letter).

G. The weapons and mode of transportation for the invading armies.

1. “Then those who inhabit the cities of Israel will go out and make fires with the weapons and burn them, both **shields** and **bucklers**, **bows** and **arrows**, **war clubs** and **spears**, and for seven years they will make fires of them” (39:9).
2. “You will come from your place out of the remote parts of the north, you and many peoples with you, all of them **riding on horses**, a great assembly and a mighty army” (38:15).
3. “‘You will be gluttoned at My table with **horses** and **charioteers**, with mighty men and all the men of war,’ declares the Lord GOD” (39:20).
4. How are these descriptions interpreted by modern-day prophecy writers? (see *Why the End of the World is Not in Your Future*, 120–124).

III. If the battle described in Ezekiel 38 and 39 does not refer to modern-day nations that will attack Israel, then when and where in biblical history did this conflict take place?

A. The claim is often made that there is no event in history that matches the details of Ezekiel’s two-chapter prophecy so it is assumed that the planned invasion must still be in our future.

1. Instead of looking to the distant future or finding fulfillment in a historical setting outside the Bible where we are dependent on unreliable secular sources for interpreting hints, James B. Jordan believes that “it is in [the book of] Esther that we see a conspiracy to plunder the Jews, which backfires with the result that the Jews

plundered their enemies. This event is then ceremonially sealed with the institution of the annual Feast of Purim.”¹⁴

2. Ezekiel 38:5–6 tells us that Israel’s enemies come from “Persia, Cush, and . . . from the remote parts of the north,” all within the boundaries of the Persian Empire of Esther’s day.
 - a. From Esther we learn that the Persian Empire “extended from India to Cush, 127 provinces” in all (Esther 8:9). Ethiopia (Cush) and Persia are listed in Esther 1:1, 3 and Ezekiel 38:5: “Persia, Ethiopia and Put with them, all of them with shield and helmet.”
 - b. The other nations were established in the geographical boundaries “from India to Ethiopia” in the “127 provinces” over which Ahasueras ruled (Esther 1:1).
 - c. “In other words, the explicit idea that the Jews were attacked by people from all the provinces of Persia is in both passages,”¹⁵ and the nations listed by Ezekiel were part of the Persian empire of his day.

B. The chief antagonist of the Jews in Esther is Haman, “the son of Hammedatha the Agagite” (Esther 3:1, 10; 8:3, 5; 9:24).¹⁶

1. An Agagite is a descendant of Amalek, one of the persistent enemies of the people of God. In Numbers 24:20 we read, “Amalek was the first of the nations, but his end shall be destruction.”

¹⁴James B. Jordan, *Esther in the Midst of Covenant History* (Niceville, FL: Biblical Horizons, 1995), 5.

¹⁵Jordan, *Esther in the Midst of Covenant History*, 7.

¹⁶In the First Targum to Esther, an Aramaic translation of the Hebrew Bible, the following is found: “The measure of judgment came before the Lord of the whole world and spoke thus: Did not the wicked Haman come down from Susa to Jerusalem in order to hinder the building of the house of thy Sanctuary?” (Lewis Bayles Paton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, (1908) 1916], 194). ^{3:1} בתר פיתגמיא האילין עאלת מדת דינא קדם רבון כל עלמא וכן אמרת הלא המן רשיעא נחית וסליק מן שושן לירושלם לבטלא בנין בית מקדשא

2. The phrase “first of the nations” takes us back to the early chapters of Genesis where we find “Gomer,” “Magog,” “Tubal,” and “Meshech,” and their father Japheth (Gen. 10:2), the main antagonist nations that figure prominently in Ezekiel 38 and 39.
3. Haman and his ten sons are the last Amalekites who appear in the Bible.
4. In Numbers 24:7, the Septuagint (LXX) translates “Agag” as “Gog.”
5. “One late manuscript to Esther 3:1 and 9:24 refers to Haman as a ‘Gogite.’”¹⁷
6. Agag and Gog are very similar in their Hebrew spelling and meaning. *Agagite* means “I will overtop,” while *Gog* means “mountain.”
7. A cursive Hebrew manuscript identifies Haman as “a Gogite.”¹⁸ Paul Haupt sees a relationship between Haman’s descriptions as an Agagite and “the Gogite.”¹⁹ These literary links should not be dismissed.
8. There is another link between Haman the Agagite in Esther and Gog in Ezekiel 38–39. “According to Ezekiel 39:11 and 15, the place where the army of Gog is buried will be known as the Valley of Hamon-Gog, and according to verse 16, the nearby city will become known as Hamonah.”²⁰ The word *hamon* in Ezekiel “is spelled in Hebrew almost exactly like the name Haman. . . . In Hebrew, both words have the same ‘trilateral root’ (*hmn*).”²¹

¹⁷Sverre Bøe, *Gog and Magog: Ezekiel 38–39 As Pre-Text for Revelation 19, 17–21 and 20, 7–10* (Wissunt Zum Neun Testament Ser. II, 135) (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 384. Anton Scholz (1892) comments that “The Book of Esther is a prophetic repetition and further development of Ezekiel’s prophecy concerning Gog.” Quoted in Paton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther*, 56. The point in all these Gog-Agagite references is to show that there are a number of scholars who saw a literary parallel between Ezekiel 38–39 and Esther.

¹⁸Paton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Esther*, 194. “When 93a makes him a Gogite (cf. Ez. 38–39), and L makes him a Macedonian, these are only other ways of expressing the same idea. . . .” (194).

¹⁹Paul Haupt, “Critical Notes on Esther,” *OT and Semitic Studies in Memory of W. R. Harper*, II (Chicago: 1908), 194–204.

²⁰Jordan, *Esther in the Midst of Covenant History*, 7.

²¹Jordan, *Esther in the Midst of Covenant History*, 7. This is quite different from identifying the common Hebrew

9. Haman is the “prince-in-chief” of a multi-national force that he gathers from the 127 provinces with the initial permission of king Ahasuerus to wipe out his mortal enemy—the Jews (Ex. 17:8–16; Num. 24:7; 1 Sam. 15:8; 1 Chron. 4:42–43; Deut. 25:17–19).

- a. Consider these words: “King Ahasuerus promoted Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him and established his authority over *all the princes*²² who were with him” (Esther 3:1; also see 1:3).
- b. Having “authority over all the princes who were with him” makes him a “chief prince.”
- c. In Esther 3:12 we read how Haman is described as the leader of the satraps, governors, and *princes*. The importance of this title identifies the “chief prince” in Ezekiel 38:2–3 and 39:1 as Haman.

C. Ezekiel writes that the forces gathered to fight against Israel are after silver, gold, cattle, and goods (Ezek. 38:12–13).

1. The Jews who had returned to Jerusalem brought silver, gold, goods, and cattle²³ with them (Ezra 1:4–11²⁴; 2:69; 5:14; 6:5; 7:15–16, 18, 22; Neh. 7:71–72), the same items mentioned by Ezekiel.
2. Haman promises to “pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who carry on the king’s business, to put into the king’s treasury” (Esther 3:9; see also 3:11; 4:7; 7:4).

word *rosh* with modern-day Russia since there is only one common letter between *rosh* and Russia (see chapter 4).

²²The Hebrew word *shar* is used for “prince” in Esther, while *naw-see* (Ezek. 38:2–3; 39:1, 18).

²³“Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:4).

²⁴“Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with **silver** and **gold**, with **goods** and **cattle**, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem” (Ezra 1:4).

3. Where did Haman plan to get the silver to pay the king? From the Jews who had previously returned to Israel with these valuable commodities. “And the king said to Haman, ‘The silver is yours, *and the people also*, to do with as you please” (3:11).
4. Haman’s goal was “to seize their possessions as plunder” (Esther 3:13). He believed the Jews would be an easy mark since they had no standing army, and they were in the process of repairing their defenses.

D. Is the “Golden Rule of Interpretation” followed by modern-day prophecy writers when it comes to “**unwalled villages**”? (Ezek. 38:11).

1. “It is interesting to note that during the lifetime of Ezekiel and up until 1900, virtually all of the villages and cities in the Middle East had walls for defense. **Ezekiel had never seen a village or city without defensive walls. Yet, in our day, Israel is a ‘land of unwalled villages’ for the simple reason that modern techniques of warfare (bombs and missiles) make city walls irrelevant for defense. This is one more indication that his prophecy refers to our modern generation.** . . . Ezekiel’s reference to ‘dwell safely’ and ‘without walls . . . neither bars nor gates’ refers precisely to Israel’s current military situation, where she is dwelling safely because of her strong armed defense and where her cities and villages have no walls or defensive bars. The prophet had never seen a city without walls, so he was astonished when he saw, in a vision, Israel dwelling in the future without walls. Ezekiel lived in a time when every city in the world used huge walls for military defense.”¹
2. In Esther we learn that there were Jews who were living in relative peace² in “unwalled towns” (9:19, KJV) when Haman conspired against them. Israel’s antagonists in Ezekiel are said to “go up against the land of unwalled villages” (Ezek.

38:11). The Hebrew word *perazah* is used in Esther 9:19 and Ezekiel 38:11.³

3. Jeffrey is mistaken in his claim that “Ezekiel had never seen a village or city without defensive walls.” They seemed to be quite common outside the main cities.

Nebuchadnezzar is said to have defeated the kingdoms of Kedar and Hazor (Jer.

49:28–32): “They have no gates or bars” (v. 31). Notice how the language is nearly identical to what we read in Ezekiel 38:8–13, demonstrating that Ezekiel, like

Jeremiah, is describing conditions as they existed in their day: “Run away, flee!

Dwell in the depths, O inhabitants of Hazor,” declares the Lord; “For

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has **formed a plan** against you and **devised a**

scheme [Esther 8:3; 9:25] against you. Arise, go up against a nation which is at ease,

which **lives securely**,” declares the Lord. “It has **no gates or bars**; they dwell alone.

And their camels will become **plunder**, and the multitude of their **cattle for booty**. ..”

4. Jeffrey’s contention that Israel today is currently “dwelling safely because of her strong armed defense” is patently untrue. Since 2006, the Israeli government has built more than 435 miles of walls in Israel.⁴

E. The Plunder

1. How do we reconcile the Jews seizing the plunder in Ezekiel (39:10) and “not laying their hands on the plunder” in Esther (9:12, 15–16)?
2. The fact that both passages mention plunder is significant in seeing a parallel between the two accounts. Ezekiel describes one aspect of what was done with the

- plunder. It was taken for a national cause, probably to assist in rebuilding the post-exile temple and the city wall.
3. Esther’s account may indicate that the plunder was not to be taken and used by individuals: “they did not lay *their hands* on the plunder.”
 4. A similar example is found in the instructions in the taking of Ai: “But all the silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron are holy to the LORD; they shall go into the treasury of the LORD” (Joshua 6:19). George Bush (1796–1859), in his commentary on Joshua, writes: “To be employed wholly for the service of the sanctuary, and not to be appropriated in any manner to the use of any private person or priest. The place of deposit was the tabernacle of the congregation, where the spoils of the Midianites were laid up.”

¹Grant R. Jeffrey, *The Next World War: What Prophecy Reveals About Extreme Islam and the West* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2006), 143, 147–148.

²While the returning exiles were hassled by residents who had occupied the land in Israel’s absence, Darius’ decree put an end to hostilities in a dramatic and definitive way: “And I [Darius] issued a decree that any man who violates this edict, a timber shall be drawn from his house and he shall be impaled on it and his house shall be made a refuse heap on account of this. And may the God who has caused His name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who attempts to change it, so as to destroy this house of God in Jerusalem. I, Darius, have issued this decree, let it be carried out with all diligence!” (Ezra 6:11–12).

³It’s unfortunate that the translators of the New American Standard Version translate *perazah* as “rural towns” in Esther 9:19 instead of “unwalled villages” as they do in Ezekiel 38:11.

⁴<http://tinyurl.com/3r7yye> and <http://tinyurl.com/3r7yye>