

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Identification of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel

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1

The identification of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel requires us to examine two passages in Scripture. First, we read in Genesis 10:2, “The sons of Japheth were Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras.” Japheth was the son of Noah (Gen. 10:1), and Magog was the son of Japheth. This genealogy gives us insight into the origin of the person Magog.

Ezekiel 38:2 is the key verse for identifying Gog and Magog. The Bible teaches, “Son of man, set your face against Gog, of the land of Magog, the prince of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal, and prophesy against him.” Ezekiel wrote about a ruler in his time identified as Gog. The prophecy from Scripture is of a future individual, named or titled Gog, who will arise from out of the land that Magog originally settled.

Josephus (d. 420) identified the *Magogites* as *Scythians* who lived north of the Caucasus Mountains by the Caspian Sea.¹ Tom Constable notes:

The land of Magog probably refers to the former domain of the Scythians, who lived in the mountains around the Black and Caspian seas (modern southern Russia). Gog will also have authority over Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. Rosh (lit. “head” or “chief”) has not been identified either by biblical or extrabiblical references.²

Classical Greek writers used the designation of *Moschoi* for the people of *Meshech*. The Assyrians referred to the people of *Meshech* as *Muski*. This people group settled in Armenia where Russia, Iran, and Turkey now come together. Tubal refers to the people that settled in central Turkey. The land of Magog will witness the rise of Gog, who will lead the Northern alliance against Israel.

¹ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987).

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (2003), Ezek. 38:1.

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The Allies of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel

Ezekiel also teaches us about the nations that will be involved as allies in the Battle of Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38:5–6). These include:

- Persia (modern Iran)
- Ethiopia (modern Sudan)
- Put (modern Libya)
- Gomer (probably eastern Turkey)
- Togarmah (Turkey/Syrian border)

2

Different Views on the Timing of the Battle of Gog and Magog

At the Battle of Gog and Magog the Northern alliance will come against Israel. The Western alliance will intervene to protect Israel. There are, however, several different views as to when this battle will take place.

Before the Rapture

The Battle of Gog and Magog is often thought to occur before the Rapture. This position was popularized in the *Left Behind* series by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins.

Yet, the doctrine of the imminency of the Rapture precludes this view. If the Battle of Gog and Magog must occur before the Rapture, then we could determine that the Rapture would not happen today. It is typically suggested by proponents of this viewpoint that the world will not know it is the Battle of Gog and Magog until we look back on it. Therefore, the Rapture is still said to be imminent.

The problem is that the nature and description of the Battle of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38–39 are so specific and all-encompassing that it seems inconceivable that it could take place without it being identified.

After the Rapture and Before the Tribulation

The second view is that the Battle of Gog and Magog will occur after the Rapture and before the official start of the Tribulation. This is a preferable position because:

- It accounts for the transition between the Church Age and Daniel's Seventieth Week.

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- It accounts for the rise in the prominence and notoriety of the Antichrist. He will be seen as a hero for preventing this all-out war from taking place, which would cause Israel to be destroyed.
- It provides a logical reason for the peace treaty of Daniel 9:27.

First Half or Midpoint of Tribulation

The third and fourth views are closely related. Many dispensationalists hold to the third view and believe that this great battle will take place in the first half of the Tribulation. A fourth point of view is that the Battle of Gog and Magog will occur in the middle of the Tribulation. This is the position that J. Dwight Pentecost taught in his book *Things to Come*.

The Word of God presents Israel as experiencing a time of relative peace during the first half of the Tribulation. The seal judgments will take place, but Israel will be under divine protection. Further, the peace treaty with Israel will be honored during the first half of the Tribulation. During this time nations will not be rising up against Israel. Therefore, it seems difficult to imagine such a massive battle taking place at that time.

Second Half of the Tribulation

Another viewpoint is that the Battle of Gog and Magog will occur in the last half of the Tribulation. The second half of the Tribulation should be ruled out since it will be a time of great trouble and difficulty for Israel (Rev. 11–13; Dan. 9:24–27). Ezekiel 38–39 presents Israel as winning the battle and protected by God, but in the second half of the Tribulation Israel will be fleeing the wrath of God and driven out of her land. At that time, the Antichrist will have taken over the Temple. The Battle of Gog and Magog does not seem to fit into the latter part of the Tribulation.

Beginning of the Millennium

Some past dispensationalists placed the timing of the battle at the beginning of the Millennium. This was the position held by Arno Gaebelein. It is difficult to see how this fits into Scripture. The start of the Millennium can be ruled out because of its peaceful nature (Isa. 9:6–7; Mic. 4:3–4). The Millennium will be a time of peace with the Prince of Peace upon the throne. There will not even be any unbelievers at the beginning of the Millennium.

After the Millennium

Some people equate the Battle of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38–39 with the Battle of Gog and Magog after the Millennium in Revelation 20. We recognize that the Millennium itself

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(Rev. 20) is precluded because of the peaceful nature of this time. But the description of the Battle of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38–39 also does not fit the description in Revelation 20:7–10. Namely, Ezekiel describes the battle as preceding the Millennium (Ezek. 40–48), whereas Revelation has the battle following the Millennium (Rev. 20). These must be two different battles.

The Bible uses certain terms metaphorically. Some of the enemies within the historical life of Israel became so profound that they took on an identity of their own. Then, in the later revelation of Scripture, the Lord metaphorically referred to a new person or location by a prior name. Jezebel in Revelation 2:20, and Babylon used throughout Revelation, are representative examples of this. The usage of Gog and Magog in Revelation 20:8 falls into this category.

Chapters 40–48 of Ezekiel are clearly teaching about the Millennium. This broader context of Ezekiel dictates that chapters 38–39 are referring to a time prior to the Millennium, but the precise timing is not directly stated. The imminency of the Rapture contradicts the idea that this battle would take place before the Church Age believers are taken up to be with Christ. This places it into a timeframe of taking place after the Rapture, but before the Second Coming of Christ. It appears to be most congruent with the totality of Scripture to take the Battle of Gog and Magog in Ezekiel 38–39 as occurring just prior to the Tribulation (after the Rapture and before the signing of the peace treaty of Daniel 9:27). This would place this battle during the time of preparation, as seen in figure 14.1.

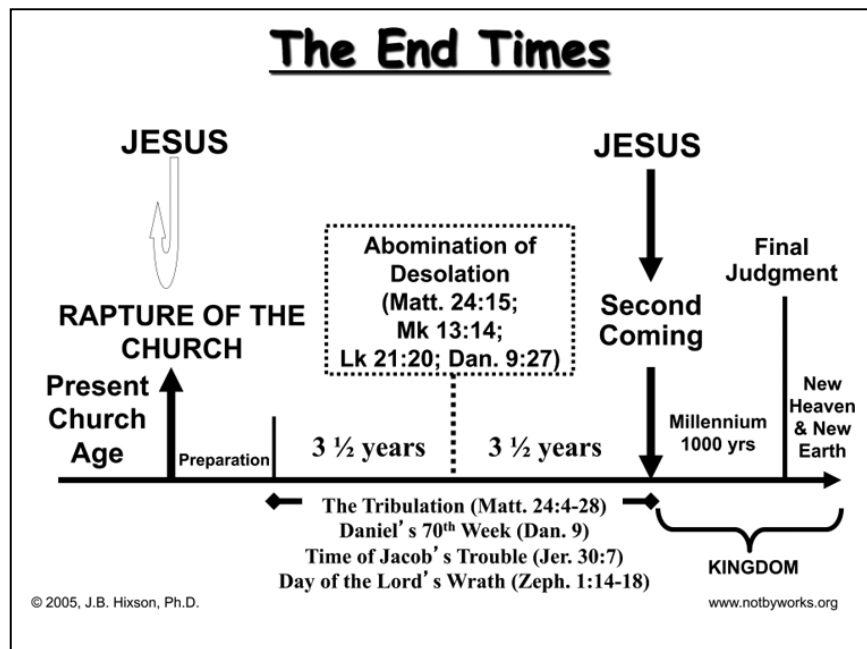


Figure 14.1

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The Battle of Gog and Magog

The Bible teaches us that a Northern alliance will form (Ezek. 38–39). This will include Gog and Magog (modern Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan). According to Ezekiel 38:5–6, nations from the South will join them. The allies from the South will include Persia (modern Iran), Ethiopia (modern Sudan), Put (modern Libya), Gomer (probably eastern Turkey), and Togarmah (Turkey/Syrian border). The Northern alliance of Russia and its Islamic neighbors will invade Israel (Ezek. 38:16). The Western alliance, headed by the Antichrist, will protest (Dan. 11:44), and God will supernaturally intervene to defeat the Northern alliance (Ezek. 38:21–39:7). The Antichrist will take credit for protecting Israel, which will give him notoriety and a stage to take over the world.³

³ Hixson, J. B., & Fontecchio, M. (2013). *What Lies Ahead: A Biblical Overview of the End Times* (pp. 289–293). Brenham, TX: Lucid Books.