

This is our God: he has claimed our hearts, our trust, our devotion:

Come, see the works of the LORD, who brings devastation upon the earth.

He makes wars to cease throughout the earth;

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;

He burns the shields in the fire.

“Be still and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted over the earth.”

The LORD of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress

Prayer;

Today we shall read about the great Battle at the end of time, and that warfare which we faithful ones participate day by day.

We look forward to understanding the place of your ancient people, Israel and your present-day church in this age of warfare. Open our minds to understand and to see your exaltation over all the earth. In Jesus' Name.

A mighty fortress is our God, Martin Luther

1. A mighty Fortress is our God, a Bulwark never failing
Our Helper He amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe
His craft and power are great and armed with cruel and hate
On earth is not his equal.
2. Did we in our own strength confide our striving would be losing
Were not the right Man on our side the Man of God's own choosing
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He
Lord Sabaoth His Name, from age to age, the same
And He must win the battle.
3. That word above all earthly powers, no thanks to them, abideth
The Spirit and the gifts are ours through Him who with us sideth
Let goods and kindred go this mortal life also
The body they may kill, God's truth abideth still
His Kingdom is forever.

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Scriptures:

These texts of Prophecy undergird the teaching on the war against God's people through history and at the end.

- Ezekiel 39,
- Revelation 20.7-11

Prayer with the persecuted Church:

Lord of all authorities and powers, help us to do exactly what you command us; to remember those in prison and those mistreated as if we are mistreated too. As evil, violent forces surround and trouble your people, grant the nations to see your glory in their faithfulness, courage, and your supernatural power working in them against all evil men seek to make them fear.

In our Lord Jesus' Name.

Teaching message: The meaning of Gog and lessons for us.

The current Israel-Iran war has stirred interest in the meaning of Scriptures which speak of Israel surrounded by armies seeking to obliterate her. Then the final demonstration of Yahweh's protection of His people by crushing the armies of Gog.

The mysterious name Gog is used for a power that is ultimately opposed to the Saints. Connecting with Revelation, Gog aligns with the Beast, False Prophet and Antichrist, all ploys of Satan to rid the earth he has hijacked from Yahweh, desperately trying to thwart our Lord's counter-attack through His Church.

Open your Bibles to Ezekiel chapters 38 and 39, and we will see what they point to in future days regarding Israel and even Jerusalem.

First, it speaks of a vast army that will be gathered from peoples and nations under the leadership of a figure called Gog of the land of Magog. These people can be located in regions around Israel, both then and now. Magog may be from North of the Black Sea, though some scholars believe they also have reference to what is now Turkey.

Likewise, Meshech, Tubal and Togarmah also identify with Turkey (formerly Anatolia). Persia is Iran, Cush is in the Upper Nile extending down to Sudan and possibly Ethiopia, and Put is Libya.

Most of these lands comprise people who, since the Arab Mohammedan uprising in the Seventh century, have shown degrees of hostility to the inhabitants of historic Israel, or Palestine as the Romans contemptuously renamed it.

But there are more nations than these. With these now known as Arab countries today, there will be "many nations with you" (38.6). The only reference to Gog in the New Testament describes the armies he leads against the "beloved city" as "in number like the sand on the seashore" Revelation 20.8

This onslaught against the land will take place, Ezekiel says, "after many days" and in "future years" at a time when Israel had been long desolate but had "recovered" with a population that had "been brought from many nations and now all of them live in safety".

At a time when the nation of Israel or the people of the Land are unsuspecting these massed international armies will come "from the far north," totally sure of victory, determined to obliterate Israel (from the River to the Sea).

Gog, Israel and the Lasting Kingdom

Before 1948, when the large migration had been occurring after the terrible holocaust and Israel became a state, these Scriptures would seem to have no application.

Israel was little more than a wasteland, with no semblance of a nation or consolidated population of God's people living there at all.

Today, the surrounding nations mentioned in Ezekiel are hostile against the people and the land, in varying degrees of expression. Indeed, in the Six-Day War most of them allied against the Land of Israel but were defeated, some believe with Divine help in miraculous ways. But Ezekiel speaks of "many armies" joining Gog thus forming a truly global force. At present, there seem to be presages of developing United Nations antipathy towards Israel.

Are we getting closer to a climax of the hate of the now established and prosperous people, to be expressed in an open invasion to finally crush them by a full military invasion?

But Ezekiel declares that in fact, no battle occurs. Instead, Yahweh Himself intervenes with seismic power and utterly destroys the massed invaders.

So vast and clear will this action be as a demonstration of Yahweh's power that all the world will be stunned at the glory of God: *"I will execute judgment on him with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulphur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. And so I will show my greatness and my holiness, and I will make myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord."* 38.23

Yahweh has the right and the power to make His name known. After all he is the Creator of all, the giver of life and all the abundance of the earth.

In 39.7 He declares that He will no longer allow His name *"to be profaned and the nations will know that I am the holy one of Israel."* Profaned means to deny any sacredness, to treat irreverently, to consider as common and ordinary. Much as expressed in the phrase so many use today, 'OMG'.

Remembering that there are the "times of the Gentiles to be fulfilled" in the latter days and the Apostle's warning that "Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved." Romans 11:25,26. There awaits a globally astonishing reminder that Yahweh keeps his promise to this nation of people and goes to inexhaustible lengths to persuade their hearts to acknowledge and see his powerful hand for their sake.

But more than this, Yahweh has unveiled a great plan and action through the work of His Son through His obedient death and resurrection.

All the ancient prophecies for a restored, cleansed, everlasting holy nation and new Israel are presented before us. Isaiah declares this in chapters 60 to 66. Paul describes its fulfilment in Ephesians and the glory of the church, which are the innumerable inhabitants of Mount Zion, the New Jerusalem (Hebrews 12.22-24).

What does this mean? Many wonderful things. It means that the most powerful weapons are not in Gog's hands, not flesh and blood or B-2 bombers

or missiles. No, righteous deeds and obedience to our Lord are the place and way of unconquerable prosperity and power.

The total failure of Gog should be contrasted with the way the real Kingdom of peace and joy will be established.

We will grasp more clearly the superiority of the Name of Christ over all other powers.

As Jesus did with the disciples, so He teaches you and me, if we are faithful, gently but firmly showing us the way of both meekness and unrelenting boldness; of advancing the fruit of the Spirit in our daily lives. Piece by piece, our egos are changed from fear of losing dignity and our place in this world to confident peace of heart. We learn the difference between doing good and just being good. We are moved more by character than charisma. We become aligned to quality over quantity. We learn when to shut up and when to speak up. When to stand alone because of the truth.

True followers of Jesus sense a growing desire, a fearless desire for righteousness, and we pursue it. And above all, like Mary of old, we want just the company of Jesus and sharing thoughts with Him. We are lonely for His company!

There is war now. It is essentially one where the victors are those who surrender to mighty Jesus. The others use human powers, the way of Gog and as intriguing as they are, those powers seek only the eradication of God from the earth and from our lives.

Prayer:

Father, help me distinguish between the warfare that uses worldly weapons from the true warfare that uses yours. Today I will devote myself to putting off the sins that hold me back, that cling so closely, and be ready and active to do the good you show me. Not anxious or disturbed, but taking each day to do good unto you. Thank you for assuring me that your gift to me of the Counsel of the Holy Spirit will take care of all I need to know to please you and keep your company.

In Jesus, my Lord's holy Name.

Jesus shall reign where'er the sun, Isaac Watts:

1. Jesus shall reign where'er the sun does its successive journeys run
His kingdom stretch from shore to shore till moons shall wax and wane no more
2. To him shall endless prayer be made and praises throng to crown his head
His name like sweet perfume shall rise with every morning sacrifice
3. People and realms of every tongue dwell on his love with sweetest song
And infant voices shall proclaim their early blessings on his name
4. Blessings abound where'er he reigns, the prisoner leaps to lose his chains
The weary find eternal rest and all the sons of want are blest.
5. Let every creature rise and bring its grateful honours to our king
Angels descend with songs again and earth repeat the loud amen.

Benediction (a blessing from Apostle Paul)

Now to Him who is able to strengthen you by my gospel and by the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery concealed for ages past but now revealed and made known through the writings of the prophets by the command of the eternal God, in order to lead all nations to the obedience that comes from faith — to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ!

Amen.

This service prepared by Rev Ian Clarkson for HopeNet SA