

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be discussing the great prophetic battles described in the scriptures.

As always, I'm extending an invitation for submissions to be published in The Gospel Notes Newsletter (TGNN). Additionally, if you have a subject or a question that you would like to have covered in a future edition of TGNN, feel free to send me a note and I'll do my best to address it.

The primary criteria for inclusion of articles are these:

1. It should be oriented towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
2. It should use the scriptures as a source of information.
3. It should include the references for any quoted 3rd party sources.
4. It should not be political.

If you have a testimony to share, please send that to me and let me know if you would like it to be included in a future edition of the newsletter. Please keep in mind the four criteria listed above where applicable.

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Isaiah 5

18 Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope,

19 That say, Let him make speed and hasten his work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come, that we may know it!

20 Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!

21 Woe unto the wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

22 Woe unto the mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink,

23 Which justify the wicked for reward and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him!

24 Therefore, as the fire devoureth the stubble and the flame consumeth the chaff, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust because they have cast away the law of the Lord of hosts and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.

25 Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them and hath smitten them; and the hills did tremble, and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this, his anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still.

26 And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth; and behold, they shall come with speed swiftly;

27 None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins be loosed nor the latchet of their shoes be broken,

28 Whose arrows shall be sharp, and all their bows bent, and their horses' hooves shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind; their roaring shall be like a lion.

29 They shall roar like young lions; yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry away safe, and none shall deliver.

30 And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea; and if they look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow; and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.

Joel 2

1 Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand--

2 A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains. A great people and a strong, there hath not been ever the like; neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.

3 A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth; the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.

4 The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run.

5 Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array.

6 Before their face, the people shall be much pained; all faces shall gather blackness.

7 They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march, everyone on his ways; and they shall not break their ranks;
8 Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk, everyone in his path; and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded.
9 They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall; they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief.
10 The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble; the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining;
11 And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army; for his camp is very great; for he is strong that executeth his word; for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible. And who can abide it?

Acts 1

6 When they, therefore, were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?
7 And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons which the Father hath put in his own power.
8 But ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.
9 And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

John 18

35 Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me. What hast thou done?
36 Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world; if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now is my kingdom not from hence.
37 Pilate, therefore, said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.

The modern "Christian" world looks forward to the time that Christ will come in his glory, with some making various claims about what will happen **before** he comes in glory, yet despite those differences of opinion the more fundamentalist "Christians" will make some claim that this will in fact happen. But what are they really looking forward to? I've often heard preachers on the radio speak about his return in the same military style as the Jews of ancient Israel believed that the Messiah would come the first time - as a conquering king, with much emphasis on the "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess," which in fairness the scriptures do tell us will happen. Also in fairness, there are many scriptures that talk about the battles, such as Armageddon in Revelation 16, which reads thus:

Revelation 16

12 And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

13 And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet.

14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, **to gather them to the battle of that great day** of God Almighty.

15 Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.

16 And **he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.**

It seems interesting to me that these preachers are falling into the same interpretation as the Jews of olden times, which depicts the Messiah as a great military commander. One can almost hear the cry, "Take arms! Take arms! Go ye out to the battle and fight for thy God!"

Jesus clearly said "***if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight,***" in the context that his servants would fight to keep him from being taken and crucified, but he further says, "***but now is my kingdom not from hence.***" Using somewhat more modern language, this would seem to mean, "***but now is my kingdom not from here.***" You'll notice that it does not say "from whence," which would mean, "from now on." What did Jesus really mean?

But step back a second and realize he prefaced it by saying, "***if my kingdom were of this world.***" Throughout his ministry he never once claimed that his kingdom was of this world, instead always referring to the kingdom of God, or of the kingdom of heaven. He did mention a kingdom that was "of this world," though not with the term "kingdom" as such, though it seems implied by the use of a royal term:

John 12:31 Now is the judgment of this world; now shall **the prince of this world** be cast out.

John 14:30 Hereafter I will not talk much with you; for **the prince of darkness, who is of this world,** cometh, but hath no power over me; but he hath power over you.

John 16

7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

8 And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:

9 Of sin because they believe not on me;
10 Of righteousness because I go to my Father, and they see me no more;
11 Of judgment because **the prince of this world** is judged.

The implication of this passage is that the "prince of the world" is the "prince of darkness," who is the devil. So in full context, at his trial when prompted by Pilate, Jesus said, "**if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight**," but because his kingdom is not "of this world," his servants would not fight. Jesus taught the disciples time and again that the physical nature of this world was so much less than the spiritual nature of their lives. If they had fought to make Jesus their king and ruler it would have gone against everything he had taught them.

Luke 22

35 And he said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, or shoes, lacked ye anything? And they said, Nothing.

36 Then said he unto them, I say unto you again, He who hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip; and he who hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one.

37 For I say unto you, This that is written must be accomplished in me: And he was reckoned among the transgressors. For the things concerning me have an end.

38 And they said, Lord, behold here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough.

Did Jesus contradict himself? Did he tell them to take swords to fight for the kingdom? Not quite. While Jesus was with them he provided for all their needs. They never hungered, nor were they destitute, but they were protected. When Jesus would leave them they would be lacking those protections. That was also a short-term condition because he had also promised them that they would have the Holy Ghost -

John 16:7 Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.

Before they received the Holy Ghost, but after Jesus departed from them, they were "at risk" in the world because Satan sought to sift them. (Luke 22:31 And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold Satan hath desired you, that he may sift the children of the kingdom as wheat.)

With all of this being said, should Christians be prepared to take up arms to fight for the kingdom of God? Are all of those radio preachers or televangelists right? Is this forthcoming battle one to be fought with bows and arrows and swords, or in modern terms, with firearms and explosives?

It is true that in ancient times Israel went out to fight literal battles with swords and other weapons of war, but it is equally true that they were living under the Old Covenant, and they had prophets that gave instructions from God to go and fight those battles. The kind of lives Israel lived in those days could be rather brutal. Just think of how much the animal

sacrifices under the law of Moses would have been a bloody mess - the blood of thousands of animals being shed next to the tabernacle/temple, followed by the butchering of that meat. The smell of cooking meat and bread would not have been very far from the smell of rotting hides and animal dung, even though those things were taken outside the camp. Yes, it was a big mess on a daily basis, and more so on the special feast days. They fought many battles and lost hundreds of thousands of tribesmen over the course of centuries. Yes, they were very brutal times. But that changed with one sacrifice - the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Such brutality was no longer to be on the recipe for the kingdom of God.

What about those fearsome passages in Isaiah and Joel? That surely sounds like future battles with swords and bows and arrows.

The answer, I believe, really depends on how you read the passages. The kingdom of God is not of this world - it didn't originate here and it isn't maintained by any earthly king. If the battles described in Isaiah 5 and Joel 2 were not to build up a physical kingdom, then they must be related to building up a spiritual kingdom. But if that is the case, will swords, spears, arrows, or other weapons really promote a spiritual kingdom? Perhaps we need to understand these terms differently rather than to take the meaning ascribed to them by the prince of this world. Let us not forget the advice of the prophet Nephi in the Book of Mormon:

2 Nephi 11

2 For behold, Isaiah spake many things which were hard for many of my people to understand; for **they know not concerning the manner of prophesying among the Jews.**

3 For I, Nephi, have not taught them many things concerning the manner of the Jews; for **their works were works of darkness, and their doings were doings of abomination.**

(meaning, Israel had a complicated relationship with God - they were "chosen" but they were also rebellious for much of their history - Ezekiel 2:3 "And he said unto me, Son of man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that hath rebelled against me; they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day.")

Nephi's brother Jacob expanded on this:

Jacob 3

19 Behold, my brethren, he that prophesieth, let him prophesy to the understanding of men; for the Spirit speaketh the truth and lieth not.

20 Wherefore, it speaketh of things as they really are and of things as they really will be; wherefore, these things are manifested unto us plainly for the salvation of our souls.

21 But behold, we are not witnesses alone in these things; for God also spake them unto prophets of old.

22 But behold, **the Jews were a stiff-necked people; and they despised the words of plainness, and killed the prophets, and sought for things that they could not**

understand.

23 Wherefore, because of their blindness, which blindness came by looking beyond the mark, they must needs fall;

24 For **God hath taken away his plainness from them and delivered unto them many things which they cannot understand because they desired it.**

25 And because they desired it, God hath done it, that they may stumble.

Despite the eloquence which Isaiah wrote with, there is still much that is not understood even today because it was written to the people that wanted hard-to-understand things. So as a result there are many things that are hard to understand in his prophecies. The nature of these future battles must be one of those things that is hard to understand. Isaiah even gave us a hint at understanding the nature of these battles, and the apostle Paul seemingly had this same thing in mind when he wrote his letters to the Ephesians and the Thessalonians:

Isaiah 59:17 For he put on **righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation** upon his head; and he put on the **garments of vengeance for clothing and was clad with zeal as a cloak.**

Ephesians 6

10 Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

11 **Put on the whole armor of God,** that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

12 For **we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.**

13 Wherefore, **take unto you the whole armor of God,** that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand.

14 Stand, therefore, having your loins **girt about with truth** and having on **the breastplate of righteousness,**

15 And your feet shod with **the preparation of the gospel of peace--**

16 Above all, taking **the shield of faith,** wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

17 And take **the helmet of salvation** and **the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,**

18 Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints,

1 Thessalonians 5

5 Ye are all the children of light and the children of the day; we are not of the night nor of darkness.

6 Therefore, let us not sleep as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

7 For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

8 But let us, who are of the day, be sober, **putting on the breastplate of faith and love,**

and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

9 For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

10 Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

11 Wherefore, comfort yourselves together and edify one another, even as also ye do.

And also from the epistle to the Hebrews as well as Deuteronomy:

Hebrews 4:12 For **the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword**, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Deuteronomy 4:24 For **the LORD thy God is a consuming fire**, even a jealous God.

If the battles we may be called to fight are not against flesh and blood, but against "***principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places,***" then do you really believe that this spiritual enemy can be defeated by temporal/physical weapons? Paul did not come up with a new thing, but referred once again to Isaiah when he refers to the armor of God using "righteousness as a breastplate."

The armor Paul refers to is not only defensive, but offensive. It protects you of course, but it "addresses" your adversary also.

If you read back through some of those earlier prophecies of Isaiah and Joel using these terms, it changes the nature of these battles a bit.

Isaiah 5

26 And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from far and will hiss unto them from the end of the earth; and behold, they shall come with speed swiftly;

27 None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the girdle of their loins (**the truth**) be loosed nor the latchet of their shoes (**the preparation of the gospel of peace**) be broken,

28 Whose arrows shall be sharp (**the word of God**), and all their bows bent, and their horses' hooves shall be counted like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind; their roaring shall be like a lion.

29 They shall roar like young lions; yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry away safe, and none shall deliver.

30 And in that day they shall roar against them like the roaring of the sea; and if they look unto the land, behold darkness and sorrow; and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof.

In a battle between the righteousness of God and the wickedness of Satan, God will win. This is a victorious battle of God, but what is more is that it does not require us to plan on improving our fighting skills in the flesh. Despite what popular ministers may say, the

battles of God have never truly been physical battles. When Israel was righteous, they prospered, and when they were evil they suffered. Nothing has changed except that the predominant theologies of modern ministers make them a lot of money with book and movie productions. (Think of the "Left Behind" series or other similar productions.)

If the battles described by Isaiah and Joel are more spiritual in nature, as Paul suggests, then do we need to fear them? Is the future a thing to be feared, or is it one to be anticipated with hope? That depends on your perspective: to the wicked it is terrifying, but to the righteous it should be a relief, but not because they get to rejoice in the destruction of their enemies. No, if we take joy in the destruction of our enemies then we probably have the wrong attitude about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. After all, Jesus said this very early in his ministry:

Matthew 5:46 But I say unto you, Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you;

Above all, let us not forget that love makes fear vanish away:

1 John 4:18 There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

Those that promote fear as the message of the scriptures simply do not understand the message of the Gospel. The intent of the Gospel of Christ is not to promote fear, but to make fear evaporate because it makes hope and faith strong by binding you to the promise of eternal life.

Now let us read Joel 2 in terms of what the Gospel gives us.

Joel 2

1 Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain; let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand--

2 A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains. A great people and a strong, there hath not been ever the like; neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.

3 A fire devoureth before them; and behind them a flame burneth; the land is as the garden of Eden before them, and behind them a desolate wilderness; yea, and nothing shall escape them.

4 The appearance of them is as the appearance of horses; and as horsemen, so shall they run.

5 Like the noise of chariots on the tops of mountains shall they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devoureth the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array.

6 Before their face, the people shall be much pained; all faces shall gather blackness.

7 They shall run like mighty men; they shall climb the wall like men of war; and they shall march, everyone on his ways; and they shall not break their ranks;

8 Neither shall one thrust another; they shall walk, everyone in his path; and when they fall upon the sword, they shall not be wounded.

9 They shall run to and fro in the city; they shall run upon the wall; they shall climb up upon the houses; they shall enter in at the windows like a thief.

10 The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble; the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining;

11 And the Lord shall utter his voice before his army; for his camp is very great; for he is strong that executeth his word; for the day of the Lord is great and very terrible. And who can abide it?

These are my thoughts, and you can accept or dismiss them as you see fit, but given the nature of the Gospel, this prophecy is not a message of fear for the righteous, but ***it is a message filled with spiritual meaning.***

To the righteous the day of the Lord is not one of darkness, but it is for the wicked that will not repent. The word of God must go forth by the power of the Spirit (***our God is a consuming fire***) and it must overflow the earth. The "soldiers" in this army of God (see verse 11) are not destroyers, but messengers. Those that will not repent will be destroyed, but this Gospel of the Kingdom must go forth to every nation, kindred, tongue and people. This is not a destroying army, but an "army" of ministers - possibly even angels, who will stop at nothing to make the word known in every house.

If any of this sounds familiar, it should. Jesus prophesied the same to his disciples:

Mark 13 (Inspired Version)

27 And ye also shall hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that ye be not troubled; for all I have told you must come to pass, but the end is not yet.

28 Behold, I have told you before, Wherefore, if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert, go not forth, or, Behold, he is in the secret chambers, believe it not.

29 For as the light of the morning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west, and covereth the whole earth, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.

30 And now I show unto you a parable. Behold, wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together;

31 **So, likewise, shall mine elect be gathered from the four quarters of the earth.**

32 And they shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. Behold, I speak unto you for mine elect's sake.

33 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom;

34 There shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in divers places.

35 And again, because iniquity shall abound, the love of men shall wax cold; but he who shall not be overcome, the same shall be saved.

36 And again, **this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come, or the destruction of the wicked.**

37 And again, shall the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet be

fulfilled.

38 And immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven shall be shaken.

39 Verily, I say unto you, This generation in which these things shall be shown forth shall not pass away till all I have told you shall be fulfilled.

40 Although the days will come that heaven and earth shall pass away, yet my words shall not pass away, but all shall be fulfilled.

41 And as I said before, After the tribulation of those days, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken, then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn;

42 And they shall see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.

43 **And whoso treasureth up my word shall not be deceived.**

44 **For the Son of Man shall come; and he shall send his angels before him with the great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.**

Does Jesus imply anywhere in this passage that his people - those that are righteous - will need to kill their neighbors or sign up for for such a physical army? Far from it - you cannot convert a people to the Gospel of Christ by violence, but by the word of God. This prophecy is about much more than national boundaries. All nations must, after all, in due time become the sovereign government of Christ.

Revelation 11:15 And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever.

This is something to rejoice about, not fear.

If you want to subscribe to the army of God, do so with the whole spiritual armor of God as Paul described, and not as one who is doing so out of feigned words or false promises. How you will fare in that battle depends on which side you take. The Gospel of Christ is one of hope and not of fear, and if you find yourself fearing what may come, then perhaps you need to understand why you are fearing it when you have the entire hope of the Gospel standing before you beckoning for you to rejoice in the salvation of Christ.

James 1

16 Do not err, my beloved brethren.

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

18 Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures.

19 Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to

wrath;

20 For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

21 Wherefore, lay aside all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

22 But be ye doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

23 For if any be a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass;

24 For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

25 But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty and continueth therein--he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work--this man shall be blessed in his deed.

And last but not least:

Matthew 24:11 (Inspired Version) But he that remaineth steadfast and is not overcome, the same shall be saved.