

Prayer as Spiritual Warfare

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By Dave Butts

My favorite Bible story is found in 2 Kings 6. It is the story of the prophet Elisha and his involvement in the war between Israel and the Arameans. The king of the Arameans had declared war against Israel, which wasn't a good thing for Israel with its smaller army. The Aramean king called his generals together and gave them the battle plans for the attack on Israel. The one thing that the king hadn't planned on was that God was listening to the strategy as well. He told Elisha the enemy plans, who then immediately passed the information on to the King of Israel. With his much smaller army, the Israelite king simply moved his army out of the way and avoided defeat.

After a couple of fiascoes like this, the king of the Arameans became suspicious. He called his generals in and demanded to know who was leaking information to the Israelites. His generals explained that it wasn't any of them, but the prophet Elisha who had revealed the plans. They explained to the king that Elisha knew everything that went on, even the things in the king's own bedchamber.

Upset over this information, the king began to make plans to take care of the prophet who was interfering in his attempts at conquest. The king's new strategy was really simple. Go after one man... Elisha! In 2 Kings chapter six, the story continues with Elisha and his young servant in the little village of Dothan. We can imagine what it must have been like that morning. The servant got up first, as was his custom, to go outside and prepare breakfast for his master. As he walked outside he looked in terror about him, as he saw the entire

army of the Arameans surrounding the tiny village. He rushed back in and woke up the prophet. Can't you see Elisha walking outside the hut, muttering and rubbing the sleep from his eyes? The first words out of his mouth were amazing, "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them." His young servant had to be thinking, "Wait a minute. There are just two of us. Prophets must be lousy mathematicians."

Then Elisha began to pray. What is astonishing in his prayer is what he didn't pray. He didn't begin to panic by praying, "Oh Lord, save us from this army." Instead, there was this calm, yet amazing request: "Lord, open this young man's eyes." I believe the implied meaning was, "Lord, open this young man's eyes so that he can see what is already there."

Elisha's prayer was answered immediately as his servant's eyes were opened and he saw there, surrounding the army of the Arameans, the army of heaven—a host of angels, decked out in battle armor, ready to move at God's command.

I'll let you read the conclusion of the story on your own. It has a fascinating finish. The point of the story for our purposes is that Elisha did not ask God to send angels. With his prophet's discernment he saw or sensed their presence. His prayer was for his young servant, that he too, would be able to know of the protective presence of God's angels on their behalf.

The Bible teaches, from beginning to end, of the existence of the invisible world, the world of the spirit. A world of angels and demons, yet a world that we touch daily as those who have been given not merely a body, but a spirit. This invisible world is difficult to believe in for many of us today. We tend to focus on that which our senses tell us is real. Things we can touch, taste, smell, hear, or see are real to us. An invisible world of the spirit seems a bit unreal or mystical.

One of the things I love about the way God's Word presents the things of the spirit, is the way it stays away from the mystical or unreal. It presents the unseen world as simply a matter-of-fact. There are things that are seen; there are things that are unseen. Both are real. One is not more real than the other. The invisible world is not a matter of myth but of solid, well-grounded reality.

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Jesus had a firm grasp of this reality. He was aware of and interacted with this invisible world on a regular basis. After His baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days of prayer and fasting. During this time He encountered the Devil and was faced with a time of temptation. The battle is not presented with a flourish as if to say, "This was a unique, once-for-all battle reserved only for the Son of God." Instead, it almost seems as though it is a model of what may happen to any believer who makes a decision to follow at all costs, the direction of God. At any rate, the battle in the wilderness was not waged with miraculous signs, but with a clear-headed use of the Word of God to counter the suggestions of the Enemy.

As Jesus moved through His years of ministry in His earthly body, He encountered the invisible realm a number of times. There was the time He was preparing to go to Jerusalem and Peter spoke up against the trip. Jesus turned to him, and we can almost see Him pointing His finger in Peter's direction as He said, "Get behind Me Satan."

How unnerving that must have been for Simon Peter! I don't

believe Jesus was calling Peter, "Satan," but rather was responding to Satan himself. Jesus understood how Satan could put words into the mouths of others, like Peter, and simply went to the root of the problem with His rebuke. By the way, if Satan could put his thoughts into the mind of the Apostle Peter, do you suppose he can do the same to us? I'm convinced that one of the major reasons for the many commands given in Scriptures regarding watching what we say, is the possibility that our words, unchecked, may contain the thoughts of the Enemy.

There is another encounter with the unseen world that gives great insight into Jesus' beliefs concerning the role of the Enemy in human affairs. It concerned a healing of a woman who had experienced a crippling for 18 years. She was so bent over that she couldn't stand up straight. Jesus healed her on the Sabbath. In response to His critics, He said, "Should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"

Jesus believed and taught that, at least some illness can be caused by the Enemy. He did not teach that all illness is from Satan, but that some may find its source in the spirit world.

Have you ever noticed, as you read the Gospels, how many times demons manifest themselves in the midst of Jesus' times of teaching? Jesus gave us a great model for dealing with the demonic. He interrupted His teaching just long enough to get rid of the distraction, then turned immediately back to His teaching. His focus was not on the kingdom of darkness, but on God's Kingdom. Jesus did not have a deliverance ministry, in the sense that He went out looking for demons to cast out of people. He went about proclaiming the Kingdom of Heaven. When a demon had the audacity to interrupt, Jesus dealt decisively with it.

The Apostle Paul continued the attitude of his Master toward

the invisible world. He clearly saw Satan as a real, created being, who was scheming against God and those who followed the ways of God. In 2 Corinthians 2:10-11, Paul spoke of the importance of forgiveness, "in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes." Later in 2 Corinthians he spoke of the god of this age (a clear reference to Satan) who is blinding the minds of unbelievers. In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul warned us that in later times (ours?) some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

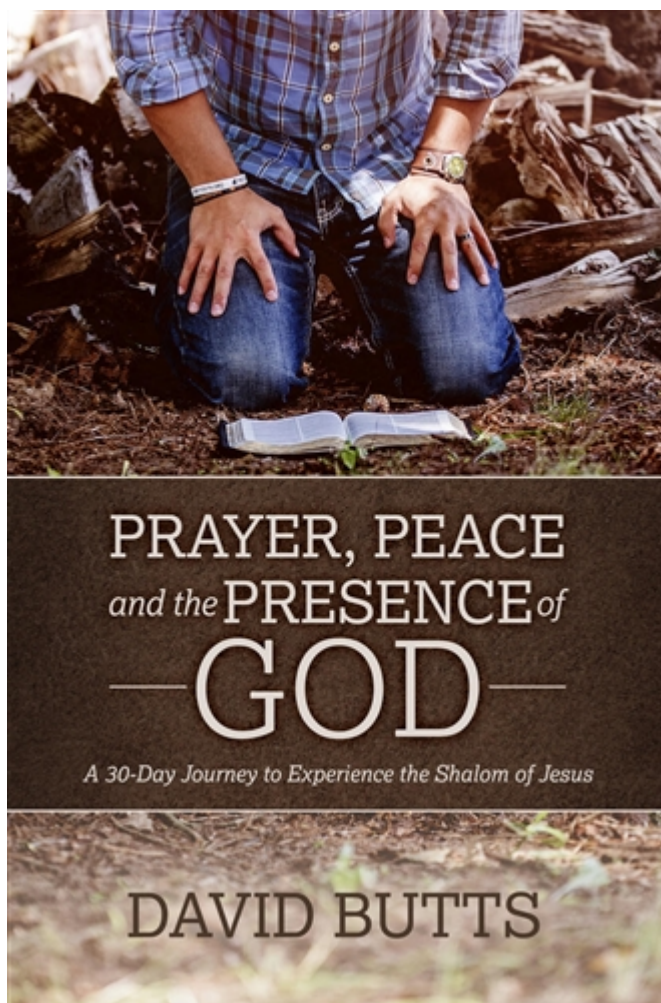
It is Paul who began to develop a military terminology for this spiritual conflict. He referred to Christians as soldiers. He told us that we do not wage war as this world does, but rather we use spiritual weapons. Then in Ephesians 6:10-18, he gave us this great treatise on spiritual warfare with special emphasis on putting on the armor of God.

Not to be left out, the Apostle Peter added his teaching concerning the battle in 1 Peter 5:8-9: "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him." In his second letter, he wrote of angels who sinned, whom God sent to hell to be held for judgment (2 Peter 2:4). In his short letter, Jude also spoke of these fallen angels, and gave us the amazing story of how the archangel Michael got into a dispute with the devil over the body of Moses (Jude 9).

It's obvious the New Testament authors took spiritual warfare seriously. We ignore it to our detriment and danger. Certainly some may go too far in their practice of this doctrine. We often hear reference to some Christian teacher who sees a demon behind every bush. I doubt demons are much interested in bushes, but the point is well taken. If we are not careful, we can end up focusing more on the devil than Jesus. But much of the Church in the last century has taken the opposite tactic of simply ignoring or denying the devil.

There is however, a growing awareness today in the Church that our battle is real and against that ages-old Enemy whom the saints have always faced. The good news of the Bible is that our victory is sure and is based on the victory of Jesus over the enemy at the Cross and the empty tomb. Our job in prayer is to walk in that victory, putting on the armor of God, and watchfully praying for God's Kingdom to triumph in our day.

Dave Butts (1953-2022) was the co-founder and president of Harvest Prayer Ministries. The content of this article is expanded upon in his book, [The Devil Goes to Church](#).



PRAYER, PEACE, and the PRESENCE of GOD by David Butts

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