

Spiritual Warfare



through

Intercession

A series of Bible studies on the importance of Intercession
as part of the Spiritual Warfare to which
Christians are called to engage

Brian Caughley

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Intercession

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SEVEN GREAT PRAYERS IN THE BIBLE

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4)

The Great High Priest's Prayer (John 17:1-26)

The Sinner's Prayer (Psalm 51:1-19)

The Worshipper's Prayer (Psalm 150; Revelation 4:8-11; and 5:9-14)

The Pastor's Prayer (Ephesians 1:15-23)

The King's Prayer (2 Chronicles 6:12-42)

The Intercessor's Prayer (Ezra 9:5-15; Nehemiah 9:6-37; Daniel 9:3-19)

Charles Spurgeon:

*“We should pray when we are in a praying mood,
for it would be sinful to neglect so fair an opportunity.*

*We should pray when we are not in a praying mood,
for it would be dangerous to remain in so unhealthy a condition.”*

1 What is Intercession?

The word “intercede” comes from two Latin words: “inter” (meaning between) and “cedere” (meaning to go). To intercede thus means to go between, to mediate, to intervene. Isaiah 59:15-16 is an example of this: “The Lord saw it [all the evil in the nation] and it displeased Him that there was no justice. He saw that there was no one, and was appalled that there was no one to intervene, so His own arm brought Him victory ...”

Intercession involves three people – the intercessor and two others. The ministry of the intercessor is to plead with one person on behalf of the other. Intercession is a meeting between, or coming between, two parties – the intercessor (mediator) standing in the middle and bringing the two parties together.

In the Bible, Jesus, our supreme example, is spoken of as our Great High Priest (Heb. 4:14), our Mediator (1 Tim. 2:5), the One Who “always lives to make intercession for us” (Heb. 7:25). In these roles Jesus stands between God the Father and us, pleading our case with the Father, on our behalf.

Standing in the gap

An intercessor is one who “stands in the gap” (Ezek. 22:30). There are two main gaps in which the intercessor may have to stand:

1. **The gap between God and man** – praying to God on behalf of another person. The following Scriptures give us some examples of this.

GOD	INTERCESSOR	PEOPLE
Genesis 18:17-33	Abraham	Sodom & Gomorrah
Exodus 32:30-32 Ps. 106:23	Moses	Israel
Isaiah 53:12	Jesus	Sinners
John 17; Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25	Jesus	Christians
Romans 8:26-27	Holy Spirit	Christians (saints)
1 Timothy 2:1-2	Christians	Everyone

In this role, the intercessor is coming to God to ask for, pray for, petition and entreat God for His blessing and favour, on behalf of some other person. In standing between God and people, the intercessor acts as a prophet (representing God to man) and a priest (representing man to God).

The parable in Luke 11:5-13 shows the intercessor as a person who links two friends – one with a need and the other who can supply that need.

2. **The gap between Satan and man** – resisting the devil on behalf of another person.

SATAN	INTERCESSOR	PEOPLE
Exodus 17:8-13	Moses, Aaron, Hur	Israel
Daniel 10:12-21	Michael	Daniel
Zechariah 3:1-2	The Lord	Joshua
Luke 13:10-17	Jesus	Woman with an infirmity
Luke 22:31-32	Jesus	Peter
Jude 9	Michael	Moses

In this role, the intercessor is involved in spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness on behalf of some other person. In standing between Satan and man, the intercessor is acting as a king, ruling and reigning with Christ over the powers of darkness, as God imparts His authority and power to do so.

The armour of God, mentioned in Ephesians 6:10-20, is for the purpose of engaging in spiritual warfare, including this second aspect of the role of the intercessor.

However, it is important to note that only this second aspect involves spiritual warfare. Coming to God for a person's need is not warfare, unless there is some Satanic influence involved. Nevertheless, in interceding between God and people, perseverance may still be required (e.g., Gen. 32:24-30 where Jacob wrestled with God until he blessed him. See Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-7).

Praying for and against

Intercession may involve prayer against evil people (Rom. 11:2, cf. 1 Kings 19:9-18), or it may involve not interceding for evil people (Jer. 7:16). More often, however, it involves a positive praying for the good of people, recognising that the ultimate good for a person may well involve painful surgery first. In other words, in praying over situations where evil is prevalent, it may be necessary for the person or people involved to go through a real crisis before they come to a place of "Godly sorrow that leads to repentance" (2 Cor. 7:10), cleansing, healing and deliverance. Such intercession will involve both spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness involved, and intercession for God's deliverance, forgiveness and blessing.

Our ultimate desire, like that of God Himself, must always be that every person will be brought to repentance, forgiveness, salvation and deliverance (2 Pet. 3:9).

Intercession and supplication

In supplication, we may pray for our own needs. This is not intercession.

In supplication we may pray **with** a person for their needs – that is, two people coming together to God. However intercession is one person coming to God **on behalf of** another – in some cases this will involve interceding for a person who cannot or will not pray for themselves (e.g., the unsaved, people with doubts and unbelief, the ignorant, the demon possessed, those who are bound, etc.)

Intercession is not the same as praise. It is more than just "ordinary praying" or hoping. It is not meditation. It is not praying for ourselves. It is persistent prayer, often involving warfare in the spiritual realm, until victory is secured or assured.

To intercede, in one sense we need to identify with the person and their need, project ourselves into their circumstances (feel as they feel) and then pray as we would for ourselves if we were in that situation. However, in another sense, intercessors can be more objective in their prayers and less bound by wrong feelings (unbelief, depression, despair, anxiety, bitterness, etc.) than the person for whom they are praying. See Romans 12:15; Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:14-16; 13:3.

Levels of intercession

The ministry of intercession. Some people are specially called and gifted by God for the ministry of intercession. For these people their main ministry will involve interceding for

individuals, situations, cities and nation. These people are usually not well known, for most of their intercession is not public but private. Their ministry of intercession may involve prolonged periods of fasting, seeking God and waiting on Him, often in solitude rather than in prayer meetings. They are people who get to know God and His ways, and are able to intercede “at all times in the Spirit” as God reveals how to pray according to His will.

Intercession for special needs. Most Christians do not have the ministry of intercession as described above. However, all Christians will, at various times, be called to special times of intercession for important needs and situations. Such intercession will often be accompanied by fasting, as the Lord leads. Thus all Christians are called to be intercessors, although not all will have this as their prime calling, function or ministry in the sense of devoting most of their Christian service to it.

Daily intercession. To a lesser degree all Christians will, almost every day, be involved in some sort of intercession as part of their daily prayer life. This may not take up much time each day and may not be intercession in depth, but is nevertheless prayer on behalf of other people, for their needs.

Why intercede?

1. God has told us to pray (1 Thess. 5:17; 1 Tim. 2:1-3) and is even amazed when He can find no-one to pray! (Is. 59:16)
2. We do not have because we do not ask (James 4:2). There are some things that do not happen and some things we do not receive simply because we do not ask. Intercession releases God’s power to work in a situation. Without God we cannot; without us God will not!
3. Through intercession we become co-workers with Christ in His ministry of intercession, and, as He leads us, sometimes God will use us to help answer our own prayers.

Why do we not intercede more?

1. We are too busy; we cannot be bothered; or it does not have a very high priority in our lives. Martin Luther has been quoted as saying “I have so much to do today that I must spend **more** time [not less!] in prayer”.
2. We are not really convinced that intercession is worth the effort – we either lack faith, or do not see many answers to our prayers (often because we are not specific enough in what we pray for). We think we can do it alone and that we do not really need to seek God’s help.
3. Satanic distractions – the devil will do all he can to stop us from praying. He can give us a thousand and one excuses why we cannot pray now. He may get us so busy in activity (good activity, of course!), or cause interruptions, tiredness, things to side-track us, etc.
4. Lack of perseverance – the battle seems too long, or too strong, and we give up.

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways is an intercessor like a solicitor or a lawyer?
2. How do intercession and supplication differ? What are the similarities between them?
3. In intercession a person exercises their ministry as a prophet, priest and king. How?

4. Since not all intercession involves spiritual warfare, how do we know when it does (that is, how do we know when we have to stand in the gap between Satan and man?)
5. Intercessors do not hate people or generally pray against them, but they do pray against all evil and evil powers. How can we ensure that we do this?
6. Four reasons are given in the study as to why we do not intercede more. What are the answers to each of these four problems?

2 The Church – The Army of Christ

One of the types or illustrations of the Church that we find in the Bible is the Church portrayed as God's army in a hostile and enemy world.

The following passages of Scripture all use this metaphor and illustrate various truths concerning the spiritual warfare in which we, as Christians, all find ourselves involved.

Matthew 16:18-19

The Church is to exercise the power and authority God gives it, so that it will attack and destroy the gates of hell, and whatever it binds on earth will be bound in Heaven and whatever it looses on earth will be loosed in Heaven.

Thus the Church cannot remain apathetic; it must wake up and use its God-given power to destroy the strongholds of the enemy.

Luke 14:31-32

Before we, as individuals or as a group, prepare for spiritual warfare, we must be absolutely convinced in our own minds that we will be victorious over the enemy. There is no room for fear (2 Tim. 1:7) or doubts (Jam. 1:6-8). If we are fearful or doubting, we had better not get involved (cf. Gideon's men in Judges 7:2-3). But if, like David, we are certain that God is with us, in all His power, and that victory is sure, then we have taken the first step in preparing for battle (1 Sam. 17:26-47).

In these studies we shall be looking first at God's army, then at the enemy and his army. Thus we shall learn both enemy strategy and how to overcome him in the power of the Holy Spirit.

2 Corinthians 10:3-6

While we shall use an ordinary army as an illustration of spiritual truths, we are, of course, talking about **spiritual** warfare, not physical warfare. Therefore, while there are some similarities and parallels, there are also some major differences and contrasts with worldly warfare. For example, our weapons are spiritual, not physical (cf. Matt. 26:47-53; Luke 22:38, 47-51). Our enemies are not people – they are evil spiritual rulers and authorities ("principalities and powers"), part of the kingdom of darkness and of Satan.

Colossians 2:13-15

On the cross Jesus disarmed the evil principalities and powers, made a public example of them, and triumphed over them. Any power or authority which the devil exercises today is usurped, and he exercises it by permission, not by right. The devil will always go as far as we allow him – he cannot go further, and he will not take less! "Submit yourselves to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you" (Jam. 4:7). Because Jesus won the victory, it is

ours. Therefore let us not permit the devil to take what does not belong to him. When we say “This far and no further”, that is as far as he can come. The Church, to which Christ has given both authority and power, thus determines the extent to which the devil is free to work in the world. The devil will endeavour to deceive, lie, trick, usurp or steal our inheritance; do not be deceived!

The devil is a liar, a murderer, a thief, a deceiver and an accuser (John 8:44; 10:10; Rev. 12:9-10), so beware! Do not be afraid of him; do not listen to him; do not be deceived by him; do not allow him to take from you the victories you have in Christ, won through His triumphant death on the cross, His victorious resurrection and His glorious ascension.

Ephesians 6:10-20

For spiritual warfare we need spiritual weapons – the armour of God. One thing is certain: we will never stand strong in our own strength, with our own weapons, or our own wisdom. Only the weapons God supplies will bring victory (cf. 1 Sam. 17:38-40, 45).

The four defensive weapons are: **Truth, Righteousness, Faith, Salvation**. The three weapons of attack are: **The Gospel, The Word of God, Prayer in the Spirit**. (Note: the shoes are for advancing, not fleeing!)

The assurance of our salvation, our faith in God, our righteousness in Christ, and the truth, should be able to withstand every attack of the enemy. Conversely, the preaching of the Gospel, the use of God’s Word (cf. Matt. 4:4, 7, 10), and Holy Spirit inspired intercession, will destroy the gates of hell.

Thus our principal attacks on the kingdom of darkness will be by means of:

1. Intercession
2. Evangelism
3. Preaching the Word of God
4. Deliverance (“binding and loosing”, which are done through prayer and the use of God’s Word)
5. Any other “works” such as a public stand for righteousness, etc., (cf. Matt. 5:13-16). These must, of course, be backed up by prayer, and teaching the principles of the Bible.

Revelation 12:7-17 and 19:11-21

One thing of which we can be absolutely certain is that if we are on God’s side, we are on the side of victory! The enemy has been, and will continue to be, overthrown. Victory belongs to the Lord our God, and through the Blood of the Lamb and the word of our testimony (the words we confess with our lips) we, today, can overcome the enemy.

On our side is the King of kings and Lord of lords, together with the armies of Heaven. This is why there is no place for fear or doubts – if we really know our God then we should go into battle confident of victory through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Old Testament types

In the Old Testament we read of many battles involving warfare on the physical level, as well as spiritually. Even in these physical battles there are spiritual lessons we can learn, and we shall look at some of these later on (e.g., 2 Chronicles 20).

In Ezekiel’s vision of the valley full of dry bones (37:1-10), when the bones finally came together and received the breath of life, “they stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army”.

Joel 3:9-10 says “Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare war, stir up the mighty men. Let all the men of war draw near ... Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say ‘I am a warrior!’.”

QUESTIONS

1. If Satan was defeated on the cross, why is he still so active in the world?
2. How can a Christian overcome doubts and fear, when facing spiritual warfare?
3. Why is the Church not having a greater effect on the world today?
4. If victory is rightfully ours, why do so many Christians often seem to be living in defeat?
5. How can we ensure, when we are praying against evil rulers and authorities, that we do not develop a hate for certain people involved in evil practices?
6. In a practical way, how do we use the weapons of our warfare?

3 The Lord and His Army

Unless we are utterly convinced of the supreme power and authority which our Lord has over every other power and authority in the universe, then we are not ready for spiritual warfare.

The Lord, our God and King

In the Scriptures, God is referred to as:

1. **The Lord of Hosts** (1 Sam. 17:41-47)
2. **The Lord**: “At the Name of Jesus, every knee shall bow, in Heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord” (Phil. 2:9-11)
3. **The King of kings and Lord of lords** (Rev. 19:11-16)

In the Old Testament, God is described by seven names which give us great confidence as we look to Him as our Captain and King. Jehovah is our: Provider, Helper, Banner, Peace, Righteousness, Sanctifier and Shepherd. At all times *Jehovah Shammah* (“the Lord is there”!) He has said “I will never fail you nor forsake you”; hence we can confidently say “The Lord is my helper, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me?” (Heb. 13:5-6). See also Hebrews 4:14-16.

Thus we can go into battle with confidence, knowing that with Him we will win. Victory is certain! (Rom. 8:31-39)

God is a God of war!

Often we like to think of God as a God of love – and that is true. But He is also a God of war! We may sing “Gentle Jesus, meek and mild”, and in one sense that is also true. But this is only part of His character. God is also a God of wrath and judgement – a terrible and awful God. Perhaps we do not like to think of God in this way (it is not “nice”), but we must have a true concept of God, rather than a sentimental, one-sided picture of Him.

Lest we think that God, as a God of war, is only an Old Testament concept, and that since Christ came we only see Him as a God of love – read the book of Revelation! Many of its

chapters show God as a God of wrath and judgement, angry at the sins of wicked people and evil spiritual beings – and much of this is still to come in the future!

Read, for example, Exodus 15:1-12 (“the Lord is a man of war”, v.3) and Revelation 19:17 – 20:3; 20:9-10. Often we have a very shallow concept of the Lord and all His glory, might, holiness and majesty. The Lord is out to destroy His enemies – not primarily men and women, but evil powers that influence and corrupt them.

In this battle God is looking for warriors who will fight with Him.

God has a work for us to do – part of it is the work of building and planting, but before that we have to “pluck up, break down, destroy and overthrow” all evil. We have to prepare the ground for the sowing and the building (Jer. 1:9-10). Are we ready for war?

The Lord’s Army

The Lord’s army comprises:

1. **Jesus**, the Commander of the army of the Lord of Hosts (Jos. 5:13-15). The Lord is also our protector in the time of battle (Ps. 144:1-2)
2. **Two thirds of the angels**, who are on our side (cf. Rev. 12:7-12)
3. **All born again Christians**. To us He has given authority and power over all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:17-19). We are to rule and reign with Him in Heavenly places (Eph. 2:4-7)

Ruling and reigning with Christ

After creating Man, God’s first command was that he “have dominion ... over all the earth ... fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion” (Gen. 1:26-31). As sons of God we thus have authority over all God’s creation. In fact one day we will even judge angels! (1 Cor. 6:3)

We are to rule and reign with Christ over the nations of the earth (Ps. 2:8; 33:10; 47:3; 110:2-3; 115:16; Matt. 28:18; Rev. 2:26). We are here, not to read history, but to make it!

The ministry of God’s angels

Here we are referring to God’s angels, the Heavenly host of God’s messengers (*angelos* = messenger or agent), the perfect servants of God who carry out His commands and minister to the saints (Heb. 1:13-14).

Angels are mentioned about 300 times in the Bible, and although we are not told exactly how many there are, Revelation 5:11 indicates that there are several hundred million. (A myriad is 10,000 and so “myriads of myriads” is hundreds of millions – 10,000 times 10,000). Also, Jesus could have called on more than 12 legions of angels (72,000 angels) to save Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, had He wished to do so (Matt. 26:53).

The aspects of the ministries of angels that we are concerned with here, are:

1. Angels are part of God’s army (Gen. 32:1-2)
2. Angels protect the saints (Ps. 34:7; 91:11-12; Dan. 6:22; 2 Kings 6:14-17)

3. Angels fight for us in the spiritual warfare of intercession (Dan. ch. 8-10)
4. Angels deliver us in times of trouble (Acts 12:5-11)
5. Angels execute God's judgement on sin and on His enemies (Ex. 12:21-30; cf. Heb. 11:28; 2 Kings 19:35; Matt. 13:41-42).

Note that there are various "orders" of angels, from Michael the archangel, to Gabriel one of God's chief angels, to other angels, the seraphim, cherubim, the living creatures, etc.

For further teaching on the ministry of angels, see Billy Graham's book *"Angels: God's Secret Agents"*

QUESTIONS

1. Why is God called a "man of war" (Ex. 15:3)?
2. What does it mean to rule and reign with Christ in the Heavens? (Eph. 2:4-7)
3. In what ways is God a "terrible and awful God"? Has the Church today over-emphasized His love and forgiveness, at the expense of His holiness, justice and wrath?
4. Who are God's enemies?
5. In what ways is the Church really ruling and reigning with Christ today, and in what ways is it not?
6. How do angels help us in: (a) our daily lives? (b) spiritual warfare?

4 Satan And His Army

A fundamental principle of warfare is to know your enemy – his strengths, weaknesses, tactics, etc., and while we do not want to over-emphasize Satan and his hosts of evil, nevertheless ignorance of them will cause us to be defeated at times when we could have been victorious.

In the last study we looked at "The Lord and His Army" and saw, in particular, that the Lord's army comprises:

1. Jesus, Commander of the army of the Lord of Hosts
2. Two thirds of the angels
3. All born-again Christians

In contrast, we now look at the enemy.

Satan's army

1. **Satan**, the "god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4), the "ruler of this world" (John 12:31), and the "prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2) is the enemy commander. In Revelation 12:7-12 he is referred to as the great dragon, that ancient serpent, the devil, Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, and the accuser of our brethren. Note that while Satan is called a prince, he is never called a king. Also, there is only one being called Satan (his name means "Adversary"), although there are many devils, demons and evil spirits.
2. **One third of the angels**, referred to as the fallen angels, demons or devils (Rev. 12. Note that the term "stars" is used to refer to angels).

3. **The world** – all non-Christians (1 John 5:19), children of the devil (John 8:44), including evil “principalities and powers, the world rulers of this present darkness, and spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12).

Colossians 1:16 refers to “thrones (kingdoms), dominions (nations), principalities (rulers), authorities (over cities)”. Ephesians 6:12 speaks of “principalities (rulers), powers (authorities), world rulers (international leaders of authority), spiritual hosts of wickedness (demons, devils, evil spirits)”.

Compare this with the world scene, in which the United Kingdom has a throne and is ruled over by a king or queen; within that kingdom there are dominions (e.g., New Zealand), principalities (regions ruled over by princes, e.g., Wales and the Prince of Wales), within the nations there are subordinate authorities (Governor General, Prime Minister, Cabinet, Members of Parliament, Mayors, Councillors, police, judges, etc). In the spirit world there is also a hierarchy over kingdoms (e.g., the kingdom of Persia, Dan. 10:13), nations (e.g., king of Assyria or Babylon, Is. 14:4-15), principalities (e.g., prince of Greece, Dan. 10:20), cities (e.g., king of Tyre, Ezek. 28:11-19), etc.

The origin of Satan

Not much is said in the Bible about the origin of Satan, although Ezekiel 28:11-19; Isaiah 14:12-15; Luke 10:18; Revelation 12:7-12 seem to indicate that he was a leader of God’s created angels who, through pride, rebelled against God and tried to make himself equal with God. As a result he was cast out of Heaven onto the earth, and took one third of the angels (who also rebelled against God) with him. Thus he appeared on earth to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and tempted them also to “become like God” (Gen. 3:5).

Few Christians would have a direct confrontation with Satan himself, but we are all attacked and tempted by devils (demons) who are Satan’s followers and servants.

Satan’s nature

1. **A roaring lion** (1 Pet. 5:8-9). When the enemy attacks as a roaring lion he attacks in an open, undisguised manner; it is obvious to every Christian that this is a Satanic attack. He will try to cause us to sin, to fear, and to intimidate us, etc.
2. **A wolf in sheep’s clothing** (Matt. 7:15-16). In this case he comes with cunning disguise, but by his fruits you will know him especially as his aims are to steal, to kill and to destroy all that which is good (John 10:10).
3. **An angel of light** (2 Cor. 11:13-15). This is a form of deception which requires real discernment to reveal his true identity.

Satan’s weakness

Satan is a fallen angel. He rebelled against God and was cast out of Heaven. While he usurps authority in every way he can, he can go no further than we allow him.

Colossians 2:13-15 tells us that, if we have repented of and confessed all sin, then God has forgiven us all our trespasses, so the enemy has no grounds for accusation or condemnation (see also Romans 8:1, 4). Moreover, Jesus disarmed the principalities and powers, so that the only “weapons” they have are lies, deception, fear and trying to usurp authority which is not rightfully theirs. Therefore “stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11); “submit yourself to God, resist the devil and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

Our victory

Our victory is dependent upon our knowledge and use of those things God has given us in order that we might be victorious:

1. The Cross of Christ (Col. 2:15)
2. The Blood of the Lamb (Rev. 12:11)
3. The Armour of God (Eph. 6:10-18)
4. The Name of the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 16:16-18)
5. The Word of God (Matt. 4:1-11; Heb. 4:12-13)
6. The Power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8)
7. The Confession of our Faith (Rom. 10:9-17)

We need to know exactly what these are and how to use or apply them, if we are always to be victorious over the enemy. (If we should fall and be temporarily defeated, Psalm 37:23-24 and Micah 7:8 are very encouraging: thought we fall, we shall not be destroyed, for the Lord will lift us up with His hand. Hallelujah!)

Ultimate victory belongs to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and to us (see Revelation, chapters 19-20).

QUESTIONS

Seven very important things are listed in the section “Our victory” above. Discuss each of them, showing exactly what is meant by each of them, and practical ways in which they can be applied to our daily lives and to spiritual warfare.

5 The Great Deception ... Exposed!

One of the dangers of over-emphasis on the demonic, spiritual warfare and deliverance is that the enemy can seem very powerful – in fact, very nearly as powerful as God Himself!

Colossians 2:13-15 says *“You, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with Him (Jesus), having forgiven us our trespasses, having cancelled the bond which stood against us with all its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities (principalities and powers) and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in the cross”*.

Just before Jesus died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, Jesus said “It is finished!” (John 19:30). This was a cry of triumphant victory, not defeat!

Genesis 3:15 says “He [Jesus, the Seed of the woman] shall bruise your head, and you [Satan] shall bruise His heel”. Note that Jesus would bruise or strike Satan’s head, not kill, destroy or annihilate him. One day the devil will be cast into hell, which has been prepared for Satan and his angels – but not yet (Matt. 25:41).

If the work of the cross was finished almost 2000 years ago; if Jesus disarmed the evil spiritual rulers and authorities and triumphed over them through the cross, how is it that the devil still seems to be so powerful today?

Sometimes it appears as if Christians are only just winning. Sometimes it even looks as though we may not win (though secretly we “know” – or at least hope – we will!).

Sometimes it seems as though the devil is *almost* as powerful as God Himself (dare we say it?) and certainly much more powerful than us.

How can this be so? Satan has been stripped of all power and authority BUT he is still “the great deceiver of the whole world” (Rev. 12:9). Jesus said that the devil is “a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). He always has worked by deception. For example, in the Garden of Eden he deceived Eve into believing that God was wanting to withhold something good from her. First He simply asked “Has God said ...?”, trying to bring into question what God had stated. Then when Eve affirmed that God had said it, Satan lied and said “You will not die” (Gen. 3:1-6).

Right through history the devil has lied and deceived, and he continues to do this today. The following statement needs to be read and re-read; memorised and written on our hearts:

**Satan is a defeated enemy. He has no power or authority over us, as Christians,
*except what we give him!***

If we listen to Satan’s lies, if we believe him, if we give him power and authority over us, he will take everything he can – but he has no right to it unless we give it to him!

Similarly, idols only have the power, influence and authority over us which we give them! These are dumb idols, made of wood and stone – the same wood we burn in a fire and the same stone we crush and make into roads for our feet! See Isaiah 44:9-20 and Psalm 135:15-18. Baal could not help his prophets when they were confronted by Elijah (1 Kings 18).

This is why James 4:7 says “Submit yourselves to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you!” He has no choice but to flee if we resist him, because he has no power over us.
DON’T LISTEN TO THE LIES OF THE ENEMY; LISTEN TO GOD!

God’s Word says (for example):

- “I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13)
- “My God shall supply all your need, according to the riches we have in glory in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:19)
- “Call to Me and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things which you do not know” (Jer. 33:3)
- “God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind (self-control)” (2 Tim. 1:7)
- “Is anything too hard for the Lord?” (Gen. 18:14). No!
- “In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him Who loves us” (Rom. 8:37)
- “They overcame the devil by the Blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony for they loved not their lives even unto death” (Rev. 12:11). What words do we confess? Are they positive or negative?

These are Scriptures we need to learn off by heart (or at least underline in our Bibles) and use when we are tempted to listen to the enemy.

Do we really believe the Word of God?
Do we confess it?
Do we submit ourselves to God and resist the devil? (Jam. 4:7)
Do we make positive confessions based on God’s Word?

Do we give entrance to the devil by doubts or sin? (Eph. 4:27)

The tongue reveals what we believe

Jesus said “Out of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). Sometimes we catch ourselves out because we think we believe all of the above and then we find ourselves saying things which conflict with what God has said!

Hence James 3:1-12 and the need for believing, and then confessing, the Truth. ***It is our choice!***

QUESTIONS

1. Why does Satan seem so powerful?
2. What did Jesus do to the enemy when He died on the Cross?
3. What is the significance of Jesus bruising Satan’s head and Satan bruising Jesus’ heel? (Gen. 3:15)
4. Why is it so important that we recognise that first and foremost Satan is a liar?
5. What are some other good, positive confessions we can make, which are based on God’s Word?
6. Why is what we say, so important?

6 Spiritual Weapons for Spiritual Warfare

“The weapons of our warfare are not worldly, but have divine power to destroy strongholds” (2 Cor. 10:4).

Ephesians 6:10-18

Christians are to be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might (v. 10). One thing is certain – we will never stand in our own strength! However, the battle is the Lord’s and He will give us the armour, the “battle tactics”, the strength or power, and the victory.

Four times we are told to “stand” (v. 11, 13, 14). To stand means to be victorious right through the battle, to the end. Christians should not only endure and survive spiritual attacks, they should be victorious! We need to appropriate and maintain the victory of the Cross (Col. 2:13-15).

In order to do this we must put on the whole armour of God. If one piece is missing, you can be sure the enemy will know, and that is where he will attack. David killed Goliath by striking him in the one place where he was not protected by armour.

Note too that there is no armour mentioned for the back – Christians are to advance and attack, not retreat!

“The wiles of the devil” (v. 11). The devil is very cunning, and while we should not fear him, we need to be very aware of his subtle attacks, especially in the area of deception (truth mixed with lies).

Our warfare is not worldly (against flesh and blood); it is spiritual – against evil rulers and authorities (principalities and powers), world rulers of darkness and spiritual hosts of wickedness. While their apparent power and deception is great, greater is He who is in us

than he who is in the world (1 John 4:4). Therefore, as long as we trust in God, put on all His armour and use His weapons, staying close to Him, we can be sure of victory.

The weapons

As we look at the weapons, we shall apply their use especially to intercession.

1. The girdle (belt) of truth

Truth means honestly and sincerity – praying from the heart and not just from the head. The girdle was a belt used to tie up flowing garments so that a person could run or go into battle without stumbling over them. One great stumbling-block to our prayers is hypocrisy – we cannot effectively pray for others what we are not living ourselves. For example, we cannot effectively pray for morality in our nation if we tolerate immoral areas in our own lives. Judgement begins first with the household of God (1 Pet. 4:17).

Our intercession, like our worship, must be in spirit and in truth (John 4:23-24).

To pray in truth not only means praying honestly and sincerely, but our lives must also be true; we must get rid of everything that is false in our lives. Our words must also be true.

2. The breastplate of righteousness

The breastplate covers our heart, affections and emotions – these must be right and pure before God. The prayers of an unrighteous person will not be heard by God (Ps. 66:18), but the fervent prayers of a righteous person have great power in their effects (Jam. 5:16).

To love the Lord with all our heart, mind, soul and strength is also to hate all that is evil and ungodly. Our hearts must be set on those things which are pure, lovely and Christlike.

While it is true that we need to appropriate the righteousness we have in Christ, and that it is only by this righteousness that we are saved, nevertheless there is a practical righteousness that God expects in the lives of all His children. "Strive for ... the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14).

3. The shoes of the Gospel of Peace

Shoes are used for walking (moving), not for standing still! We are not to be static but moving on with God into battle.

The Gospel of peace speaks of evangelism. Our spiritual warfare is not merely defensive, but it is also offensive – positively going out and taking the Gospel to the lost. The outworking of our prayers is in the taking of the Gospel to a needy and dying world, seeing their lives transformed by the power of God, and thus our prayers answered. The ultimate answer to all the world's problems and needs is for people to be reconciled to God through the Blood of the Cross, and their lives transformed by the power of God. This calls for us to put on our shoes and get out with the glorious Gospel.

4. The shield of faith

If we are ever going to get anywhere in intercession we must pray in faith. There is no room for doubt or unbelief. "Whatever you ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive" (Matt. 21:22). "Let [us] ask in faith, without doubting ... for we must not suppose that a double-minded person will receive anything from the Lord" (Jam. 1:5-8).

If we cannot pray in faith, then we should not pray, but rather we should seek out the reason for our doubts and unbelief, deal with it, and then receive the faith with which we can quench the fiery darts of the evil one. All sorts of strange doubts may come from the enemy – resist them; trust God and His Word.

5. The helmet of salvation

The helmet protects the mind from doubts, lies, deception, discouragement, depression, etc. When we intercede, when we evangelise, we must be absolutely certain of our own salvation, and of our place of authority, seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6). God's salvation covers us in every area of our life – physically, mentally, spiritually, socially, etc., and we need to maintain the victory in all these areas.

6. The sword of the Spirit (the Word of God)

We use the sword of the Spirit when we know and confess God's Word – His promises, His truth. Primarily this refers to the living, inspired Word (rhema) of God, as well as the written Word (logos). As God inspires His Word to us, we confess it, live by it, and use it as a weapon of attack.

We need to pray according to God's revealed will (1 John 5:14-15), not simply according to our own desires, feelings or thoughts. Thus we need to know God – His character, His Word and His will. Then we need to use His Word in combat against the enemy (see Matt. 4:1-11).

7. Prayer in the Spirit

This weapon has no earthly or physical counterpart! It is prayer that is led and inspired by God's Spirit, so that we are praying according to His will and direction, and God hears and answers. See Romans 8:26-27. There is no way in which the devil can overcome God's Word and God's Spirit; hence the need to know and use His Word, in dependence upon the power and authority of His Spirit, "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance ..."

How to "put on the armour"

It should be obvious from the above that we do not put on the armour by going through the physical motions, pretending to put on the various pieces of armour and saying "I now put on the helmet of salvation ..." etc. We put on the girdle of truth by repenting of all lies, and instead speaking the truth. We put on the breastplate of righteousness by repenting of all unrighteousness and seeking, with God's help, to walk in righteousness. We put on the shoes by getting out with the Gospel and witnessing to the lost. We take up the shield of faith by repenting of doubts and unbelief, and trusting God and His Word. We put on the helmet of salvation by trusting in the full salvation we have in Christ. We use the sword of the Spirit by believing it, acting upon it, confessing it and using it. We pray in the Spirit by praying in the Spirit!

That is a lot harder than going through the physical motions of a pretend game, but it is what the Bible means by putting on the armour, and it works!

Moreover, we do not need to put on the armour every day – once it is put on, never take it off; make it a lifestyle. You will need it every hour of every day and night. Keep covered!

Finally, “Put on the whole armour of God” is addressed not just to individual Christians, but to the whole army of God – the Church. Let us put on the armour, let us stand, and be victorious over all the power of the enemy.

QUESTIONS

1. Why is deception so difficult to discern?
2. In what ways is evangelism the ultimate answer to all the needs and problems in society?
3. “Truth, righteousness and faith are things we must live; they are not things we pretend to put on”. Discuss.
4. Discuss the importance of the Spirit and the Word in spiritual warfare.
5. Why is it so important to know God and to know His Word if we are to be victorious in battle?
6. What does it mean to “pray at all times in the Spirit”? Is it any use praying if we are not praying in the Spirit?

7 Some Principles of Warfare

All the following verses refer to **1 Samuel 17**, unless otherwise stated.

In this chapter we have a number of types or illustrations of people who stand for others in the spiritual realm. Thus, Goliath is a type of Satan; the Philistines are a type of our spiritual enemy; Israel is a type of the Church; David is a type of the spiritual Christian; Saul is a type of the man of the flesh (the carnal Christian).

v.9 The enemy challenges the people of God. There are many challenges which the Church and Christianity as a whole are having to face: the challenge of other religions, false cults, atheism, materialism, humanism, the occult, etc. In all these challenges, as with Goliath’s challenge to Israel, we either win or we submit!

v.10 The devil, in his ignorance or pride, still thinks he can win against God and His people, even though he has been cast out of Heaven and was defeated on the cross. However, the devil can only go as far as we, the Church, allow him to go (see Colossians 2:13-15). We can be sure of this: the enemy will take all we allow him to – he cannot take more and he will not take less. He is a defeated enemy, stripped of his power and authority, but he is also a liar and a deceiver so he will do all he can to usurp authority and power over us which he does not rightfully have. This is why we must strongly resist him (James 4:7).

v.11 Fear! Fear is simply faith in the devil! The Israelites believed Goliath and feared; David believed God and was fearless. Who will we believe?

v.16 The number 40 symbolises a period of testing. The enemy tried to demoralise Israel and cause them to doubt and fear. For God’s answer, see James 1:6-8 and 2 Timothy 1:7.

v.26 David discerned that this was no ordinary battle; this was spiritual warfare. He first won the battle in the spiritual realm, and then in the physical.

v.28-30 Discouragement from his brothers. One of the things we have to be prepared to face is the fact that there will be times when we, especially as intercessors, will be misunderstood, discouraged and even opposed by our own friends, especially those who are less spiritually discerning.

v.32-33 Even King Saul (a type of the natural or carnal man) did not recognise David's faith. Saul applied human wisdom and was wrong! "You are but a youth" – see God's answer to this in Jeremiah 1:4-12 and 1 Timothy 4:12.

v.34-37 David had already proved God's faithfulness in his daily life. Chapter 16 implies that he had a right heart (16:7) – he was not perfect, but was a man after God's own heart; he had been anointed by the Spirit (16:13); he was skillful with the harp (praise), a man of valour (fearless), a man of war, wise in all he said, and the Lord was with him (16:18). Thus, having proved God already, he was full of faith.

Note David's positive confessions: there were no negative, depressing doubts in the things he said and confessed.

God's honour was at stake, and His Name was at stake. Why? Because the Israelites were God's people, representing the living God. What sort of God must He be if Goliath, the Philistines and their gods could defeat Israel?

v.38-39 Spiritual warfare needs spiritual weapons. Saul, a type of the carnal man, knew only worldly warfare, but David, a spiritual man, knew how to win the spiritual battle and thus the physical battle too. See 2 Corinthians 10:3-6 and Ephesians 6:10-20.

v.40 Why did David take 5 stones? Possibly this shows David's determination to win. If the first stone did not kill Goliath, then there was a second, a third, a fourth and a fifth! He was determined to press through to complete victory. Let us, in intercession, never stop short of complete victory, no matter how long it takes. Let us persevere – "ask and keep on asking" (Luke 11:9).

v.42-47 The enemy's attack and curse were rebuffed by David's confession of his faith in God. Nothing would make him waver. The battle is the Lord's, and to Him will go all the glory. David's motive for winning was simply "that **the earth may know** that there is a God ... and that **Israel may know** the battle is God's" (spiritual warfare, not worldly warfare). Answers to prayer are both a demonstration to the world ("the earth") and to the Church ("Israel").

v.48-49 David initiated the attack, he did not wait for the enemy to attack first. Why wait until we are wounded or defeated before we begin to attack? So often the Church has failed to take the initiative. Let us not lose by default or because we are too slow to begin the offensive.

v.49 The very spot where Goliath was not protected by the armour was where he was struck and killed. We need to find that spot! Conversely, we need to make sure we are completely covered with God's armour so that the enemy cannot successfully attack us!

v.49-51 David completed the job – it was not sufficient to have Goliath stunned and lying on the ground. David cut off his head and killed him. We must persevere until we get through to total victory; until "It is finished!"

In some ways the stone and sling are like intercessory prayer, and the sword is like practical acts which complete the victory ("faith and works"). Both are necessary. Most things cannot successfully be achieved without warfare through intercession; but there are also practical things which God requires us to do to complete the task.

v.52-53 The enemy was pursued, destroyed, and their goods plundered. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

v.55-58 The “unknown” warrior – one of God’s “little” people who are big in God. David was not the king, he was not even a commander in the army; in fact he was not even in the army! He was just “David, the son of Jesse the Bethlehemite!”

QUESTIONS

1. Why is it important to be able to prove God’s faithfulness in the “little” things of life? Conversely, why is it important that we are faithful even in small things?
2. Why is it important to always make positive confessions – confessions of faith?
3. “David first won the battle in the spiritual realm, and then in the physical realm”. What does this mean?
4. What was David’s attitude and response to discouragement from others?
5. How can we be sure that we are spiritual in our thinking, rather than natural (carnal)?
6. “Intercessory warfare and practical warfare (“faith” and “works”) go hand in hand”. Explain what is meant by this.

8 The Battle is the Lord’s

The subject of Spiritual Warfare may at first seem somewhat negative and frightening. Battles are never easy, and in these last days Christians are going to face increasing persecution and spiritual warfare from both men and Satanic powers. But the battle is the Lord’s, and we must never lose sight of this fact. God has promised the believer “I will never fail you nor forsake you” (Heb. 13:5). In Psalms 121 and 139 God reminds us that He is always watching over us, loving us, caring for us, and protecting us. The Lord Jesus “ever lives to make intercession for us” (Heb. 7:25). Thus we can confidently face the future and all spiritual battles, knowing that they are primarily His battles, and that we will see the victory of God on our behalf, if we will only trust in Him.

2 Chronicles 20

All the following verses are from 2 Chronicles 20.

v.1-2 **The enemy prepared for battle**, but Jehoshaphat was informed. If we are going to pray intelligently and successfully then we need to know what is going on around about us. In these days there are many subtle attacks of the enemy on the Church, the individual Christian, the family, and the nation as a whole. We need to be spiritually perceptive, to know what is going on, to discern the fronts on which the enemy is attacking, and to effectively combat these through prayer.

v.3 **Jehoshaphat feared**. This is a natural reaction – but we are not supposed to live in the natural! If the enemy can bind us in fear, then he has scored a major victory. We may fear at first, but it is what we do with the fear that is important. We should bring it to the Lord in prayer and cast it on Him (1 Pet. 5:7-10). In some cases we may need special prayer to be set free from a spirit of fear (2 Tim. 1:7).

- (a) Fear can paralyse, like the rattlesnake and hooded cobra which paralyse their prey with fear before striking and devouring them. Fear can make us inactive: “What’s the use?” “There’s no hope” etc.
- (b) Fear can cause us to bury our heads in the sand, pretending the problem does not exist, or hoping that it will go away. But it won’t! This is a totally unrealistic and useless way of dealing with problems.

- (c) Fear can bring bondage, depression, etc., again rendering us ineffective.
- (d) Or, fear can lead us to seek the Lord with prayer and fasting, until we break through to victory, just as Jehoshaphat did.

v.3 **Jehoshaphat and all Judah fasted.** Why fast? Fasting is not a magic ritual; it has no intrinsic power. But through prayer and fasting – seeking God – we can get closer to God and receive a greater measure of spiritual power. Fasting is often an act of obedience to God’s command and therefore brings blessing; it is a spiritual discipline that demonstrates our deep concern and burden over a matter – in fact, fasting is often natural in times of crisis.

v.4 **Judah assembled together to seek the Lord** with prayer and fasting. We need to gather together to the degree of importance of the need. E.g., for personal needs we may deal with them ourselves, with our family, or a few close friends. For needs affecting the local church, the elders or whole church should join together in prayer. For the needs of a city, representatives of all the churches in that city need to gather for prayer. For national crises, representatives from all over the nation need to be called together to unite in intercession for the nation.

Evil principalities and powers over a nation or a city are rarely, if ever, broken by one or two individual Christians. We need to know the boundaries of our spiritual authority and work within them.

v.5-12 **Jehoshaphat’s prayer**

- (a) He looked to the Lord and His greatness (v.6) – this builds faith. If our eyes are on God, not ourselves or our problems, faith will grow. Read appropriate passages of Scripture and meditate on God’s greatness, goodness, love, majesty, power, etc.
- (b) He remembers God’s past blessings and deliverances (v.7) – this encourages us for the present battles. “I am sure that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion ...” (Phil. 1:6).
- (c) He remembers their covenant (v.9; also 2 Chr. 7:12-18). If there is trouble, seek the Lord, cry to Him, and He will save. But we must be faithful in keeping the conditions – it is no use claiming promises if we fail to fulfil the prerequisite conditions!
- (d) He claimed their God-given inheritance as the people of God (v.11).
- (e) He prayed with faith, remembering that the battle is the Lord’s (v.12). “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on You”.

v.13 **Whole families were involved** in seeking the Lord and praying. In preparation for the future, as well as in the present situation, we need to train our children in intercessory prayer, and show them how to fight spiritual battles and win!

v.14-17 **God promises victory.** There was no need to fear, and no need to fight with worldly weapons. They had sought the Lord, fasted and prayed, and now they would “see the victory of the Lord on your behalf ... for the battle is not yours but God’s ... and the Lord will be with you”.

God revealed the enemy’s strategy, and how they were to face it. Oh that the Church today might get a revelation of the enemy’s strategy and how to combat it victoriously!

v.18-22 **Praise and worship followed** as a result of faith in God's promised victory. But note that they had sought the Lord with prayer and fasting first. Some people have said that "Praise brings the victory", as though there is no real need to seek the Lord or intercede. "All you need to do is praise the Lord in faith". But this is not taught by this passage. Praise is not an "arm-twister" that you can use to force God to answer your prayers.

Praise and worship preceded the victory only because the people had first sought the Lord and interceded with fasting until God promised them victory. There is no faith without first a word from God. Faith comes by hearing the word of God, and believing it. There is no magic power in praising God. We worship Him because of who He is, not because of what we hope He will do for us! When the "work" of intercession is done and God has assured us of the answer, then we can thank and praise Him!

When God had spoken, and His word was quickened in their hearts, all they had to do was believe God and His revealed word (v.20). God is in control!

v.23-25 **Victory!** God brought confusion, dissension and division into the ranks of the enemy and they destroyed one another. Confusion, division and discouragement are three major ways of destroying the enemy, but conversely, they can also ruin the effectiveness of the Church if they are tolerated. "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand" (Mark 3:24-27).

v.26-30 **Praise and worship followed the victory.** Previously they had worshipped the Lord because they believed His word and His promise; now they worshipped Him because the promised victory had been accomplished. Thus we see the order: intercession – promised victory – praise – victory – further praise. Both praise and intercession are very important aspects of prayer, but we need to realise that praise is not intercession.

Thus the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet and God gave them peace and rest. Unless and until the enemy is utterly routed and defeated, we cannot have complete rest and peace. We must deal ruthlessly with evil – not compromising with it in any way – for only then can we enter into the place of rest.

If the battle seems long and tough, let us never forget that primarily this battle is not ours, but the Lord's. Look to Him and ask Him to intervene so that you can see the victory of the Lord on your behalf.

QUESTIONS

1. When the future seems so frightening and uncertain, and the spiritual battles we face seem so difficult, what must we always remember and hold on to?
2. How can the Church get a revelation of the enemy's strategy and how to combat it?
3. How can we deal effectively with fear?
4. When, and why, should we fast?
5. What is meant by the statement: "We need to gather together to the degree of importance of the need"?
6. In times of intercession and spiritual warfare, when is the time to praise?

9 Waging War in the Heavens for Victory on Earth

Spiritual warfare takes place not, primarily, on earth but in the heavens; not in the physical realm but in the spiritual.

There are a number of Biblical illustrations of the fact that victory only comes on earth when it has first been won through spiritual warfare in the heavens – as the power of God defeats the powers of darkness.

1. Moses, Joshua, and the Amalekites

Exodus 17:8-13. As long as Moses interceded, Joshua was victorious, but when Moses stopped interceding Amalek was victorious. Thus Aaron and Hur stood with Moses, helping him in his intercession, so that Joshua prevailed and Israel defeated the Amalekites.

2. David

1 Samuel 17. See a previous Bible study on this chapter. David's faith in God, and his prophetic declarations to the heavens, to Goliath and to Israel, brought him swift victory over Israel's enemies.

3. Jehoshaphat and Judah

2 Chronicles 20. See a previous Bible study on this chapter. Jehoshaphat and his people prayed through until God promised them victory; the next day the victory was won on earth in the physical battle which took place. Spiritual warfare and victory preceded physical victory.

4. Daniel and Michael

Daniel 10. Daniel fasted and prayed, but his prayers were hindered for three weeks by the powers of darkness. Then the Lord revealed to Daniel why his prayers had not yet been answered. The Lord sent Michael, one of His chief angels (Jude 9; Rev. 12:7-8) to fight against the demonic powers opposing Daniel and his prayers, and when they were defeated Daniel's prayers were answered.

Notice that in Daniel 9, he had perceived that it had been prophesied that Israel would be in captivity for 70 years (v. 2; Jer. 25:11; 29:10) and this time was almost ended. However, Daniel still fasted and prayed for the fulfillment of this prophecy (v. 3-4) – in other words, just because it had been prophesied he did not sit back and say "It's going to happen because God said so" – he prayed it into being!

Again, what was accomplished in the heavens in Daniel's time, in answer to his prayers, was fulfilled on earth at the end of the 70 years, just as God had said.

5. Jesus and the disciples in Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36-46. Jesus won the battle in Gethsemane as He agonised for hours in prayer, and came through to the point of victory: "... nevertheless, not My will but Yours be done". Because of His victory in Gethsemane there was victory at Calvary!

In contrast, the disciples slept in Gethsemane and were defeated and dejected by Calvary – Judas betrayed Jesus, Peter denied Him with oaths and curses, the rest forsook Him and fled.

Praise God that even though the disciples slept instead of praying, Jesus prayed. And as a result of His intercession for Peter, Peter repented, was restored, and strengthened his brethren, so that eventually they prayed through to the victory of Pentecost about 7 weeks later (Luke 22:31-34 and Acts 1 and 2).

6. Peter in jail

Acts 12:1-17. Peter was jailed by King Herod who probably intended to kill him, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the Church (v. 5). As a result, the victory was won (in spite of some later doubts!) and Peter was miraculously released from jail.

7. Paul and Silas

Acts 16:16-34. In a somewhat similar way, Paul and Silas were not only released from jail, but the jailer and his whole family were converted as a result of the victory won in the heavenlies by Paul and Silas's prayer and praise.

Binding and loosing

There are many people today who are in spiritual bondage. There are national and worldwide situations which need to be loosed in the heavenlies before we will ever see a response on earth. Christians need to rise up in intercessory prayer and storm the gates of hell, so that they are destroyed in these areas, and people are set free.

Jesus said we must first "bind the strong man" before we can "spoil his goods" (Mark 3:27; Luke 11:21-22). Jesus was anointed by the Spirit in order that He might set the captives free, and bring liberty to those who were oppressed by the devil (Luke 4:18-19), and this same anointing is available to the Church today (Luke 9:1-2; 10:17-19; John 14:12; 20:21-22; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8).

The literal Greek translation of Matthew 18:18 is "Whatever things you shall bind on earth shall be, having been bound in heaven, and whatever things you loose on earth shall be, having been loosed in heaven". In other words, whatever is bound (or forbidden) in the heavens we may bind (or forbid) on earth; and whatever is loosed (or permitted) in the heavens we may loose (or permit) on earth. How we need to bind the works of darkness and set people free to believe, be saved, delivered, etc.! And this all comes about by spiritual warfare through intercession.

Notice that we are not praying against people – we are praying against evil powers and forces at work in their lives. Our desire is that everyone be saved and delivered from the works of darkness.

As we agree (harmonise together) in prayer, praying in the Spirit (that is, according to God's will), God will bind and loose in the heavenlies and we will see the answers on earth (Matt. 18:18-20). Hallelujah!

Faith and works

We need to exercise faith, by praying through to victory in the heavens, as well as to work out the victory in practical ways on earth. Faith and works go hand in hand. Without faith and victory in heaven, our works are of no avail; and without works on earth, the victory won

in the heavenlies will not be brought about on earth – just as Joshua needed Moses' intercession in order to prevail, but Moses needed Joshua's actions to bring about victory on earth.

"Your will be done on earth, even as it is already being done in Heaven".

The battle must be won in the heavenlies before it can be won on earth, and the only way to win spiritual battles is by spiritual warfare involving intercession.

QUESTIONS

1. Why were Jesus' disciples not victorious during His arrest, trial and crucifixion, yet Jesus was?
2. How do Moses and Joshua illustrate faith and works?
3. What is the relationship between intercession, and prophecy being fulfilled (see Daniel 9).
4. What other Biblical illustrations show the importance of prevailing in prayer in order that victories might be won on earth? What do these teach us concerning prayers that seem to be unanswered for a long time (see Daniel 10:12-14).
5. What does it mean to "bind and loose"? What (or who) do we bind, and what (or who) do we loose?
6. "God inspires (directs and guides) our praying; we pray according to His will; He binds and looses in heaven in answer to our prayers; it is bound or loosed on earth". Show how this sequence of events can apply to:
 - (a) a person's salvation
 - (b) God's over-ruling in national or international events
 - (c) destroying the attacks and hindrances of the enemy in our lives.

10 Esther – the Intercessor

[All references, unless otherwise stated, are to the book of Esther]

The book of Esther is, of course, a true historical account. However, there are also a number of spiritual lessons, especially in intercession, that we can learn from it. The five main characters in the book are spiritual examples as follows:

PERSON	EXAMPLE OF
King Ahasuerus	The Lord, God the Father
Queen Vashti	The Old Testament Israelites
Mordecai	Jesus Christ
Queen Esther	The Christian intercessor, or the Church
Haman	Satan

Any human, physical examples are, of course, only illustrations of spiritual truths. The parallels are not perfect, but they illustrate spiritual truth.

Background

King Ahasuerus displayed his glory before all his princes, servants, the army, nobles and governors (1:3-4). He is a type of the Lord of glory, ruling and reigning on High.

At this banquet he requested his wife Vashti to come and show off her beauty, but she refused (1:11-12). Vashti thus not only disgraced the king and rebelled against him, but also

set such a bad example of rebellion that she had to be punished. So the king banished her from the kingdom.

Vashti is an example of the Old Testament Israelites who, because of disobedience and rebellion, were cut off from God (Rom. 11). Israel was God's chosen race, to be His people, but her refusal led to her losing the place of privilege that could have been hers.

The Bride (the Church and the Christian family) is to be an example to the rest of the world; rebellion against the Lord cannot be tolerated (1:16-18).

The king instead chose another bride to be queen – Esther, a beautiful maiden, a type of the Christian intercessor. “She had neither father nor mother” (2:7) but had been brought up by her older cousin Mordecai who adopted her into his family. Mordecai is a type of Christ.

Esther pleased the king and won his favour (2:9, 17), and so the king prepared a wedding feast for his bride (2:18).

Mordecai heard of a plot to overthrow the king. He warned Esther, who in turn warned the king. As a result the plot was overthrown and the rebels were hung (2:21-23).

Haman, a type of Satan, was made chief over all the princes and leaders, but Mordecai refused to bow to him (3:5. Compare with Matt. 4:8-10). Hence Haman sought to destroy Mordecai and all his people (3:9). Cf. Satan on several occasions sought to destroy Jesus (at His birth, when the people wanted to stone Him, and push Him over a cliff, and on the Cross), and throughout history has sought to destroy the Church in many devious ways.

Some principles of intercession

On the 13th day of the twelfth month Haman sought to destroy all God's people. As a result, the people **mourned, fasted and wept** (4:3). How seriously do we take the attacks of Satan upon our nation and upon our own lives? Do we weep before God, with fasting and praying?

When Esther hesitated to intervene and intercede to the king for her people, Mordecai said: **“Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's house will perish. Who knows whether you have not come to the Kingdom for such a time as this?”** (4:13-14). What tremendous words for an intercessor: intercede or perish!

We are part of our nation, and we will suffer with it if we fail to intercede and win through to victory (cf. Matt. 5:45b and Jer. 29:7 “... in its welfare you will find your welfare”).

Esther and her people all fasted, and then she went in before the king, saying “If I perish, I perish”, but the king held out his sceptre to her, inviting her into his presence with her petition (4:16-5:3; cf. Heb. 4:14-16. See also Exodus 32:32 and Revelation 12:11).

The king rewarded Mordecai for informing him of the plot to kill him, and he honoured Mordecai more than Haman. Haman was furious, and prepared gallows on which to hang Mordecai (ch. 6).

Esther interceded for the lives of her people (7:3-4). The king, realising what Haman had done and planned, hangs him on the very gallows he had prepared for Mordecai (7:10). Thus the defeat intended for Mordecai became the end of Haman! (Cf. When Jesus died on the Cross, Satan was defeated but Jesus was victorious!)

Esther again interceded for her people (8:3-6). The king could not revoke his edict, but instead prepared the Jews for warfare. Cf. Christ did not annihilate Satan on the Cross – He defeated him and gave us power and authority over him. But we still have to engage in spiritual warfare against him. We must stand against the enemy and be victorious over him (Eph. 6:10-13).

Thus the Jews defeated their enemies, and all the sons of Haman were put to death (9:5-16). Victory was won and with great rejoicing the Jews celebrated the next day as a day of feasting, gladness and rest (9:19). When the victory is won (but not before!) we can rest in faith, knowing the battle is over. More battles will have to be faced in the future, but we can be victorious in each one.

Through all this Mordecai was honoured, and his people enjoyed peace and rest (10:2-3). See Hebrews 4:1-11.

Like Esther, we too are intercessors before the throne of grace. Christians, when they are in a right relationship with the Lord (that is, they find favour in His sight), are in a unique place of having His sceptre extended towards them; they come straight into the King's presence and their requests will be heard and answered. But this is both a **privilege** (seated with Him in kingly or heavenly places, Eph. 1:18-23) and also a **responsibility** (fighting against the powers of darkness through intercession, Eph. 6:10-18).

QUESTIONS

1. What does the book of Esther teach us about:
 - (a) When to fast?
 - (b) The place of privilege we have as Christians?
 - (c) The need to identify with the nation in which we live?
 - (d) Spiritual warfare?
2. What are some of the consequences of not interceding?
3. Why do so few Christians really spend much time in intercession?
4. What costs are involved in becoming a true intercessor?
5. In terms of spiritual warfare and the defeat of Satan, what did Jesus actually accomplish on the Cross? (See Colossians 2:13-15).
6. When do we enter into the place of rest and rejoicing?

11 Elijah – An Effective Intercessor

Often, when we read of some of the Godly men and women in the Bible, we are inclined to feel that we can never aspire to their greatness or holiness. How encouraging it is, therefore, to read that “Elijah was a man of like nature with ourselves”, and yet he prayed fervently and the effective fervent prayers of this righteous man availed much! “The petition of the righteous, being made effective, is very strong” (Jam. 5:16b-18). If we are righteous in Christ, if we pray fervently, then we too can see great power released and effective answers to our prayers. “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much” (AV) – such praying is powerfully effective, releasing God's power and allowing Him to act in a certain situation.

Keys to Elijah's effective prayer life

Read 1 Kings, chapters 17-19 and 2 Kings, chapters 1-2.

1. Righteousness

Only a person who is in right relationship with God, who is righteous in Christ, walking in the Spirit, can expect to really pray unhindered prayers, because sin hinders prayer (Ps. 66:18; Is. 59:1-2). If your prayers seem to go no higher than the ceiling, the ceiling is probably sin (or unbelief – which is also sin!) Even wrong relationships, especially within marriage, can hinder prayer (1 Pet. 3:7).

2. Fervency

Praying fervently implies praying with faith (Jam. 1:6-8), and with perseverance (Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8). We need to pray through and then stop (you can stop firing when the victory has been won!) We are engaged in spiritual warfare, but not in vain repetition.

3. Specific

Elijah prayed specific prayers and got specific answers (cf. Jabez, in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10). Having asked specifically we then need to give specific thanks (Luke 17:12-19).

Note how Jesus, on seeing blind Bartimaeus, asked him what he wanted. His need was obvious, but Jesus wanted him to ask specifically, and then He fulfilled his request! (Mark 10:46-52).

4. Earnestness

Elijah cried to God from his heart (not his head) – he was earnest and sincere in his prayer; in one sense he was desperate (1 Kings 17:20-22). He cast himself on God, and God answered his earnest prayers.

5. He knew the word and will of the Lord

At least 8 times we read that “the word of the Lord” came to Elijah. Elijah knew God’s word, he knew His will, and was therefore able to speak forth: “Thus saith the Lord ...” Hence he knew what to pray for and how to pray. Imagine what would have happened if God had not answered his prayer on Mt Carmel! See also 2 Kings 10:10.

Elijah’s obedience to specific directions from God led to miracles (eg., 1 Kings 17:16, 22; Luke 4:25-26). God confirmed His word with signs following, thus setting His seal on Elijah’s prophetic ministry (1 Kings 17:24).

6. He bound and loosed

Elijah bound and loosed (rain) what God had already bound and loosed in Heaven (Matt. 18:18 NAS). At his word the heavens withheld their rain for three and a half years; again at his word it began to rain again, just as God had told him (1 Kings 18:1).

7. He was ruthless with evil

Elijah was uncompromising with evil: he slew the prophets of Baal, and King Ahaziah and his servants were destroyed (2 Kings 1:9-17a). Unfortunately the wicked Queen Jezebel was not also destroyed at the same time as the prophets of Baal. As a result, Elijah became afraid and discouraged because of her and her threats on his life (1 Kings 19:1-4).

8. He was human, but God upheld him

Elijah at this time was ready to give up, but God, understanding his weakness and with still further work for him to do, sent an angel to strengthen and encourage him (1 Kings 19:1-8). Praise God for His ministering angels who come when we are low, discouraged or battle-weary! (cf. Matt. 4:11).

9. Elijah sought to honour God's Name

1 Kings 18:36-37. We will never get very far in spiritual warfare if we are simply seeking to defend ourselves, vindicate ourselves, or honour our own name. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake and on Christ's account (Matt. 5:10-11), not those who are trying to justify themselves! Watch your motives!

10. Unity

See Romans 11:2-5 and compare with Matthew 18:19-20 where "agree" means to "harmonise together" or to be "in symphony together". Elijah is never described as having prayed with other people. There were 7000 other people he could have prayed with, but in ignorance and fear on one occasion he hid himself away, depressed and lonely, rather than joining with others to be lifted up by their prayers and encouragement.

Praise God for the times of prayer and fellowship we have alone with God. But there is also great encouragement and power when we pray together, harmonise with, and unite with, others in prayer! This is especially true when the battle is long, tough and discouraging. We need others to pray with us and encourage us so that together we are victorious – praying powerfully effective prayers!

QUESTIONS

1. What is the significance of stating that Elijah was "a man of like nature with ourselves"? (James 5:17)
2. In what ways can wrong relationships hinder our prayer lives?
3. How can we avoid "vain repetition" when the answer to our prayers is delayed?
4. Why is it necessary both to pray alone, and with others?
5. Our motives are very important when we are interceding. What are some wrong motives, and what are the right ones?
6. What is the practical meaning of "agree" in Matthew 18:19?

12 Ezra – Intercessor for a Nation

Read Ezra chapters 9 and 10. The following references are all to the book of Ezra unless specifically stated otherwise.

Background (about 457 BC)

Although the Babylonian captivity of Judah had now ended and the rebuilding of the Temple was complete, the people had sinned by intermarrying with heathen races rather than separating themselves from them and their abominations. Moreover, the officials and leaders (priests and Levites) had been the chief offenders (9:1-2).

Ezra was a scribe, skilled in the Law (7:6) and a priest (10:16). When he realised the seriousness of the situation he sat appalled by it, and was joined by all those who feared God (9:3-4). He then fasted and interceded for his people.

1. Ezra humbled himself before God (9:3-5)

All true prayer is humbling, because it recognises our weakness and inability, and God's greatness and ability. To pray is to beg, beseech or plead with, which implies that the person praying is inferior to the one being prayed to (e.g., Matt. 18:23-35; Luke 18:1-8).

2. Ezra fasted and prayed (9:3-5)

The Hebrew word for "fasted" is very similar in meaning to the words for "afflicted" and "humbled" (see Lev. 23:26-32; Ezra 8:21-23; 9:5 NAS; 2 Chr. 7:14). Ezra sought the Lord with real earnestness, humbling and affliction of the body, soul and spirit – he meant business!

3. Ezra recognised God's greatness, holiness and majesty (9:5b-6)

He saw the Lord God – Who He is! (cf. John's vision in Revelation 1:9-20).

4. Ezra identified with the sins of his people (9:6-7)

As a result of seeing the Lord's holiness, he saw their sin and was ashamed; then he repented and confessed their sin. (cf. Isaiah 6:1-7). Ezra not only confessed the sins as his own, but he also confessed the sins of his people, asking God for forgiveness on behalf of them all.

Note that while Ezra prayed, he used the plural words "we" and "our", not "I" and "my" (9:6-15). To intercede is to go between. The intercessor prays on behalf of some other person or people, pleading for mercy on their behalf. Hence the intercessor must first repent and confess his own sin before he confesses the sins of others. "Judgement begins with the household of God" (1 Pet. 4:17). We need to get our own individual lives right, then the Church, and then we can reach out to the nation. How can we effectively bind evil spirits, evil rulers and authorities, and pray against sins and wickedness in our society, if these things are still in our own hearts and lives?

5. Ezra acknowledged that God had blessed, in spite of their sins (9:8-9)

How gracious and merciful God is! How He longs to bless! Often when we least deserve and expect it, He blesses us. This is not to condone sin, but to demonstrate His mercy and love (Rom. 5:8).

6. Ezra made specific confession of sin (9:10-15)

He acknowledged the rightness of God's commands, and their failure to obey them. If we are to be forgiven and cleansed from sin then we must be specifically aware of that sin, repentant over it, confess it specifically and receive God's forgiveness. Then we can be sure of forgiveness. The problem with general confession is that it is easy to fall back into those same sins again. See 1 John 1:9 and Romans 8:1-4.

7. Ezra cast himself on God's mercy, forgiveness and love, pleading with God not to punish them as they deserved (9:8-9).

He acknowledged God's justice and their unworthiness, pleading for God's forgiveness (9:15). The Bible gives us some beautiful pictures of what God does with our sin once it is forgiven: see Psalm 103:10-12; Isaiah 38:17; Jeremiah 31:34; Micah 7:19; 1 John 1:7, 9. Praise God!

8. Ezra reminded God of His promises and their inheritance, having first fulfilled God's conditions of seeking Him with true repentance (9:11-12).

We do not need to "claim" promises from God – all we need to do is to obey their conditions and allow God to fulfill them! After all, He is always faithful to His Word.

9. Ezra and the people wept bitterly over their sin (10:1)

This was not emotionalism, but the right and proper use of emotions to express deep repentance of heart over their sin. It is not wrong for emotions to be used in worship, repentance, etc., as long as they are genuine and not emotionalism for emotion's sake.

Balance is, of course, required. We can control our emotions and they should not offend others or take their attention away from the Lord or from prayer.

Emotions run high at sports events; why not for the King of Kings? Human love involves emotions; why not our love for God? Someone has said: "All Word and no Spirit and we will freeze up. But all Spirit and no Word and we will blow up!"

10. Their repentance was shown by a change of behaviour (10:3-17)

This is the fruit of genuine repentance. Compare with 1 John 1:7 "If we walk in the light ... the Blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin". The people promised to stop sinning and to obey God's commands (10:2-5). Anyone who refused to obey was to be cut off from amongst God's people (10:6-8). The people then confessed their sin and sanctified themselves (10:9-14). This was done in depth, not superficially (10:13b). God's fierce wrath was averted because of their repentance, and the matter was finally put right (10:16-17).

The Results

About 12 years later (445 BC), Nehemiah and others had returned from captivity and rebuilt the walls around Jerusalem. Many thousands of exiles had returned with Zerubbabel to Jerusalem, and Ezra continued his work of reform, teaching the Word and the ways of the Lord to the people.

Read **Nehemiah chapters 9 and 10** (the following references are to these chapters). As a result of Ezra's teaching, the people fasted, confessed their sins and those of their fathers, and sanctified themselves (9:1-2). For six hours they read God's Word (Law) and for another six hours they confessed their sins and worshipped the Lord (9:3-5).

In Ezra's prayer he again:

- (a) acknowledged God's greatness (9:6)
- (b) remembered God's dealings with Israel – His promises, blessings and judgements (9:7-15)
- (c) remembered that in spite of God's blessings and Israel's disobedience, God is merciful and did not forsake them (9:16-25). Because of repeated disobedience and blasphemies, God allowed them to be captured and to suffer under their enemies, yet when they cried to God He heard them and saved them. This cycle was repeated over and over again: disobedience, punishment, repentance and forgiveness. Nevertheless, God did not destroy them or utterly forsake them, for He is gracious and merciful (9:26-31).
- (d) God is just, patient and merciful (9:32-35).
- (e) Ezra remembered their promised inheritance which they were not enjoying because of their sin (9:36-38).

The People's Response

As a result of Ezra's preaching of God's Word and of his intercessions, the people promised to walk in God's ways and obey His laws (10:28-39):

- Not to intermarry with the heathen (unbelievers), but to remain separate (sanctified)
- To remember the Sabbath day (the day of rest) and keep it holy
- To keep the sacrifices
- To give of their first-fruits
- To tithe
- Not to neglect the House of the Lord

What an example for us today!

QUESTIONS

1. When and why should we fast?
2. How do we "identify with the sins of our nation"?
3. Must repentance in the Church precede repentance in the nation?
4. How can God be merciful without condoning sin?
5. What can we, as intercessors, learn from Ezra's example?
6. Is it really possible for a nation – our nation – to turn to God in true repentance and "be healed" (2 Chr. 7:14)? How could this happen?

13 The Prayer Life and Example of Daniel

[All references are from the book of Daniel unless otherwise stated]

Daniel and his three friends, Shadrach (Hananiah), Meshach (Mishael) and Abednego (Azariah) were Jewish youths who were taken captive to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar about the year 606 BC. In spite of the pollution of pagan Babylon they remained true to the Lord; their lives and the prayer life of Daniel especially, are an example to us all.

Daniel knew the cost of being true

As a slave in a heathen country it must have been very easy for Daniel and his friends to compromise and fall into the evil ways of those around them. But in spite of this they remained pure, prayerful and true to the Lord. As a result they demonstrated the power of the one true God in Heaven and even influenced Nebuchadnezzar to proclaim "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries" (2:47). But there was a cost involved:

1. **Dying to self.** Daniel and his friends literally risked their lives on three occasions because of their faithfulness to God: over the matter of food (1:8-10); refusal to bow down to a statue (3:8-18); refusal to worship the king (6:6-10). On each occasion God honoured their faith and obedience, and rescued them.
2. **The discipline of fasting.** Daniel knew the discipline of fasting (9:3), on one occasion fasting and interceding for three weeks until he broke through in the heavenlies and the answer came to his prayers (10:2-3).
3. **The sacrifice of time.** It was Daniel's regular habit to spend time in prayer three times each day (6:10). In fact, he was known for his prayerfulness and it was this that was

used by his enemies to have him thrown into the lions' den (6:3-5). Daniel prayed and God answered! Daniel prayed and God blessed him! His prayers were anathema to his enemies. In the New Testament we are not commanded to pray three times a day towards Jerusalem, but rather to "pray without ceasing ... worshipping the Father in Spirit and in Truth" (1 Thess. 5:17; John 4:19-24). That is, we should continually be in an attitude of prayer – open towards, and in fellowship with, God – praying when we do as the Spirit inspires us. Prayer should be an inseparable part of our lives. We can pray at any time, any where!

4. **The cost of not compromising.** Daniel utterly refused to compromise the truth, his behaviour, or his loyalty to God (as opposed to his loyalty to the king). This nearly cost him his life, but "God is faithful" to those who are faithful to Him. Note the tremendous confession of his friends when they faced the fiery furnace: "Our God Whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. **But if not**, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods ..." (3:17-18).

How Daniel prayed

Daniel's prayer life, as recorded in 2:17-23 and 6:10-13, shows us that he prayed:

- United prayer – he joined with others to intercede.
- Definite prayer – he sought God specifically concerning the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.
- According to God's will – and God heard and answered.
- With praise and thanksgiving – for God's answers.
- Alone – there were times when he sought God alone.
- Fearlessly – he knew the danger of opening his windows towards Jerusalem and praying, but he still did so.
- Upon his knees – in humility and utter dependence on God for His help and intervention.
- Three times a day – regularly, as a priority.
- As he had done previously – he was neither intimidated by, nor frightened of, what man could do; he did not compromise in any way.

Prayer and prophecy (Daniel chapters 9, 10)

Daniel knew from Jeremiah's prophecy (Jer. 25:11; 29:10-14) that the Babylonian captivity would only last 70 years (see Dan. 9:2; it lasted from 606 to 536 BC). But Daniel did not just sit back, do nothing and wait for it to be accomplished. No, he fasted, prayed and entered into spiritual warfare through intercession so that the captivity was broken.

1. Daniel fasted and prayed (9:3)
2. He confessed his sins and the sins of his people (9:4-8). God has both promised judgement on sin, and forgiveness where there is repentance (see Leviticus 26).
3. He acknowledged that God was right and just in punishing the people for their sin (9:9-14).
4. He repented over their sins (9:15-16).
5. He pleaded for God's help and mercy, on the basis that they were God's people (9:17-19).

As a result of this intercession God sent His angel Gabriel to encourage him and tell him what was about to happen (9:20-27).

About five years later as Daniel was fasting and praying he had a vision (10:1-11). An angel of the Lord told Daniel that God had heard his prayer right from the beginning, but the (Satanic) prince over the kingdom of Persia had withstood him for 21 days. So Michael, one of God's chief angels, came to confront him (10:12-14). After this the angel returned to join Michael, and after they had defeated the prince of Persia he said that the prince of Greece would also oppose him (10:20 – 11:1). Daniel was involved in spiritual warfare in the heavenlies, but, as always, the ultimate victory belongs to the Lord and His people. Hallelujah!

The period of captivity broke the Israelites from the sin of idolatry – they never again have fallen, as a nation, into idolatry. Today Israel as a nation is, in practice, basically atheistic – that is, most Jews have very little, if any, time for the Jewish faith, even though they may follow Jewish customs. Most Jews are secular rather than religious, but at least they have not turned back to the worship of false gods.

Israel's idolatry began in the wilderness, after their deliverance out of Egypt, when the people persuaded Aaron to build a golden calf (Ex. 32:1-35). Their idolatry continued into the Promised Land because they disobeyed God and failed to destroy all the idolatrous people in the land as God had commanded and warned them (Deut. 9:1-5; 18:9-14; 30:15-20). The idolatry continued through the period of the judges, and off and on through the kings, but finished after the captivity was ended in answer to Daniel's prayers of repentance, confession and intercession.

As a nation we have turned to idolatry, especially to the god of materialism and the goddess of sexual immorality, together with false religions, the occult and new age. May we be spared a "Babylonian captivity" by the intercessions of "Daniels" throughout our land!

Results of Daniel's faithfulness and prayers

1. Daniel had a vision of the Lord (10:2-9; cf. Rev. 1:9-20).
2. He was delivered from the den of lions (6:21-22).
3. He received angelic assistance in his spiritual warfare (10:12-13, 20-21).
4. God was pleased with him and blessed and promoted him (6:3). Note that it is God who sets up kings and removes kings (2:21; Ps. 75:6-7). Every authority in the world is there by the permissive will of God and when He decides to raise up leaders or remove them (for example, in answer to the prayers of His people) then He will, and nothing and no-one can stop Him. God is supreme in the whole universe! (Rom. 13:1).
5. Daniel received revelations concerning the future (2:25-45). The head of gold was the Babylonian empire, the silver kingdom was Medo-Persia, the bronze kingdom was Greece, the iron kingdom was the Roman empire, and the stone was the Son of God together with the Kingdom of God. Daniel also received revelations concerning the end of the captivity (ch. 9, 10) and the end times (ch. 12).
6. Daniel was given the gift of interpretation of dreams, and the gifts of wisdom and understanding (1:17).
7. Daniel saw the end of the captivity and returned from exile, saw the rebuilding of the temple and wall around Jerusalem, together with the reformation under Ezra (Ezra 8:2; Neh. 10:6).
8. His righteousness and standing with God ranked with those of both Noah and Job (Ezek. 14:12-20).

May God raise up more "Daniels" in our nation today!

QUESTIONS

1. In what ways did Daniel honour God, and did God honour Daniel?
2. When should we pray alone and when should we seek out others to pray with us?
3. Must we be regular and systematic in our prayers as Daniel was (“three times a day”)? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such regularity?
4. How can a Christian effectively witness in a non-Christian environment (eg., at work, school, in a non-Christian home, etc)? What can we learn from Daniel’s example?
5. What would a “Daniel” do in our nation today? How would he live differently from the way we do?
6. What is the intercessor’s role in fulfilling prophecy?

14 The Intercessions of Abraham, Moses and Solomon

ABRAHAM (Genesis 18:17-33)

God was about to destroy the wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, but no-one knew this except God Himself. Because of his close relationship to God, God chose to reveal to Abraham what He was about to do. The Lord said “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do? ... No, for I have known him, that he will command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice” (v. 17, 19)

Oh to be so close to God, and in such a right relationship with Him, that He can reveal His secrets to us, in order that we might intercede! See Amos 3:7.

Abraham pleaded for God to spare the righteous people in the city of Sodom, and not to destroy them along with the wicked (v. 23). God heard Abraham’s plea and agreed not to destroy the city if there were even 10 righteous people there. But because there were less than 10 (and this was the number at which Abraham stopped, rather than God!), God instead brought Lot, his wife and two daughters out of the city before He destroyed it. Lot’s wife would have been spared had she not disobeyed and looked back to Sodom, so she was destroyed too (19:1-29). Thus the lives of only three people were spared.

Abraham’s intercession for Sodom shows:

1. His sense of justice (“Will you destroy the righteous with the wicked?”)
2. Humility (“I, who am but dust and ashes”)
3. Tenacity (“I will speak again”)
4. God’s preparedness to spare a whole city for the sake of ten righteous people in it.
5. God’s answer to Abraham’s basic request (“Will you indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked?”) God did, in fact, spare the lives of the only three who were obedient.
6. God’s ultimate judgement on persistent wickedness. The time may come when God says “Do not pray for these people, nor lift up cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercessions to Me, for I will not hear you” (Jer. 7:16; 14:11-12).

Abraham’s persistence in prayer reminds us of the way Jacob also wrestled with God and prevailed (Gen. 32:24-30). Perseverance in prayer is often very important. Jacob wrestled with God; Abraham pleaded with God for Sodom; Moses interceded for Israel; Hezekiah pleaded with God to spare his life (2 Kings 20:1-6). Jesus spent 40 days in the wilderness,

some nights in prayer, hours in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus also taught a parable to the effect that “men ought always to pray and not to faint” (Luke 18:1).

God longs to bless, and He promises blessing on obedience. He also promises punishment for disobedience, but forgiveness when there is repentance! (Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28).

MOSES, Intercessor for Israel

Exodus 17:8-13

Here we see Moses interceding for Israel, with the assistance of Aaron and Hur. As long as Moses interceded, Israel was successful in their battle against Amalek, but when Moses grew tired and ceased praying, then Amalek prevailed. As a result of his persistence in prayer, Israel finally won the battle. How easily do we tire of intercession? We need to persevere! We also need our Aarons and Hurs to support us in the battle! This is why prayer groups (even 2 or 3 people, Matthew 18:18-20) are so important.

Exodus 32 (see also Deuteronomy 9:6-29)

Israel’s sin, rebellion and rejection of God finally led them into idolatry, as the people persuaded Aaron to make them a golden calf (v. 1-6). God was so angry that He wanted to wipe out the whole nation except Moses (v. 7-10). But Moses pleaded with God on behalf of his people. He reminded God of His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; he reminded Him of the miraculous way He delivered them from Egypt. And the Lord “changed His mind” because of Moses’ intercession! (v. 11-14).

When Moses came down from the mountain he began to realise just how God felt! (v. 15-29). He again pleaded with God to spare Israel: “But now, if You will forgive their sin – and if not, blot me, I pray, out of Your book which You have written” (v. 32). What love he had for his people! Could we honestly pray like that when we pray for our nation? Or would we rather save our own skin, and let the rest be lost? God heard Moses’ prayer, and while He sent a plague on those who had sinned against Him, He spared the nation as a whole (v. 33-35; Ps. 106:23).

Numbers 11

The Israelites began to murmur against God and God was so angry that He began to destroy parts of their camp with fire until Moses intervened in prayer and the fire was halted (v. 1-3).

When the people again complained for lack of meat, God heard Moses’ cry and sent meat to the people, but He also again sent a plague amongst the people to punish those who had murmured against Him in this way (v. 4-35).

Notice that when Moses complained of the fact that he alone was burdened for Israel (v. 10-15), God told him to gather around him 70 elders and leaders of the people, and He would place the same burden and the same spirit upon them as was upon Moses, so that the burden of the people would be shared (v. 16-17). The result was that these elders began to prophesy to the people (v. 24-29). How we need to pray that God will pour out a spirit of intercession upon our land, especially on the leaders and elders in the Church, and that those with this burden will gather together and share the burden of intercession between them, and bring a prophetic word to our nation!

Numbers 14

Once again the Israelites complain, this time that their enemies in the Promised Land were too strong for them and they would have been better off left in Egypt. God tells Moses that he wants to wipe out the Israelites and start again with Moses and his descendants, but again Moses' intercession for his people prevails. Nevertheless none of the adults who left Egypt and saw God's miracles would enter the Promised Land except Joshua and Caleb, who alone believed God. Ten times the people had tested God (v. 22) and had not listened to His voice; now it was too late. Only their children would enter the land of promise (v. 28-35).

Numbers 21:4-9

Still Israel complains, and this time God sends poisonous snakes to bite them, so that many died. But when Moses intercedes for them God tells him to make a snake and set it on a pole, so that everyone who is bitten might look at it and be saved. In this we see the example of Christ on the Cross – Jesus, Who knew no sin, became sin for us so that we might look to Him and be saved. Again, Moses' intercession for his people brought about their salvation. Is not Moses, the intercessor for Israel, like our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, Who ever lives to make intercession for us? (Heb. 7:25).

Deuteronomy 9:22-29

Moses not only interceded, he also fasted. In times of crisis especially, as one pours out one's heart to God in earnest prayer, fasting naturally accompanies such intercession. Twice Moses spent 40 days fasting on Mount Sinai, as God gave him the Ten Commandments (Ex. 24:18; 34:28; Deut. 9:9, 25; 10:10). Several times he interceded for Israel without their specific repentance, and while God punished some, He spared Israel as a whole. God is a merciful God, not wanting any to perish, and He hears the prevailing prayers of intercessors as they pray for their people and nation. Hallelujah!

Note that Moses not only interceded – he also knew how to praise God too! Read Exodus 15:1-18. While intercession is important, so is praise and worship!

Notice too that the first time the Israelites complained (at Massah, Exodus 17:1-7), Moses simply asked God what to do and God told him; God miraculously provided water. But each time after that, God punished the people for murmuring, and only Moses' intercessions for them prevented much greater judgement coming upon them (that is, at Horeb, Ex. 32; Taberah, Num. 11:1-3; Kibroth, Num. 11:31-35; and Kadesh, Num. 13 and 14). They should have learned their lesson the first time! (and so should we!)

SOLOMON (2 Chronicles 6:12 – 7:22)

In essence, there are 10 sections to Solomon's intercession for his nation, in chapter 6. The 10 petitions are:

1. That if the people were obedient, then a king would sit on the throne of Israel forever (v. 14-17).
2. That God would hearken to (listen to and answer) the prayers and supplications made to Him (v. 18-21).
3. That justice would prevail in the land, God punishing the wicked and vindicating the righteous (v. 22-23).
4. That when Israel was defeated because of sin, God would deliver them if they repented (v. 24-25).
5. That when there was drought, God would send rain if they repented (v. 26-27).

6. That when there was famine, pestilence or disease, God would deliver and heal them if they repented (v. 28-31).
7. That when a foreigner turned to the Lord, God would hear his prayers also (v. 32-33).
8. That God would give them victory over their enemies (v. 34-35).
9. That when they were taken into captivity and bondage because of sin, God would deliver them if they repented (v. 36-39).
10. That God would hear their prayers, watch over them, and bless them (v. 40-42).

God's answer (chapter 7)

God's answer, in effect, was that He would do all that Solomon had asked! God even used the same words as Solomon, in His answer! (see especially v. 13-18).

As long as the people were obedient, God would bless and establish them. But if they turned to sin, and especially idolatry, God's judgement would come upon them. This has always been God's way:

- **blessing** where there is **obedience**,
- **judgement** (punishment) where there is **sin**, but
- **forgiveness** where there is **repentance**.

"If My people, who are called by My Name, will humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked way, then I will hear from Heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:14)

QUESTIONS

1. What effect can righteous people ("salt" and "light") have on a city or nation? (Refer to the section on Abraham).
2. Moses exercised power with God for his nation: Moses "changed God's mind" towards a nation by his intercessions. Can we do this? How?
3. Note the importance of repentance in both Solomon's prayer and God's answer. Can there be blessing and forgiveness if the Church and/or the nation fail to repent and turn to God?
4. What effect on a nation would there be if the Church ("My people") humble themselves, fast and pray, seek God's face and repent? (2 Chr. 7:14)
5. Why are small groups of people, meeting together for intercession, so important?
6. How do the following verses apply to this study: Genesis 6:3a (AV), Jeremiah 18:7-10 and 2 Peter 3:9b.

15 Jesus – Our Great Intercessor and Example

Jesus' life and ministry were saturated with prayer. Even though He was God incarnate, He knew the need to pray and spend time with His Father:

1. **During His baptism in water**, it was as He prayed that the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him (Luke 3:21-22).
2. **Prior to His public ministry**, as He was led by the Spirit to fast and pray for 40 days in the wilderness, and was tempted by the devil, no doubt He spent much time communing with His Father and seeking His will for His ministry (Luke 4:1-2). This was why He said "The Son can do nothing of His own accord, but only what He sees the Father doing ... I can do nothing on My own authority" (John 5:19, 20, 30). Jesus sought the will and authority of His Father before He spoke or acted – that was why He had such authority!

Likewise, He always prayed according to the will of God, and His prayers were always answered.

3. **Before choosing His disciples** Jesus spent all night in prayer (Luke 6:12-13).
4. **Jesus prayed with His disciples** and His example was such that as they saw Him praying they said “Lord, teach us to pray” (Luke 9:18; 11:1-4).
5. **Jesus prayed before He ministered and worked miracles** (Mark 1:35-42; 6:45-56). Jesus prayed very early in the morning; He prayed all night until the fourth watch (3-6 a.m.)
6. **In the midst of popularity and much ministry** Jesus still found time to draw aside to rest and pray, and wait on His Father (Luke 5:12-16). Rather than have a breakdown, Jesus withdrew to a quiet place to pray.
7. **When Jesus prayed** He was transfigured as the Spirit of the Lord shone through Him (Luke 9:28-36).
8. **Before His crucifixion** Jesus spent hours in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:36-46). In this time of crisis Jesus surrendered Himself into the hands of His Father, and as He prayed an angel appeared to Him and strengthened Him (Luke 22:43). Hence He counselled His followers to “Watch and pray so that you do not enter into temptation, for the spirit is willing [to follow and obey the Lord] but the flesh is weak” (Matt. 26:41). If the Son of God needed to pray, how much more do we! See also Hebrews 5:7-9.
9. **On the Cross** Jesus prayed the greatest of all prayers for His enemies: “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34), and the greatest of all prayers of consecration: “Father, I commit My Spirit into Your hands” (Luke 23:46).

The intercessions of Jesus

1. For the salvation of the lost

It should not be surprising to realise that the main theme of the intercessions of Jesus (Whose Name means “Saviour”) is for the salvation of the lost. He came to save us from our sins (Matt. 1:21) and this was His constant prayer.

2 Peter 3:9 says that the Lord is not willing that anyone should perish, but that everyone should come to repentance, and hence salvation. See also 1 Timothy 2:3-4.

Isaiah 53:12 prophesied that He would not only carry the sins of many, but would also make intercession for the transgressors (sinners). On the Cross Jesus prayed “Father, forgive them ...” (Luke 23:34).

Hebrews 7:25 says that “Jesus is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them”.

2. For the Church

The only prayer of Jesus that is recorded in any length is His intercession for the unity of the Church (John 17). We do not know what Jesus prayed most of the time, but John 17 is a beautiful prayer of the Head interceding for His Body, the Church.

3. For the individual believer

Jesus intercedes for us – for you and me! (Rom. 8:34). How wonderful to know that the eternal Son of God is praying for me! And as I pray, His Spirit intercedes for me according to the will of God (Rom. 8:26-27). His intercessions for us are illustrated by His prayer for Peter: “Simon, Simon, behold Satan demanded to have you (plural; that is, the disciples), that he might sift you (plural) like wheat, but I have prayed for you (singular; that is, Peter) that your faith may not fail. And when you (singular) have turned again, strengthen your brethren” (Luke 22:31-32).

Jesus also prayed for another Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, to come and be with us forever, after He had ascended to Heaven (John 14:16-17).

Thus we see Jesus’ concern for the individual Christian, as well as the Church as a whole.

4. The Lord’s prayer

This is an outline of the prayer which Jesus gave to His disciples when they asked Him to teach them to pray (Matt. 6:9-13; Luke 11:1-4).

Jesus and fasting

As has already been mentioned, Jesus fasted for 40 days in the wilderness prior to commencing His public ministry. While He did not directly command His followers to fast, He did say “When you fast ...” (Matt. 6:16-18), not “If you fast ...” He also said that after He ascended into Heaven, then His followers would fast (Matt. 9:14-16). He indicated, too, that some intercessions would only be effective if accompanied by fasting (Matt. 17:21).

QUESTIONS

1. Why do so many Christians pray so little?
2. Why was it necessary for the Son of God to seek His Father and pray?
3. Why should Christians fast from time to time? Is fasting essential or optional?
4. What was the secret and source of Jesus’ authority and power?
5. Jesus gave His disciples “The Lord’s Prayer”. Should it simply be recited, or how should it be used?
6. What specific things did Jesus pray for in John 17?

16 Paul and Intercession

Often we think of Paul as the great apostle, evangelist or teacher, but let us never forget that he was also a great intercessor. It may well have been that Paul’s salvation was, in part, due to the prayer of Stephen who, when he was being stoned to death in front of Paul, prayed “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge” (Acts 7:54-60). Paul is the only person we know of who heard this prayer and received this forgiveness.

Immediately after his conversion on the road to Damascus it appears that Paul spent three days in prayer and fasting, which culminated in him being saved, healed and filled with the Holy Spirit (Acts 9:9, 11). As a devout Jew Paul had no doubt been a praying man all his life, but when he found Christ he really learned how to pray! “I often say my prayers, but do I ever pray?” – this is a question which is well worthwhile pondering.

Paul was a man who often fasted and prayed (2 Cor. 6:4-5; 11:27). As a result of one such time of prayer and fasting he was called by God and set apart by the Christian leaders to be an apostle to the Church at large (Acts 13:2-3).

Indeed, as a result of his life being spent in dependence on God in prayer, and filled with the Holy Spirit, he constantly demonstrated the power of God in deliverance, healing, salvation and miracles, in answer to prayer.

No wonder, then, he spent so much time praying for those people he had led to Christ, and for the churches he had had the privilege of planting. In the first chapter of almost every one of his epistles, Paul prays for, and mentions his constant prayer for, the Christians in that city. Read Romans 1:7-12; 1 Corinthians 1:3-8; Ephesians 1:15-19; Philippians 1:3-11; Colossians 1:3-12; 1 Thessalonians 1:2-3; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 1:4-6 for some inspiring prayers! In these passages, notice the following:

1. **Paul's constant prayers.** Paul did not give up! "God is my witness ... that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers" (Rom. 1:9). "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers" (Eph. 1:16). This is real follow-up! Having brought people to Christ, or having ministered to them in other ways, Paul followed up the work with constant prayer.
2. **Paul's constant thanksgiving.** Paul not only prayed for those to whom he wrote – he also spent much time thanking God for every work of grace that had been done in their hearts: for their faith, all God's blessings, for their love for the saints, and so on. Paul prayed with a heart full of gratitude for all that God had already done.
3. **Paul's constant desire.** Paul's great desire was that Christians would go on in God, grow in Christ and in all His fullness. Note his words: "that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you" (Rom. 1:11); "so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift" (1 Cor. 1:7); "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ ... may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened" (Eph. 1:17-18); "that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment ... filled with the fruit of righteousness" (Phil. 1:9); "that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding ... increasing in the knowledge of God. May you be strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might" (Col. 1:9-11).

Wouldn't you like to be on the receiving end of Paul's prayers?

Paul's desire was that every Christian become mature in Christ – a charismatic (gifted), Spirit-empowered and Spirit-filled believer, with the knowledge of God's will, discernment, wisdom and revelation. To this end he constantly prayed!

The gifts of the Spirit and intercession

In 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 Paul lists nine gifts or manifestations of the Holy Spirit which can all be used in intercession – as well as at other times, such as in evangelism, counselling and other ministry.

1. **Wisdom.** In many situations it is not easy to know how to pray – only God knows all things, and only God has all wisdom. Hence, as we wait upon God we need to wait for a revelation of divine wisdom to know how to pray and how to act in a given situation.
2. **Knowledge.** Closely related to wisdom is knowledge. There are many things and many situations which we are unaware of in the natural, and yet which involve things for which

God may desire us to pray. Through the gift of knowledge God can reveal to us what to pray for.

3. **Faith.** “Without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb. 11:6) so if we are to pray successfully we must have faith. If God has spoken to our hearts and we have a word from God upon which to base our faith, then the gift of faith will enable us to lay hold of God for the seemingly impossible – and see God answer! Normal, everyday faith may be supplemented by a supernatural gift of faith, beyond that which we normally have.
4. **Healing.** Usually we think of healing only in physical terms, and yet healing or wholeness really applies to our wellbeing in every area of our lives. In 2 Chronicles 7:14 God promises that if we will fulfill His conditions then He will “heal our land (nation)” – and how our nation needs healing! – spiritually, morally, socially, etc. Truly there are many ailments and diseases in our nation that need God’s healing touch, and for this we need to pray.
5. **Miracles.** There are many problems for which there is no human solution, but, praise God, with Him nothing is impossible. Why should we only believe God for what we can see as humanly possible? Let us, rather, take hold of God in intercession and trust Him to do the “impossible” – to miraculously answer prayer if need be. Let us not limit God!
6. **Prophecy.** As we intercede God may speak to us prophetically – this may be for guidance or direction from God, a warning or a promise, a word of encouragement, etc. Let us not talk so much when we pray that we fail to listen to what God has to say to us! Much of our praying might be unnecessary if we first listened to what God said and then prayed accordingly!
7. **Discernment.** In many situations that we pray for, it is not easy to really discern the motives or spirits behind various possibilities. What is of God, and what is of human origin, or of the devil? Is this really good and right, or is it partly evil and wrong? In order to pray for that which is right and according to God’s will, and to pray effectively against that which is not of God, the gift of discernment is necessary.
8. **Tongues.** The gift of tongues may be used as an intercessory cry to God – praying in the Spirit – when we do not know how to pray otherwise (see Romans 8:26-27).
9. **Interpretation.** The gift of interpretation, together with the gift of tongues, may bring further revelation from God as to how He is leading us in our intercession.

Praise God that in every situation we are not limited to human resources, but God will supply us with every gift and manifestation of the Spirit that we need, if we will only ask Him in faith, and wait on Him to do so. Do we ask? Do we ask in faith? Do we wait for the answer?

Intercession for a nation

Paul prayed for the sick, the demon-possessed, the lost; for his converts, the churches, and also for nations. In 1 Timothy 2:1-4 he sums this up by saying “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for all men; for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life, Godly and respectful in every way. This is good, and it is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, Who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth”.

A quiet, peaceful, Godly, respectable way of life in a nation is good and acceptable in God’s sight. And not only God knows that this will never come about unless we intercede!

QUESTIONS

1. Can a person really have an effective spiritual ministry without also being a person of prayer?
2. "I often say my prayers, but do I really pray?" What is the difference between "saying prayers" and "really praying"?
3. What was Paul's constant desire for all Christians?
4. Why do we not spend more time waiting on God and listening to God during times of prayer?
5. To what extent should we expect the gifts of the Spirit to be exercised during times of intercession? How can we encourage their use?
6. What sort of national way of life does God desire, and how can we help to bring this about?

17 The Call to Intercession

Please read 1 Timothy 2:1-4

Verse 1:

"First of all" Paul's use of these words does not necessarily mean that whenever we pray the first thing we must pray for is for all people, especially those who are in authority. However, it does indicate the importance he places on such prayer, and is especially needed by many Christians who spend most of their time praying for themselves and their own immediate needs.

God, in these days, is especially speaking to Christians about the importance of interceding for those in authority.

"I urge" To add emphasis to what he is about to say, Paul urges Timothy (and all other readers of his letter) to pray in this way.

"supplications" To supplicate is to pray alongside someone for their particular needs. It also includes asking God for our own needs to be met.

"prayers" These are prayers in general.

"intercessions" To intercede is to go to God in prayer on behalf of some other person; it is to intervene on their behalf. Sometimes it may even involve praying against their will but according to God's will!

"thanksgivings" Let us never forget to thank God for all the prayers He has answered, and to thank Him for all those people in authority who use that authority in a Godly, just and right way. Praise God for good leadership, where that exists, and pray for it where it doesn't!

"be made for (or on behalf of)" The important thing about intercession is that often when we pray in this way we are praying for someone who cannot, or who will not, pray for themselves. For example, most of our leaders are not born again Christians and therefore do not seek God for His will and guidance in the many decisions they are called upon to make. Consequently, if we are to see God's "will be done on earth as it is in Heaven" (Matt. 6:10), in our nation, then those of us who are Christians have the responsibility to come to

God on their behalf, praying that they will be given wisdom to make the right decisions, and the courage to stand up for what is right.

“all men” Christians, and non-Christians, leaders and people alike. We need to uphold our brothers and sisters in Christ, in prayer, and we also need to intercede for the lost – primarily for their salvation, but also for their other needs. We need to uphold our leaders in prayer, that they will rule righteously and justly, in the fear of the Lord. We also need to pray for the people of our nation that they will respond in the right way to good leadership.

Verse 2:

“kings” Those who are in supreme authority: in our nation, the Queen, her representative the Governor General, and the Prime Minister as our elected leader. No matter what we may think of them personally, it is our responsibility and privilege to pray for them.

“all who are in authority” As well as the supreme leaders in our nation, we should also pray for all who are in authority: Members of Parliament, Cabinet, judges, juries, magistrates, police, city councillors, Church leaders, employers in the labour force, and parents in the home. A tremendous responsibility rests on these people; they need our prayers, encouragement and support in all that which is good and proper.

“that we may lead a quiet, peaceable, Godly and respectable (honest, respectful) life in every way”. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34).

Verse 3:

“This is good” This manner of praying and this manner of living is good both to us and to God. It is God’s desire that we lead Godly lives in this way. Constant disruption, rebellion, anarchy, strikes, disturbances, injustice, violence, immorality, wars, etc., are not God’s ultimate desire or plan for any nation. These things are the evil fruit of rebellion against God and God’s laws.

“it is acceptable in God’s sight” God’s desire for a nation and its leaders are outlined in Romans 13:1-7, Ephesians 5:21 – 6:9 and 1 Peter 2:13-17. In the Church, God’s direction to the leaders is “Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians (overseers), to feed the Church of the Lord which He obtained with His own blood” (Acts 20:28).

Verse 4:

“God desires all men to be saved” (2 Peter 3:9; John 3:16). The unsaved cannot or will not pray for themselves; the intercessor must pray for them. Only Christians can intercede at the throne of grace, therefore we must! What a responsibility! What a privilege!

Evangelism is the ultimate answer to all the world’s needs and problems. As people’s lives are reconciled to God and to one another, as people are transformed by the power of Christ, so the other needs and problems can be dealt with and overcome. Of course, not everyone will respond to Christ’s call to “Follow Me”, but those who do, as they are built together into the Body of Christ and into the Kingdom of God, they will find the answer to those needs.

“and come to the knowledge of the truth” It is the Church’s responsibility to proclaim the truth as it is contained in God’s Word and revealed by God’s Spirit. It is the Government’s responsibility to uphold God’s laws as the standard of righteousness in the nation. It is the

nation's responsibility to obey. God will judge the Church, the Government and the nation if they fail to do so. See 1 Peter 4:17; Leviticus 26; 2 Chronicles 7:12-22.

God, Who rules over all, Who is the King of kings and Lord of lords, has ultimate authority over the whole universe. We are all ultimately accountable to Him. "He removes kings and sets up kings" (Dan. 2:21). As Christians – as intercessors – it is our task to work with God in seeing His perfect will being done here on earth as it is in Heaven. Let us pray "Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven".

QUESTIONS

1. How important is it that the Church regularly intercedes for all those people who are in authority? Why is it important?
2. What is the difference between supplication and intercession?
3. To what extent can we, by our prayers, intervene on behalf of someone who cannot or will not pray for themselves?
4. What should be some of the major things for which we pray, when praying for our leaders?
5. God desires (a) good leadership and government; (b) that everyone should be saved. In what ways is preaching the Gospel facilitated by good government rather than bad?
6. If it is prophesied in the Bible that things are going to get worse and worse, what is the point of interceding for nations?

18 Spiritual Warfare for a Nation

The ultimate authority, in Heaven, on earth, and even over things under the earth, is the Lord Himself (Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2:9-11).

Hence "There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God" (see Rom. 13:1-7; Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17).

Daniel 2:21 says "He (God) removes kings and sets up kings". Thus, when God calls Christians to intercede "for kings and all who are in high positions", we are engaging in spiritual warfare against the powers of darkness and evil principalities on behalf of our leaders and nation (see 1 Tim. 2:1-4).

Should Christians be involved in politics?

To some people, "politics" is a dirty word. Some feel that Christians should not be involved in political issues – "politics is 'worldly' and Christians should be involved in spiritual things".

But if Christians are to be the "salt of the earth" and the "light of the world" (Matt. 5:13-16) then surely they should do all they can to influence the world towards those things which are good and Godly – and this involves not only prayer but other practical ways as well. It is our responsibility, as Christians, to warn the ungodly of God's coming judgement if they do not repent and turn to God (Ezek. 33:1-9).

While people may choose to disobey and break the laws of the land, this is no reason whatever for lowering the standards. The laws of our land should be based on the highest possible principles, namely those of God's Law. People must know what God requires of them, and of God's judgement (often through those He has set in authority in the land) on those who disobey.

National prosperity

National prosperity – physical, economic, racial, moral and spiritual – depends on righteousness. “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people” (Prov. 14:34). “When there is moral rot within a nation, its government topples easily, but with honest, sensible leaders there is stability” (Prov. 28:2 TLB). “When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice, but when the wicked rule, the people groan” (Prov. 29:2).

Divine judgement will come upon a nation to the degree to which it turns from God and His ways. This judgement can only be averted by national repentance. If the nation refuses to repent then the Godly may be saved out of it (although often they have to suffer with their fellow countrymen), but judgement will come, often in the form of an enemy who is victorious over them, or through “natural disasters”. See 2 Chronicles 7:12-18; Genesis 18:17-33; Jonah 3:1-10; Ezekiel 22:23-31.

The problem

The problem is that God desires the very best possible for every nation, but what He really wants, and what He allows, are often very different. To a very large extent we get the government and leaders we deserve, especially if we live in a democracy. There is a divine law that a person (or nation) will reap what they sow (Gal. 6:7-8).

Our task as Christians

Our task as Christians is to seek to turn our nation back to God through:

1. **Evangelism:** Ultimately people’s hearts need to be transformed by the power of God.
2. **Teaching:** We need to proclaim the truths of God’s Word, His standards and His laws.
3. **Godly leadership:** We need to pray for the salvation of our leaders; for Godly leaders who will uphold God’s laws in our land. Of course, it goes without saying that the leadership in the Church should be of the highest possible standard!
4. **Intercession:** We need to identify with the sins of the nation, repent over them, confess them to God by name, and ask for His forgiveness and cleansing. See, for example, Nehemiah chapters 9 and 10.

Will we get the government and blessings God really wants us to have, or will we get what we deserve?

How to pray non-politically

The Church cannot take sides politically. As individuals, God gives us a choice as to who we vote for, although we should, of course, ask Him! Thus, in public intercession we can forget party politics as such. What we need to do is to pray in the Kingdom of God – the Kingdom of God needs to rule in the midst of His enemies (Ps. 110:2). An individual Christian can enter into politics, but the Church cannot – it should stand for Biblical principles, irrespective of which party or parties support them.

Thus, for intercessors, it is not a matter of one party versus another, left wing versus right wing, black versus white, etc., but rather, the Kingdom of God versus the kingdom of darkness. We are not pro- or anti- anyone. “God so loved the (whole) world ...” (John 3:16). Instead we must pray according to the character of God and His revealed will.

For example, God is a God of justice, freedom (not oppression; He sets people free) and righteousness. He is impartial, not racist (“Here there cannot be Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man ...” Colossians 3:11). God is not

prejudiced; He is against greed, laziness, selfishness, tyranny. He is deeply concerned for the needs of the poor, the down-trodden and the weak. If we keep these things in mind as we pray, then we can pray according to His will, for the establishment of His Kingdom, rather than be involved in party politics as such. In fact, “party spirit” is listed as one of the works of the flesh in Galatians 5:20.

We are called to proclaim the Truth, to teach God’s Word, to exhort people to be obedient to God and His laws, and to warn people of the consequences of disobedience.

How should we pray?

Pray that God will over-rule in the government, and for His choice of leadership, so that our nation will be upheld in righteousness.

Pray for individual Members of Parliament, the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Pray for those Members of Parliament who are already Christians, that they will seek God’s guidance and wisdom in all that they do, that they will uphold Godly standards, and be an influence for what is right, good and best for our people.

Pray for those who are not Christians, that they will be saved, or, if they continue to act in ways which are seriously contrary to God’s desires and laws, that they will be replaced.

Pray for leaders who will rule justly, in the fear of God (2 Sam. 23:3-4).

QUESTIONS

1. What should be the Christian’s attitude to the laws of the land?
2. What should be our attitude to the law when the law is:
 - (a) far more liberal than God’s laws?
 - (b) contrary to God’s law?
3. How deeply should Christians be involved in politics?
4. Is judgement of our land inevitable? If not, what can we do to prevent it?
5. What can we do to help bring our nation to a place of repentance before God?
6. In what ways is communism different from ordinary political parties?

19 The Cure for the Curse of Leprosy

All references are to 2 Kings 5 unless otherwise stated.

The problem

Naaman was commander of the Syrian army, a mighty man of valour, victorious in battle, in favour with the king, “but he was a leper” (v. 1). The curse of leprosy had begun to show on his body – a disease so terrible and contagious that the Law of Moses said that lepers had to be isolated from all other healthy people (Lev. 13:45-46).

The world we live in today is full of many deadly, contagious “diseases” similar to the sins for which God commanded the Israelites to wipe out all the heathen nations in the Promised Land (Ex. 23:20-33; 34:11-16). There is a great sickness in the land and in the world – spiritually, morally, racially, socially and so on.

Ignorance

We see in this story of Naaman, three different kinds of ignorance:

- 1. Ignorance of the problem.** No doubt when Naaman first discovered the white leprosy spots on his body he would have tried to hide them, hoping they would go away, or not be leprosy after all. Eventually his wife and her servant also found out about the problem, but most other people would have been ignorant of it. Many people including, tragically, many Christians, are largely ignorant of the colossal problems facing the world around them. Some are deliberately ignorant – they do not want to know, they bury their heads in the sand hoping they will go away, or that they are not really true. Others, apathetically, have not troubled to find out. Others are so spiritually blind that they cannot see them. But they are there, and they are growing and they are spreading. Hosea 4:6 says “My people are destroyed through lack of knowledge”. We need to be informed – not in order to cause fear, panic or depression, or as an intellectual exercise – but in order that we might do something: intercede, and seek God as to what we should be doing in the situation. If we do not know there is a battle on, we are not likely to win it!
- 2. Ignorance of the answer.** Naaman knew the problem, so did his wife. But only the servant girl knew the answer – a man of God in Samaria who knew how he could be healed! (v. 2-3). Naaman did not know the power of God that was available to meet him in this time of crisis. We need not only to know the problems, but even more important, to know the answers!
- 3. Ignorance of the ways of God.** When the King of Syria heard the problem and how it could be solved, in fleshly haste and with carnal thinking he wrote a letter to the King of Israel asking him to heal Naaman! (v. 4-6). His ignorance of the ways of God, and his haste to tackle the problem in the flesh, almost led to warfare with the King of Israel! (v. 7) How similar this is to King Saul’s desire to clothe David with physical armour in order for him to fight the giant Goliath – a fight which was primarily spiritual, not physical (1 Sam. 17:38-39, 45-47). Knowing the answer in general terms is not sufficient – we need to know God’s ways and strategy in any given situation. Only He has the wisdom and knowledge to meet every situation perfectly (Is. 55:8-9).

The problem of the flesh (v. 8-13)

Naaman, like most of us, had real problems in doing things God’s way instead of our own way. As so often happens, his ideas of how God should act got in the way.

- 1. Pride.** Elisha did not even come out to talk to Naaman – he simply sent a messenger to tell him what to do! Prayer is humbling! To “pray” literally means to beg, beseech, to plead with – it is the inferior person coming to the superior (the Almighty One). We cannot dictate to God – our Lord tells us what to do, no matter how different it may be from our own fleshly, worldly ideas!
- 2. Looking for alternative ways.** Why could not Elisha have come himself and called on the Lord and waved his hand over the leprosy and healed him? Why could he not wash in the rivers of Damascus? Why Jordan? Why? Because God said so! God’s ways are not our ways, so which ways will we choose? Our ways, which will end up in frustration (cf. 1 Chronicles chapters 13 to 15) or God’s ways which lead to success?
- 3. Wanting to do something great.** Had Elisha told Naaman to do something very difficult in order to be healed he would have surely tried to do it, but dip seven times in a river? It was too simple! When will we ever learn that it is not by our might, nor by our

power, but by God's Spirit that our needs are met and our battles are won? We do not have to try to be great for God; all God wants is our obedience to His commands. It is God Who does the miracle as we obey. Then to Him will go the glory (2 Cor. 4:7).

The answer: faith and works (obedience)

Seven times Naaman dipped himself in the water and as he rose after the seventh time he was healed (v. 14).

Faith and works (obedience) are together so important. Intercession requires faith: God will also require us to do something as well (an act of obedience). In Mark 16:16 Jesus said "He who believes (exercises faith) and is baptised (acts in obedience) will be saved".

Persistence

Seven times Naaman dipped, six times nothing happened. Then, when God's time was fulfilled and His command obeyed, the answer came.

"Though the vision tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come, it will not lie" (Hab. 2:3). See also Exodus 23:29-30. God did not immediately drive all the heathen out before Israel because if He did the land would have become desolate and overrun with wild animals. Instead His purpose was to drive them out little by little until the Israelites had increased to fill the land and possess it. If God was to do immediately all that we asked, or all that He intended to do ultimately, we would not be able to handle it, and our state would be worse than it is now. God will prepare "new wineskins" first before He pours out the new wine in all its fulness, lest it become spilled and wasted. God has His time – pray for it, work towards it, but also wait for it!

The purpose (v. 15-19a)

The ultimate purpose is two-fold: (a) to bring glory to God, and (b) to turn people to the Lord. "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel ... Henceforth your servant will not ... sacrifice to any god but the Lord" (v. 15, 17).

The son of Gehazi (v. 19-27)

Gehazi does not appear to have been the least concerned with either Naaman's problem or his healing – apathy and selfishness were the sins which led him to seek things for himself rather than rejoice in God's miraculous answer. As a result of his sin, God judged him, and the problem of Naaman (the sickness of leprosy) haunted him and his descendents for ever, until the last of his descendents died.

What a solemn warning to all Christians: if, in our apathy and selfishness, we are only concerned for ourselves and not for the desperate and needy world around us, that is dying in its sins, then we will suffer with those around us. God "sends the rain on the just and the unjust" (Matt. 5:45), and if we Christians do not have a Godly influence on the world; if, out of apathy, selfishness or ignorance, we fail to intercede and see the world changed by the power of God, then we will suffer with those around us.

By the grace of God, let us not be ignorant of the needs and problems in the world, but let us seek God for His answers, let us pray, let us act in obedience, let us be persistent, let us see the glory and power of God again be demonstrated in the earth.

Let not the sin of Gehazi be our sin!

QUESTIONS

1. What will happen if we try to exercise faith (eg., pray) without works (acting in obedience), or try to act without faith? (James 2:14-26).
2. What are some of the problems in the world around us of which many Christians seem to be ignorant?
3. Why do large sections of the Church not really intercede over the problems of the world? What is the answer to ignorance, apathy and unbelief?
4. How do we know when we are thinking "God's ways" and "His thoughts" rather than simply our own?
5. We all lapse back into fleshly (carnal) ways of thinking and acting. How can we overcome this?
6. How do we find the balance between trying to do great things for God, and humbly allowing God to use us to do great things?

20 Jonah – the Reluctant Intercessor

[All references are to the book of Jonah unless otherwise stated]

1:1 The name "Jonah" means "dove". While the dove is a symbol of peace, the Holy Spirit and blessing, Jonah was very reluctant to see God's blessing and peace come upon the people of Nineveh - people whom Israel both despised and feared.

1:2 The role of prophetic intercession. Jonah's message was one of judgement on a wicked city. Is there too much love, blessing, prosperity and healing being taught in our churches today, and not enough warning of God's judgement if we fail to obey Him? Sometimes people say "God loves you just as you are", but does He? He hates the sinful way we are!

1:3 Jonah was told to do one thing, but did the opposite. He was to pray, warn (through prophetic proclamation) and bring salvation, but he did something else. Jonah did not want to hear what God wanted to say. How often do we know what God wants us to do, but waste our time and effort doing something else instead?

The ships of Tarshish and the city of Nineveh (in Assyria) were in opposite directions from Israel! One was in the Mediterranean sea to the west and the other was on land to the east. Jonah sought to flee in the opposite direction to the one in which God told him to go.

He fled to Tarshish, away from the presence of the Lord. If you disobey, you lose the presence of the Lord.

Jonah "went down", "found a ship" (which speaks of self-effort), "paid his fare", and went "away from the presence of the Lord". What a tragedy for one of the Lord's prophets!

1:4 God's displeasure at Christian's sin can affect other people. If we fail to intercede, witness, etc., then non-Christians are affected. Judgement will come if we fail to pray, intercede, warn and preach God's Word of truth.

1:5 Non-Christians can only "pray to their gods" and do things they hope will save them, because they don't know the one true God who gives salvation as a gift.

Jonah was "fast asleep" - like some Christians or some churches, perhaps?

1:6 Even an unbeliever thought, hoped and suggested that perhaps Jonah's God might be able to help.

1:7-8 The sailors knew the disaster arose because of sin, and God allowed the lot to fall to (guilty) Jonah. God exposed his sin, but Jonah still had to confess it!

1:9-10 "I worship the Lord", Jonah said, and yet he was fleeing from God, away from God, in a state of rebellion and therefore sin!

1:11-16 Sin requires sacrifice (death); rowing hard (works) was not an alternative! After the miracle of the storm ceasing, the men feared the Lord, offered sacrifices to Him and made vows.

1:17 Meanwhile, the Lord "prepared a large fish" to save Jonah. God is merciful and made a way of escape (cf. Jesus' death for us: three days and three nights in the bowels of the earth, Matt. 12:38-41). Grace is receiving what we don't deserve; mercy is not receiving what we do deserve!

2:1-9 Many people call on the Lord in times of distress, but how few praise and worship Him, give Him thanks, confess or wait on Him when things are going all right? Like the 10 lepers Jesus healed (Luke 17:11-19) - only one (a Samaritan "foreigner") came back to thank Him, and he was additionally blessed by being made "whole" (not just physically healed, but made totally whole because he returned to give thanks to the Lord).

2:2a, 7a Jonah's prayer is hardly one of deep repentance. Out of distress, as his life was ebbing away, he remembered the Lord! At least he renewed his vows to God and made the right confession (2:9)

2:10 Note that the fish obeyed God, even if Jonah didn't!

3:1-3 God's mercy - to Jonah and to Nineveh. God speaks a second time and repeats His original call (1:2). This time Jonah obeyed.

3:4 Forty, in Scripture, often indicates a period of testing - would the people of Nineveh repent and be forgiven, or would they refuse and be destroyed? Sadly, Jonah wanted judgement, not mercy, for the Ninevites. Yet he was called to be an intercessor and prophet to them.

3:5-9 The people believed God, fasted and repented (as shown by their sackcloth and ashes, turning from their evil ways and crying mightily to God).

3:10 When God saw their repentance He turned from His threatened judgement. (Note that it is not very clear whether Jonah's words were **all** that God had told him to say, 3:2)

4:1-5 Jonah knew God's mercy and didn't want Nineveh to be saved. How cold was his heart towards "the wicked" - he wanted judgement for them, not salvation (cf. chapter 2 where he wanted mercy for himself!) Jonah would rather die than see God's mercy extended to the heathen! He even sat in the shade waiting to see what God would do, hoping God's judgement would come on the city.

4:6-11 God showed Jonah his utter selfishness and dislike of people: 120,000 people who God cared for, but who the "prophet" Jonah wanted to see wiped out. Job was more concerned at the death of a plant than the lives of 120,000 people. How similar this is to some people who are more concerned about the dying out of various species of animals and birds than they are for human misery and death, including abortion!

We need God's mercy, love and compassion for people. Like Jonah, we are called to intercede, prophesy (proclaim God's word), seek to turn people to repentance and forgiveness.

The world today needs:

the prophetic word + love/compassion + desire to see people repent and be saved

This will bring revival to a city or nation.

Jeremiah 29:7 says "Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you ... and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare". It is interesting that God said this to the Israelites when they were in captivity in Babylon. They were to pray for the welfare of the people they despised!

QUESTIONS

1. Do you think that what Jonah said in chapter 3, verse 4, was all that God told him to say, or was it merely the part Jonah wanted them to hear?
2. In what ways are Christians reluctant, like Jonah, to be intercessors and prophets?
3. Are our prayer lives mostly cries for help, with very little thanks, praise and confession?
4. What can we do if our hearts are cold and hard, and we despise other people who are not Christians?
5. Why are some people more concerned about rare animals and plants than they are about people's lives and salvation?
6. In what ways are some Christians and some churches like Jonah?

21 War – and Peace!

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth ... and God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good" (Gen. 1:1, 31). However, as we all know, everything did not remain "very good".

War in Heaven

Isaiah 14:12-15, Ezekiel 28:12-17 and Revelation 12:1-12 indicate that Lucifer, one of the archangels which God had created, led a rebellion against the Lord and sought to make himself equal to God. As a result of this sin and rebellion, God cast him and his followers out of Heaven, onto the earth.

Deception on Earth

Ever since Lucifer (Satan) came down to earth he has constantly sought to oppose God and all that He does, and to lead people away from God. In Genesis 3:1-13 we read that Satan deceived Eve, and led Adam into sin and disobedience to God, as Adam and Eve (like Satan before them) tried to make themselves equal to God (v. 5). Notice that God told Adam not to eat of the tree (2:16-17); it was Adam who in turn told Eve. Thus Eve was deceived by Satan, while Adam knowingly and deliberately yielded to sin. The punishment for Adam and Eve was the same as for Satan when he rebelled - they were cast out from the presence of God.

The coming of the Messiah announced

As a result of Satan's deception, God said to Satan "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed (Christ). He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Gen. 3:15). Through the "Seed of woman" (Jesus Christ) God said He would bring about the crushing of Satan's head and his ultimate downfall. Note that the Messiah, the anointed Saviour, was to be the "Seed of woman", not man. This is the first reference to the virgin birth.

"He (Christ) shall bruise your head". Christ crushed the head of Satan at Calvary and stripped him of all his authority (Col. 2:13-15). "You (Satan) shall bruise His heel" - throughout the Old Testament Satan constantly sought to wipe out or corrupt the Messianic line through which the Saviour would be born and through Whom salvation would come, right up to the crucifixion when Jesus' heel (His lowest part; that is, His physical body) was put to death. But, praise God, Satan did not succeed! When Satan thought he had won, he had in fact just lost! God is always victorious! Hallelujah! Jesus' death brought us life!

War declared on earth

Ever since the fall of man, and God's announced plan of redemption, Satan has tried to frustrate God's plan and destroy His people - right down to the Church today! Satan has declared war on earth!

Satan, together with one third of the angels (fallen angels), is behind all that is evil in the world's systems - behind sin and evil of every kind. His aim is to enslave, to steal, to kill and to destroy (John 10:10), to oppose God (hence the name "anti-Christ"), and His people.

However, God has an answer! Through the Church, the wisdom and power of God will be manifested to the world. Through Spirit-filled Christians engaging in **spiritual warfare through intercession** in the Spirit, the ultimate victory of good over evil, of the Lord and His people over all the powers of darkness is certain! Hallelujah! Jesus said "I will build My Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18). Praise the Lord!

The Battle of the Ages

The "Battle of the Ages" has been waged both in the heavenlies and on the earth ever since Satan and his followers rebelled against God. Throughout cosmic history we see a seven-fold rebellion and attack of Satan as he declares war on:

1. God (the rebellion in Heaven)
2. The human race (Adam and Eve; at Babel; and through the flood)
3. Certain key men to whom the promise of the Messiah was given (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, David)
4. The nation of Israel (and Judah) in Old Testament times.
5. Jesus Christ, the Messiah and Saviour of the world.
6. The nation of Israel today.
7. The Church (the saints) throughout Church history.

Satan's attempts to frustrate God's plan

After the fall of Adam and Eve, and God's promise of the Messiah, we see Satan's attempts to frustrate God's plan as follows:

1. **Through Cain killing Abel** and then being cast away. But Eve then bore Seth, and it was through Seth that the Messiah was born (Gen. 4:1-16, 25-26).

2. **Through the pollution of the human race** prior to the Flood (Gen. 6:1-8). “Giants” (v. 4) = Nephilim = fallen ones (probably fallen angels). At this time the (godly) “sons of God” began to intermarry with the (ungodly) “daughters of men” and wickedness polluted the earth. But God found one righteous man, Noah, and through him and his family the human race survived the Flood, even though God destroyed the rest of the world. Indeed, God would have destroyed all of mankind except that He had promised Adam and Eve that through them would be born a Messiah or Saviour Who would crush Satan’s head.
3. **Through the rebellion at Babel** when people tried to repeat what Satan had unsuccessfully tried to do earlier, namely ascend into Heaven and become equal to God. But God confused their language and dispersed the people (Gen. 11:1-9).
4. **Through Sarah’s barrenness.** God promised that through Abraham and his seed the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). Since Sarah was barren, Abraham had a child by her servant, but God said that it would be through Sarah that the Messiah would come (Gen. 16:1-15; 17:15-21). Then, at the age of 90, Sarah conceived and bore Isaac. God promised that Abraham’s descendants would be blessed through Isaac. When God then asked Abraham to sacrifice His only son Isaac, Abraham believed God - that if necessary God would raise him from the dead, in order to fulfill His promise (Gen. 22:1-18; Heb. 11:17-19).
5. **Through Rebekah’s barrenness.** Isaac married Rebekah but she also was barren. After God caused her to conceive she bore twins (Esau and Jacob) and God said that the promise would be fulfilled through the younger twin, Jacob (Gen. 28:13-14). Jacob obtained the birthright by cunning, because he really wanted it, while his older brother Esau despised it.
6. **Through Leah’s barrenness.** Jacob married Leah, but she too was barren, at least for 7 years; later she bore Judah (Gen. 29:31-35). Jacob’s name, which means “one who supplants”, was changed to Israel, “one who rules with God”, and God renewed His promise that the Messiah would be born through his line (Gen. 35:10-12). Jesus was to be the “Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev. 5:5).
7. **Through famine and possible starvation.** It was only because of Joseph (Judah’s brother) that famine and starvation were averted, and Judah and his family were kept from starvation (Gen. 41, 42). Even then, twice Joseph’s life was threatened, once at the hands of his jealous brothers, and once in Potiphar’s prison.
8. **Through Pharaoh’s killing of all male Israelite babies** (Ex. 1:8-22). God saved Moses and through him delivered the Israelites out of the hands of the Egyptians and protected them through the wilderness, even though God was tempted to wipe them out because of their continual sin, idolatry and rebellion (Num. 14:1-38). Satan persuaded the Israelites to spare the lives of some of the heathen people in the Promised Land, to compromise and, later, to intermarry with them.
9. **Through Goliath’s attempts on David’s life.** Both Goliath and his four brothers (1 Sam. 17; 2 Sam. 21:15-22; 1 Chr. 20:4-8) tried to destroy David, but it was to be through David and his son Solomon that God’s promise was to be fulfilled (2 Sam. 7:12-17). Twice also, king Saul tried to spear David (1 Sam. 18:10-11) and he was hunted by Saul for quite some time after it became obvious that David would replace Saul as king. But God preserved David through all this. Later, in 2 Kings 11:1-3 Athaliah attempted to kill all the royal seed, but Joash escaped.
10. **Through a confederation of armies** which tried to destroy King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah (2 Chr. 20). Remember that it was through Judah that the Messiah was to be born.

11. **Through King Ahasuerus' plan to destroy the entire Jewish race.** Wicked Haman persuaded Ahasuerus to destroy the Jews, but God placed Esther, a Jewess who became queen, in the palace and in a place of favour with the king, in order to frustrate this planned annihilation and fulfill His promise (Esther 8).

12. **Through King Nebuchadnezzar.** Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, destroyed the Temple and took many of the people into captivity in Babylon, during the days of Daniel (Dan. 1). But after 70 years, in answer to Daniel's intercessions, and the victory was won through spiritual warfare in the heavenlies (Dan. 9, 10), the people were released. Under Cyrus, king of Persia, they were permitted to go back and rebuild the Temple and walls around Jerusalem. About 480 years later, however, the Jews again came under foreign domination, this time by the Romans. But throughout it all, God preserved the Jewish people and the Messianic line in order to fulfill His promises.

QUESTIONS

1. Satan (Lucifer) has led two rebellions: one in Heaven and one on earth. What was the nature or basis of these two rebellions? What is Satan trying to achieve in the world today?
2. "Eve was deceived by Satan; Adam sinned". What was the difference between Eve's deception and Adam's sin?
3. What is the significance of the fact that God said that the Messiah would be born of the "seed of woman" rather than the "seed of man"? What does this tell us about the deity and humanity of Jesus Christ?
4. "He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel" (Gen. 3:15). What does this mean, and when did it happen?
5. What was Satan's aim in "The Battle of the Ages" and throughout Old Testament history?
6. How do we know that Satan is doomed to ultimate defeat?

[Continued in the next chapter]

22 War – and Peace! *(continued)*

In the last study we saw that Satan rebelled against the Lord in Heaven, and then, after God cast him out of Heaven, he declared war on earth. We then traced some of the major attempts by Satan to frustrate God's plan of redemption and His promises concerning the coming Messiah and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

However, in the fulness of time in spite of all Satan's efforts to the contrary, the Messiah was born just as God had promised: miraculously born of a virgin ("the seed of woman"), descended from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel), Judah and David. In spite of murder, sin, barrenness, famine, enemy armies and foreign domination, Satan's war against God and His plan, which had lasted for 4000 years since the fall of Adam and Eve, was unsuccessful. In fact, through Christ's birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection, scores of prophecies were fulfilled, and in many amazing ways.

Satan's attacks on Christ

Satan tried to destroy Jesus' life and ministry in a number of ways:

1. Mary was almost 9 months pregnant when she rode by donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a distance of about 150 km.

2. Herod tried to destroy Jesus along with all the baby boys two years of age and under, but God warned Joseph in a dream, and Joseph, Mary and Jesus escaped to Egypt.
3. Satan tempted Jesus to sin (in which case He would have no longer been the perfect sacrifice for our sin), to worship Satan (compromise and go the “easy way”), and to join him in his rebellion against God (Matt. 4:1-11).
4. The Jews twice took up stones to stone Jesus to death (John 8:59; 10:31).
5. Once they tried to push Him over a cliff, possibly prior to stoning Him, as that was the Jewish custom (Luke 4:29).
6. Through Peter, Satan tried to stop Jesus from going to Jerusalem for the Passover, and to the Cross (Matt. 16:21-23; 26:51-53).
7. Jesus was tempted in the Garden of Gethsemane not to go through with it Matt. 26:39-42). He could have called on 72,000 angels to save Him from the Cross.
8. Satan even tempted Jesus to come off the Cross before He died (Matt. 27:39-44). Praise God He didn't!

Jesus had to be crucified (Ps. 22:16; Gal. 3:13) and all these were Satanic attempts to stop God's plan for, and prophecies concerning, the redemption of mankind.

Finally, when Satan thought he had won and Jesus died on the Cross, it was Satan who was stripped of all his authority and power, and was defeated for all time (Col. 2:13-15). Sin was atoned for; the enemy was defeated. Hallelujah! Any apparent authority that Satan has today has been usurped or taken by deception and lies.

The battle of the ages, however, did not end on the Cross, for Jesus rose from the dead and Satan, throughout the whole of Church history, ever since the resurrection and ascension of Christ, has now turned his attacks on both the Church and the nation of Israel. He has tried to usurp authority which is not rightfully his. As long as we Christians give way to him, he will take everything we allow him. But he can go no further than we allow - for the victory is rightfully ours through the Cross. We must stand the ground won for us by Christ!

War on Israel and the Church

Today, Satan has declared war on the saints and war on the nation of Israel; the parallel between the two is very interesting.

The early Church suffered great persecution (Acts 8:1-3). All twelve disciples (except John), together with Paul and Stephen, were martyred for their faith. In AD 70 the Romans destroyed the Temple, and the Jews were greatly persecuted, brutally murdered and scattered over the face of the earth. Then, nearly 2000 years later and in fulfillment of God's promises, He began to bring the Israelites back to their Promised Land (Ezek. 36:22-28; 37:12-14). Similarly, right from the first century the Church went through much persecution, followed, in the third and subsequent centuries, by a time of general spiritual darkness and decline. It might have appeared that Satan had won after all - that the “gates of hell (death)” had prevailed against the Church (cf. Matt. 16:18) - but such was not the case! From the early 1500's God began the process of restoration in the Church, through to the beginning of the 20th century which began with an outpouring of the Spirit in various parts of the world, leading up to this latest move of God's Spirit all around the world - the “latter rain” (Joel 2:23; James 5:7-8).

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- 1904** God began to pour out His Spirit in different parts of the world.
 - 1917** Near the end of the First World War, Palestine was to become the homeland of the Jews, under British protection.
 - 1945** After the Second World War there began an evangelical awakening.
 - 1948** The State of Israel was created and Jews began to return back to Israel from all around the world. So while one of Adolf Hitler's purposes in the Second World War was to annihilate the Jews, as a result of two world wars, first Palestine, and then Israel, came into being as the homeland of the Jews.
 - 1960** God began to move by His Spirit throughout all nations and all sections of the Christian Church, baptising hundreds of thousands of Christians in the Holy Spirit and imparting gifts of the Spirit to believers everywhere.
 - 1967** After an amazing six-day war, Israel regained control of the whole of the city of Jerusalem, together with the West Bank (Samaria), which is, of course, part of the land God promised to Israel centuries before.
 - 2000** Today we continue to see attempts to divide Jerusalem into Israeli and Palestinian (Arab/Muslim) sections.
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**THE PARALLEL BETWEEN THE CHURCH (ISRAEL AFTER THE SPIRIT)
AND ISRAEL AFTER THE FLESH**

YEAR	THE CHURCH	YEAR	ISRAEL
30	Christ died.	70	Temple destroyed.
35	Church persecuted and scattered. Dark and Middle Ages: general decline and apostacy.	73	Jews persecuted and scattered. Jews dispersed throughout the world; decline of Judaism.
1857	Great revivals in USA.	1878	Zionist movement began.
1904	Outpouring of the Holy Spirit; Pentecostal movement began.	1917	Balfour Declaration of a Jewish homeland to be established in Palestine.
1945	Evangelistic awakening; re-birth message.	1948	Israel re-born as a Nation.
1960	Charismatic movement born; restoration of baptism and gifts of the Spirit to the whole Church, worldwide.	1967	Six day war and restoration of West Bank and Jerusalem to the Jews.

Note how closely Israel follows the Church in the above historical events

Today, some Moslem and Arab nations, and the Palestinians, are still trying to destroy the nation of Israel, while there are many attacks also on the Christian Church, by people of

other religions, the atheistic world system, and demonic attempts to “divide and conquer”. Satan is still fighting!

Thus we see a remarkable parallel between:

- the nation of Israel (God’s people of promise, after the flesh) and the Church (God’s people of promise, after the Spirit)
- the attacks and attempts of Satan to destroy both the Messianic line and the Jews, and his attempts to destroy the Church.
- God’s protection and restoration of the nation of Israel, and His protection and restoration of the Church.

A renowned but atheistic French philosopher, Voltaire (1694-1778) once said that within 100 years the Bible would be a forgotten book. But 100 years after he made that statement the Geneva Bible Society had bought the house he had lived in and was using it as their headquarters! Today, 250 years later, Voltaire is almost unknown and forgotten, while the Bible is still the world’s best seller!

Jesus said, “I will build My Church and the gates of hell (death) shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18), and this has always been true - even 2000 years later! In spite of all the attacks on God’s people, He has always preserved them.

Because of God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (Israel) and David, and for His Name’s sake and honour, God still has a strategic plan for the nation of Israel today, even though in the past they have broken God’s laws and the conditions to His promises, and still today the majority of Israelis are not really practising the Jewish religion, let alone have embraced Jesus Christ as the Messiah, their Lord and Saviour.

Moses said to God, “What will the Egyptians and heathen say if we die in the wilderness? That God did not care, or could not save them, or did not keep His promises?” God forbid! In the same way, all His promises to Christians and the Church are still as true today as they ever were, in spite of all our failures. “God is not a man that He should lie” (Num. 23:19-20).

What of the future?

“You have heard that the anti-Christ is coming, so now many anti-Christ’s have come; therefore we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). Satan has not yet given up in his great battle to win the world and the souls of men in rebellion against God. See 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12.

In the last days there will be great persecution, great apostacy, and also great revival! Satan knows that his time is short. See Revelation chapters 16-20 for the great final battles and overthrow of Satan.

If you look at the end of the Book you will see that we who are on the Lord’s side will win! Hallelujah! (See Revelation chapters 20-22). The final victory belongs to Christ and those who are His - He is King of kings and Lord of lords - the Victor!

We, the children of God, are the spiritual Israel. “Israel” means “ruling with God” (cf. Eph. 1:15 - 2:7) and it is for us to rule and reign with God, both now and forever, over all the enemy.

When the Prince of Peace returns and brings final victory over Satan and all his followers, we will enter into the eternal rest and peace of God. This peace has been described as:

- total and complete victory over the enemy
- cessation of all internal strife and conflict
- entering into the fulness of God's promises and blessings

Fear not!

The whole subject of spiritual warfare, if we are not careful, can become negative, fearful and depressing. No doubt that is why we read over 80 times in the Bible, the words "Fear not!"

God has promised that no temptation or testing will come upon us that we are not able to endure (1 Cor. 10:13). He has promised that His grace is sufficient for us and that His strength is made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:7-10). He has promised "I will never fail you, nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). He has given us His peace (John 14:27).

God loves us with an everlasting and perfect love; God has all wisdom and knows what is best for us; God has all power and authority to bring about what is best in our lives - if we will only trust Him and let Him. Therefore "Fear not, for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you. I will uphold you with My victorious right hand" (Is. 41:10).

May the peace of the Lord Jesus Christ rule and reign in your hearts (Col. 3:15).

Hallelujah! The victory is ours - let us enter into it NOW!

Jesus said "Surely I am coming soon". Amen! Come, Lord Jesus! The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen! (Rev. 22:20-21).

QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the things Christ achieved through His death on the Cross?
 2. Why is Satan so concerned about the nation of Israel today?
 3. What are the similarities and differences between Israel and the Church?
 4. What does the Bible say will happen in these last days to (a) the Church; (b) the nation of Israel?
 5. Why is it that so often, and in so many areas, the Church seems to be defeated by the enemy, rather than victorious? What can we do about it?
 6. Why are Christians often fearful, and what can we do about it?
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