

# **Enjoining the Battle**

## ***Prayer & Partnership***

**Ephesians 6:10-20**

**October 29, 2000**

**Bethany Church**

Wesley J. Gabel

Back where I came from, we had some testy firemen. They were really aggressive in battling blazes, but the fire chief had to keep tight reins on them. One day when the chief was gone, the firemen battled a blaze that trapped three men on a roof. The firemen took out a blanket, held it taut, and called to the first man, "Jump, jump, it's your only hope." The first man leaped, and just as he was about to hit the blanket, the men whipped it away. "What are you doing?" cried the second man on the roof. One fireman said, "Karl's German. We don't like Germans, but Ole, we like Norwegians. We won't pull the blanket away. Jump! It's your only chance." The other firemen urged him too. Ole hesitated, but when he saw no alternative, he jumped. Right before he landed, the volunteer firemen pulled the blanket away. The third man stood on the roof paralyzed. He wasn't Norwegian or German. He was a Hittite (you know, a member of that extinct biblical race). "We like Hittites," the firemen claimed. "I don't believe you, I don't trust you," the Hittite called. "Jump. It's your only hope," the firemen shouted. "Oh no," cried the Hittite, "I'll jump on one condition. Lay the blanket down. Now back away."

I don't think there are firemen like that, even volunteers, but we do find ourselves in precarious situations uncertain about where to turn. And, there are times, I believe, that our thinking is as clouded or flawed as the Hittite's. You and I were created as children and companions of God. We were designed to be in innocent and intimate communion with our divine Papa. Prayer is a means of conversing and partnering with God without which we can't fulfill our purpose on earth. Many of us forget that. That lapse in our perspective and laxness in our practice are not accidental. They are purposeful works of your real enemies. You see prayer is more than conversation with God. Prayer is

conversation and partnership on a battlefield. We live on a battlefield. Forces opposed to God and us affect what we face, what we feel and too often what we do. As children of God, prayer is a terrific weapon. Prayer is a world class weapon when you understand who you are and what really, truly is happening around you.

I listened this past week to retired General Norman Schwarzkopf explain how important knowledge of the enemy was to gaining a decisive victory in the Persian Gulf War. He needed to know the tactics, the arsenal, the strategies and the strongholds of the Iraqis. Because Schwarzkopf learned that Saddam Hussein expected an invasion in Kuwait and was concentrating his defense there, the allied forces pummeled the Iraqis with an air campaign while secretly shifting our forces west. When the Allies attacked, they hit the Iraqis at their weakest point and routed them with few losses.

Similarly, it is important to learn something about the nature of our real enemies on this planet. If we don't, we may be as befuddled in our judgment as my leaping Hittite. Our best efforts may amount to shadow boxing phantoms.

*The Bible teaches that our real battle on this planet is spiritual.* We may suffer from drunk drivers on the roadway. We may lock our houses for fear of criminals. We may struggle from the judgments of leaders and from the actions of lovers, but our real battle is not with people. "**Our struggle is not with flesh and blood,**" writes the Apostle Paul. Our fight is not with people. If not people, then who or what? Who or what is behind the pain we experience with people? Who or what is behind the battles we have with addictions, disease and disaster?

Paul names four entities that oppose us. Some day we'll examine these more thoroughly, but briefly we battle with "archas," powerful beings with the "first-say;" they are rulers or principalities that govern territory. We battle "exousias" or authorities that have gained the right to determine certain things. We battle cosmic princes or world-rulers who create the darkness we experience. We battle *the spiritual*, Paul emphasizes, *of evil in the heavenly realms.*

Amazingly, this picture is similar to what is described in the book of Job. In the first chapter of Job, angels come and go and gain audience with God. One of them is Satan, the accuser. God points with pride to Job. Satan, however, degrades him. Satan charges that Job's faith is superficial and cannot withstand adversity. Satan complains that there is a hedge protecting Job so that Satan can't test him. When the protective hedge is removed from everything but Job's life, there is one big, hideous burst of Satanic fury as he simultaneously exercises influence over people and the weather. Job experiences four assaults according to the Bible. Satan incites a group of Arabian traders and merchants, called Sabeans, to seize Job's oxen and donkeys. Satan unleashes a devouring firestorm from dry lightning that kills all of Job's flocks and herdsmen. Satan convinces the Chaldeans to form three raiding parties and swoop down from the hills and take all of Job's camels. Satan slams a windstorm or tornado into the house where Job's children have all gathered. Everyone of them die. All of Job's loss is attributed to Satan. Job's enemy was not the Sabeans, Chaldeans or the weather. It was the spiritual, of evil in the

heavenly realms. Authority was withheld from the cosmic prince, Satan, to take Job's life; but in the second chapter Satan made Job sick. In all this pain I believe that Job was further pained by the voice of Satan, not in the hiss of a serpent, but in the counsel of his wife and three friends. Job was not struggling with merely a depressed wife and misguided friends. He was fighting with the evil one who influenced their thinking and talk. Satan was using these good people to try and affect Job's thinking and dominate his life.

We see illustrations of Paul's teaching and glimpses of our spiritual battle in Daniel's life. God gave a vision of a great war to Daniel, but he didn't know what it meant. For three weeks Daniel fasted. At the end of those days, an angel visited Daniel with the interpretation. However, Daniel learned something else. He learned that as soon as he began praying, God sent the angel with an answer. However, the angel was detained. As a captive Jew living in the Persian empire, Daniel was hindered by the "archas" or angelic prince over Persia who stood in the way of the angel sent to him. Daniel had no problem with God answering prayer. He had a problem with the "*spiritual, of evil in the heavenly realms.*" Three weeks of fasting resulted in a breakthrough.

Have you ever thought that God, your loving father, may have answered some of your prayers as soon as you uttered them, but a great spiritual battle may have delayed their arrival? Our real battle is not with God, and it is not with people. We fight with the spiritual, of evil in the heavenly realms. Our real struggle on earth is spiritual. It is also personal.

The Greek term Paul uses to describe our spiritual battle is unique. There is not a noun in the English language that translates it well. That is why the translators in the King James Version used a verb. They wrote, "We wrestle not with flesh and blood." The term Paul uses describes wrestling. We wrestle with these spiritual forces. Wrestling is the most intimate form of fighting one can imagine. In fact, wrestling is the most intimate form of contact outside of lovemaking. Paul depicts *our struggle with evil as up close and personal*. It is up close and personal because our battle involves *what we think and tell ourselves*. It involves *what we feel and act upon*. These cosmic princes tempt, trick and trap people messing with our minds and our hearts.

Paul wrote how the Ephesians could stand their ground against the deceitful schemes of the devouring devil. He talked of armor that would expose the deceptions, but he also urged them to prayer. In prayer we have a weapon that overcomes evil principalities. That is why Paul urged the believers to pray on all occasions. When things don't happen, don't stop praying. We're to talk to God with all kinds of prayers and requests. We're at war and prayer is a mighty weapon. "Be alert and always keep praying," Paul urges. Keep going. Don't give up.

Moses learned that lesson when he led the Israelites to the Promised Land. A group of Amalekites attacked them. Joshua led the Israelite men in a battle that raged all day long. Moses stood on a hill above the fight where he watched the battle. As long he lifted up his arms to God, the Israelites prevailed; but when he put them down, the Amalekites

started winning. Moses had two men help him keep his arms held up to God all day long until the Amalekites were completely defeated. As much as it looked like a battle against people and a battle with swords and clubs, Moses discovered it was a battle won with persistent, unrelenting prayer.

The fastest growing church in the world is the church of Korea. Korea, a Buddhist country, is quickly becoming Christian. Little churches are mushrooming into giants there. David Cho leads a local church in Seoul that has grown to over 750,000 members. More importantly, in Korea there is great hunger to know God. One military chaplain was transferred from Germany to Korea. He was stunned to find that hunger. American soldiers, whom he had known in Germany and who had no time for God there, were insatiably hungry to know and serve Christ in Korea. When he told David Cho this, Cho told him that is only natural, that we've broken the opposition's power in Korea through prayer. Nearly every hill in Korea is some believer's prayer chapel. Sanctuaries are packed with all night prayer meetings, and tens of thousands of Korean believers attend prayer meetings each morning at 5:30 before work. The Korean church reports tremendous miracles, healing and answers to prayer. Cho says that 80 percent of those answers come only after extended periods of prayer. In Korea, believers pray on all occasions, with all kinds of prayers and requests. They are alert and they keep on praying.

Brothers and sisters, you were made to live as God's children and companions who change the world. That's why you struggle so much. Satan fears you and hates you. In Christ you were remade to be God's partners in redemption. People all over this planet need redemption. They need freedom. Prayer takes up their battle. Will you become their freedom fighter? Prayer is your greatest weapon in your fight and also in theirs. Will you get to know your weapon and explore what it can do? We've got a God who is pulling for us. Now will we use the weapon he has given us?