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Dispossessing the Devil

“Be strong and courageous; for you shall put this people in possession of the land that I swore to their ancestors to give them. ⁷ Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to act in accordance with all the law that my servant Moses commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, so that you may be successful wherever you go. ⁸ This book of the law shall not depart out of your mouth; you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to act in accordance with all that is written in it. For then you shall make your way prosperous, and then you shall be successful. ⁹ I hereby command you: Be strong and courageous; do not be frightened or dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.’ ¹⁰ Then Joshua commanded the officers of the people, ¹¹ ‘Pass through the camp, and command the people: “Prepare your provisions; for in three days you are to cross over the Jordan, to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God gives you to possess.”’”
Joshua 1:6-11
“Submit therefore to God. Set-yourself-against the devil and he will flee from you.”
James 4:7
“...upon this rock I will build My church (gathered people); and Hades’ gates shall not prevail against it.” Matt. 16:18

Somehow we have received a very mixed up paradigm concerning spiritual warfare. We have come to believe that we need to be fearful of the enemy, Satan, because he is a bad guy, has lots of power and he wants to hurt us. He is mean, crafty, spiteful and malicious, ...and he is relentless in his opposition to us. If we give him an opportunity, he will be all over us like a bad smell, and will do whatever he can to entrap us and ruin us. He is a spin-master, the ultimate liar and con man, and we must be on our guard. While all that is true, even this perception of him has been twisted and “spun”, so that we would not perceive the reality about the fundamental nature of the spiritual war that rages all around us.

What is really going on is that we, the church, are the aggressors in a campaign to take back planet earth from Satan and his compatriots. John the Baptist came, proclaiming that the kingdom of God was “at hand”, that is, on the verge of coming (Matt. 3:2). Jesus came to bring the kingdom. He came in visible power and authority, which the enemy could not resist. The good news He preached was that the kingdom of God was here! His disciples were trained to go through the land healing the sick, raising the dead and casting out demons, all visible manifestations of the power of the kingdom which they proclaimed (Matt. 10:1-8). By his death on the cross, and his resurrection, Jesus forever broke the enemy’s powerbase (Col. 2:14,15; Heb. 2:14,15), and He sent the Holy Spirit to empower *us* to prevail against the enemy and liberate what he had held captive. Jesus bound the strong man, so that we could plunder his house (Mk. 3:27). We, the church, are to be soldiers in this campaign, bringing the light of God’s kingdom into this world of spiritual darkness, bondage and confusion (Phil. 2:12-16). Our mandate is to do as Jesus did, “...to bring good news to the poor, ...to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor (Luke 4:18-19). **The truth is that Satan should be more afraid of us than we are of him!**

Some Christians downplay reading the Old Testament. They do not believe it is relevant to them. They view it as an antiquated collection of stories. **Satan is behind this effort to keep people from reading this valuable resource for our faith.** Jesus Himself said that it was not irrelevant (Matt. 5:17-19). Paul told us that it had been written for *our* instruction, so that we could learn from the examples of those OT saints (Rom. 15:4; I Cor. 10:11). He also clearly proclaimed that these scriptures were profitable to help us grow up to maturity, and to equip us for action in service to our King (II Tim. 3:16,17). They contain promises which will help us tap into the power of God for living godly lives today (II Pet. 1:3,4). **It is important to be reading the OT, but we need to learn how to interpret it correctly to benefit from it.** The OT is full of historical events, things that really happened, which are recorded to teach and illustrate spiritual principles, and are often “types” or word-pictures of things that would come later. We have to be careful that we don’t just make up our own “types”, making the Bible say what it was never *intended* to say. Those word pictures that are identified for us, however, can be very valuable to help us understand NT spiritual truths.

One such type, a figurative foreshadowing in natural OT events that has a parallel to our spiritual experience, **has to do with Israel’s fight to dispossess the nations which dwelt in the land of promise.** This is alluded to by Jesus in Matt. 16, by His use of the language “I will build my congregation and the gates of Hades will not be strong against it.” As you can see from the passage at the top of the page, Joshua was to lead the people into the land. God already had promised that the land was theirs. They had only to go up and take it. **This is a parallel to our spiritual battle today. It is the church’s mandate to go up and “take possession of the land”. Jesus is a second Joshua.** He broke the power of Satan, just like Joshua broke the power of the Canaanites in his 7 year campaign against the 33

kings of Canaan. He led the people into the land, but **the task of the Israelites was to continue to fight the smaller settlements and dispossess the nations who still remained.** In our parallel, Jesus has struck the fatal blow to Satan's power, and **we have the responsibility to liberate the places and people still occupied by enemy influences.** There still remains opposition, and the battles can sometimes be quite fierce, but, if we go forth into battle in the Lord's strength, the victory will always be sure.

The history of Israel, however, was that they compromised with the people of the land, choosing to live in peace with them, instead of driving them out. They became distracted from their prime responsibility, and focused more on developing their own farms and cities. They stopped following God's commands, and no longer valued or obeyed His instructions. They even became ignorant of His word, losing sight of who they really were, and what their calling was. Soon, they began to take on the practices and lifestyles of the pagans living around them. **Consequently, God took away His protection and blessing,** and they came into hard times, eventually culminating in defeat and domination by their enemies. **They lived in fear of the very nations that originally had been in fear of them.**

From time to time, God would raise up a leader who would once again rally the people to return to God and drive out their enemies. As long as the people were obedient to God, and took up again their covenant identity and calling, the Lord would bless and protect them. When they became lax and compromised their devotion to God with other interests, and lost their focus as God's people, they would once again lose His blessing and protection.

The history of the church has paralleled the experience of Israel. Where Christians have been truly devoted, Kingdom-minded people, God has used them mightily to spread the gospel of love and set people free from bondage and oppression, both spiritual and physical. **When the church has been corrupted by a self-seeking, self-satisfied orientation, the enemy succeeds in convincing us to lay down our spiritual arms. We become lax and lose our vision for reaching out to others.** We become content to live out our days in the confines of our own meager lives. Soon, we all but forget who we are, what we are *supposed* to be doing, or that we even *have* any spiritual power and authority. We become unaccustomed to the word of righteousness, and we are not used to the hardships and disciplines of spiritual warfare. Once advantage has been gained, the enemy attempts to afflict us with all kinds of curses, hardships, bondages and despair. He is emboldened by our apparent powerlessness, and begins to bring even immoral and occultic practices out into the open. He hopes to move public opinion against the true church, by exposing and parading the sins and hypocrisies of those he can manipulate into error. At times in church history, the genuine church has been forced to flee and hide from other, often religious, people who were determined to root them out and destroy them. The true believers have had to live in fear of those who should be fearful of them.

It is vital that we recognize that there is a spiritual war going on. **We are called to be "set against" the devil. We are not just to "resist" him.** The Greek word is stronger than merely to "stand against" or "resist". **No, we are to "oppose" him. We are to be on the offensive,** at all times pressing forward in the commission to take away territory and people from his influence and control. **Just as Jesus came to destroy the "works of the devil" (I Jn. 3:8), we must also do the same.** Poverty, captivity, blindness and oppression are specifically identified as issues Jesus came to address. Sickness and demonization are also "works of the devil". As representatives of Christ's Kingdom, we are to *get active* in practical ways in order to oppose these works. We are to be dead set against them, and we ought to mobilize to address these issues in whatever ways the Lord would prompt us to. **We need to bring the battle to Satan's doorstep, into the lives and places where he is entrenched.** As soon as we stop doing that, you can bet that he will be coming to *our* doorstep. Unlike us, who can be fooled into thinking that there is a "cease fire", he is very much aware that there is not room for both his darkness and God's truth. He will *always* seek to gain inroads and advantage, if he can. He has seen the Kingdom of God advance and take away influence and territory in great bursts throughout history. He has had to change his tactics and attempt to infiltrate and occupy the lives of people within the church, so that he is not totally displaced. He is ever seeking to gain domination, but he has learned to bide his time, and assert his evil oppression as quietly and unobtrusively as possible, so as not to provoke a counter-attack from God's people.

When Jesus first talked about the church, He said that Hades' gates would not prevail against it. The word, "prevail", literally means to "be strong against". In other words, **Jesus said that we would be stronger than the enemy, even in his strongest "fortified places".** The light of God's Kingdom will always reach into the darkness, and the darkness will continue to recede before it. Nevertheless, **we must never forget that we are here to dispossess the devil.** God has called and equipped us to take away territory and people from his influence and control. **We must stay true to our calling, and become fit and ready for the fight. Victory is sure, but skirmishes can be very costly, especially if we are not prepared.** If we stay yielded to God, meditate on His word, are watchful for His counsel, and quick to obey His leading, we will keep the enemy in retreat, and bear much fruit for God's glory.